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Paris: A modern architecture Mecca and magnet for Plečnik's young students (Reflections on the book)

Title: *Plečnikovi študenti in drugi jugoslovanski arhitekti v Le Corbusierovem ateljeju* (Plečnik's students and other Yugoslav architects in Le Corbusier's studio)

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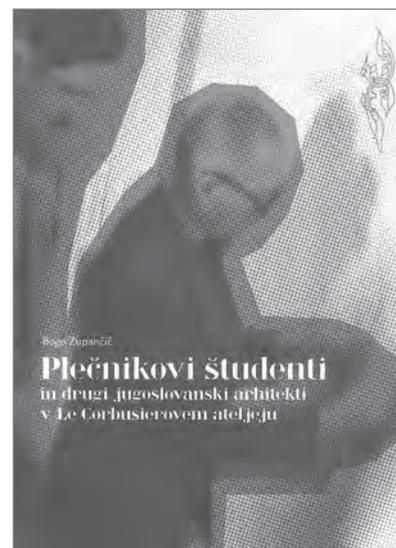
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As the author mentions in the introduction, the release of this book commemorates three important anniversaries: the 130th anniversary of the birth of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier, one of the twentieth century's greatest modern architects; the sixtieth anniversary of the death of Jože Plečnik, the greatest central European architect of the twentieth century; and the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Edvard Ravnikar, the leading Slovenian modern architect, who in a way also represents a link between the first two.

This book is the result of thorough research in Slovenia and abroad, and a detailed review of extensive material scattered between Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Cambridge, and Paris (where an important part is held by the Le Corbusier Foundation). The author has been engaged with this important topic for over ten years. He first presented it in 2007 at an exhibition at the *Vžigalica* gallery in Ljubljana, he has held several talks and published several articles on the subject, and in 2017 he staged a major exhibition at the Ljubljana Museum of Architecture and Design titled *Plečnik's Students and Other Yugoslav Architects in Le Corbusier's Studio in Paris*.

This book provides the first-ever comprehensive presentation of this topic within the wider context of modern developments in architecture in Slovenia and abroad, especially Paris. As its author explains in the introduction, it is primarily intended for experts and connoisseurs. The fundamental question that the author, Bogo Zupančič, addressed is how Plečnik's students and other Yugoslav students that trained with Le Corbusier contributed to shaping Slovenian and Yugoslav urban-planning thought and practice before and especially after the Second World War.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part presents Plečnik's students that trained in Le Corbusier's studio between 1929 and 1940, the second covers other Slovenian architects and civil engineers that trained in Paris between 1925 and 1938, and the last part discusses Croatian and Serbian architects at this studio between 1927 and 1937. The work concludes with an extensive literature review, which will be of tremendous help to future researchers. The book is richly illustrated and many of the photographs, which have been collected from various sources in Slovenia and abroad, have been published here for the first time.



In the first chapter, the author presents seven architects that graduated under Plečnik and then left for Paris to work as draughtsmen in Le Corbusier's studio. He lists the following individuals based on the documents studied: Miroslav Oražem, Milan Sever, Hrvoje Brnčič, Marjan Tepina, Jovan Krunic, Edvard Ravnikar, and Marko Župančič. Traditionally, Slovenians had good relations and close contacts with France. At the initiative of Slovenian intellectuals, the French Institute was founded in Ljubljana as early as 1921 (i.e., soon after the establishment of the University of Ljubljana). Because of the close contacts and historical connections with France, and a good command of French, students were provided good opportunities to travel and also had access to French government scholarships. It is therefore natural that they used these opportunities well. Paris was the most attractive European and world cultural and art capital during the interwar period, and it drew artists, architects, and intellectu-

als from all over the globe. In addition to architects, many Slovenians studied and worked in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, including the painters Veno Pilon and Nikolaj Pirnat, the writers Josip Vidmar, Bratko Kreft, and Ciril Kosmač, as well as other students, lawyers, engineers, and linguists, and certain politicians. The French Institute had an extensive library, where students could read the latest journals. As one of Plečnik's students, Janko Omahen, wrote in his book, this was also how students learned about Le Corbusier and modern developments in architecture, which they heard only little about from their teacher, Jože Plečnik. Plečnik was reserved regarding Le Corbusier and modern functionalism, and he more or less discouraged his students from engaging in modern endeavours, even though he paid close attention to developments in modern architecture, which, among other things, is also proved by his extensive library. On the other hand, his students were increasingly interested in modern developments. In 1925, they attended the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, where they were completely swept away by Le Corbusier's Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (*Pavilion of the New Spirit*).

Based on an exceptionally detailed review of sources and literature in Slovenia and abroad, the author proves that seven of Plečnik's students worked in Le Corbusier's studio before the Second World War: Miroslav Oražem, Milan Sever, Hrvoje Brnčič, Marjan Tepina, Jovan Krunič, Edvard Ravnihar, and Marko Župančič. Alongside these, there were also other Slovenians working there, including the architect Feri Novak, the civil engineer Janko Bleiweis, and most likely also the civil engineer Fran Tavčar. This was a relatively high number compared to architects coming from other, larger countries that worked at the studio. Because of their excellent knowledge of classical architecture and

the drawing skills that they learned from Plečnik, Slovenian students were highly regarded by Le Corbusier. The author provides precise information on when individual Slovenian architects arrived at Le Corbusier's studio, how long they worked there, and which projects they were involved in. He also confirms this with some certificates signed by Le Corbusier himself, plans and sketches (mostly held by the Le Corbusier Foundation in Paris), photos, and correspondence. Zupančič dedicates a special chapter to the relationships between the Slovenian and other architects at Le Corbusier's studio, who came from all over the world. Slovenian architects kept in touch with some of them even after the war; thus, for example, the Swiss architect Alfred Roth was invited to give talks in Ljubljana and contribute articles to the journal *Arhitekt*.

Even before the Second World War, Plečnik's students used the experience they had gained in Le Corbusier's studio in numerous design competitions in their home country, where they won a series of prizes. This is also described in detail in the book. Among the most high-profile competitions was definitely the one for the urban development of Ljubljana in 1939, in which Ravnihar and Tepina directly applied some of Le Corbusier's urban-planning principles in their project proposals. Le Corbusier's orientation, which Slovenian architects already applied to some degree before the war, also prevailed in architecture and urban planning after the war, with a short intermezzo of communist-style architecture. The author describes this in three chapters, in which he highlights the plans for the Slovenian town of Nova Gorica and the Novi Beograd neighbourhood in Belgrade, and a series of architectural designs in Slovenia and elsewhere, and he discusses the inclusion of Slovenian architects in international organizations (e.g., UIA and CIAM), their participation in prominent international conferences

and exhibitions, and staging of architectural exhibitions. Among the latter, the 1953 Le Corbusier exhibition held at the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art and the 1956 exhibition *Stanovanje za naše razmere* (An Apartment for Our Conditions) staged at the unfinished *Kozolec* (Hayrack) building in Ljubljana met with an especially wide response.

The second part of the book presents architects (Plečnik's students) that trained in Paris, but did not work in Le Corbusier's studio: Dušan Grabrijan, Boris Kobe, and Gizela Šuklje. In addition, it also presents the architect Feri Novak and the civil engineers Janko Bleiweis and Fran Tavčar, who did work there. The author presents each of them separately, with designs that reflect Le Corbusier's influence.

In the third part of the book, Croatian and Serbian architects: Zvonimir Kavurić, Ernest Weissmann, Jurij Neidhardt, Ksenija Grisogono, Krs-to Filipović, Milorad Pantović, and Branko Petričić, that also worked in Le Corbusier's studio are presented in a similar manner. During the interwar period, Slovenian architects established significantly close ties with them, both privately and professionally via the journal *Arhitektura*, which was published from 1931 to 1934 as a joint publication of Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian architects.

Bogo Zupančič's book is an exceptionally valuable document about the interwar period, when alongside the great Plečnik a new modern architecture was being born. Despite its seeming deviation from the great Slovenian mentor, it actually expanded the valuable skills and information that Plečnik imparted to his students with new ideas conveyed in the works of Le Corbusier and other pioneers of the modern movement. The author provides detailed descriptions of the young Slovenian architects' path from their home architectural envi-

ronment suffused with Jože Plečnik's personality to the world's art and culture capital, filled with new challenges, where a completely new spirit of modernism prevailed during the 1920s. It was a spirit filled with optimism after the end of the First World War and a desire to improve the world, to which the young architects believed architecture could also contribute its part.

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Information about the book

The book's internet site:
<http://mao.si/Publikacije.aspx>