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## *New Decorationism in 21<sup>st</sup>-century architecture. General characteristics and analysis of selected examples*

### *Abstract*

This paper presents a number of examples of a new trend in recent architecture, called New Decorationism. It has only recently been observed in European projects, since the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Aesthetic concepts in both the visual arts and architecture, are not permanent, they are subject to change. There are few architectural projects within these new directions and trends, with isolated buildings found in various European cities. In this case, it is crucial in architecture that a new approach to shaping the aesthetic atmosphere of architectural form has appeared, one in which the application of ornamental textures of external envelopes – the “skin” of the building, using various materials such as glass, metal, stone and technologically advanced concrete types. This research was based primarily on in situ studies, also literature studies and a multiple-case study. A descriptive analysis of selected examples was performed, enabling the characterisation of a new trend in architecture that shows the decorative outer shells of buildings. The presentation of statements by a number of philosophers also appeared helpful in understanding the actions of the avant-garde. Examples of European projects have been chosen to discuss and illustrate the problem.

**Key words:** latest architecture, texture and matter of external walls

### *Introduction*

This paper discusses a trend in contemporary architecture called New Decorationism, which has been observed since the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The distinctly simplified, austere, minimalist architecture that was common in the earlier period no longer seems attractive to many designers and their audiences. Several projects in smaller and larger European cities that are representative of this trend are presented.

### *Research objective and method*

The aim of this study was to identify and perform a descriptive analysis of recently completed buildings that are characterised by different aesthetics related to the use of decorative building envelopes. Aesthetic trends in the contemporary architecture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century – Mod-

ernism, New Modernism, Postmodernism, Minimalism, Deconstruction or High-Tech architecture did not operate with external building envelopes that were deliberately given a decorative form by multiplying a pattern, creating a new type of texture that is legible in the body of the building and constitutes an important element that defines its character and distinguishes it from its surroundings, despite maintaining the desired scale and dimensions in relation to the existing context. An analysis of the textures of the façades of these buildings allows us to determine the extent to which the use of a decorative pattern that forms the formal structure of the buildings' external envelopes defines their distinct aesthetic features and their architecture's atmosphere that is different than that of their surroundings. This paper is based primarily on in situ studies, on field research – visits to selected sites in European cities, which were carried out both in an urban environment of historic value and in areas free from development. A review of the literature was also performed. The method was a multiple-case study and descriptive analysis of the cases selected, intended to clarify the building features distinctive of the trend under discussion. The author's

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research, which has been carried out for several decades, is aligned with a trend associated with contemporary architectural and urban design in the historical context of European cities. The coexistence of heritage elements with new urban, architectural and landscape layouts is a phenomenon that is characteristic of early-21<sup>st</sup>-century European cities. Public buildings with cultural uses and a scale consistent with the surrounding urban fabric, built in Madrid, Barcelona, Sainte-Lucie-de-Tallano (Corsica), Cottbus, Hamburg, Marseilles and Budapest were selected for analysis. These buildings, both new constructions and adaptive reuse projects targeting historic buildings, despite their apparent separateness of scale and character, which depend on their context, are linked by the design of the aesthetics of their forms and architectural atmospheres, characteristic of New Decorationism, through the use of external building envelopes with textures created from clear, repetitive patterns. The selection criteria were the territorial confinement to Western Europe, the period of construction as the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the distinctiveness and diversity of materials used to create the buildings' decorative envelopes.

### *About the meanders of thought*

In architecture, philosophical and aesthetic concepts change constantly. Aesthetic concepts are not fixed and unchangeable. In each era, new value criteria and slightly different aesthetics emerge. The concept of beauty has also changed over the years. Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, pointed out in his works that many people cannot have a proper view of the concept of beauty because they are incapable of experiencing sophisticated emotions (Eco 2005). Years ago, a similar question of whether Minimalism makes us happier than Decorativism was asked by Alain de Botton in his bestselling book *The architecture of happiness* (2006).

Artists create their own worlds, which sometimes have little to do with current reality. Today's world of aesthetic exploration in the field of forms and textures uses other fields of science such as mathematics, physics, biology, botany, as well as the latest industrial technologies. Many contemporary thinkers are of the opinion that the world of new art, from which architecture stems, is subjected to a constant process of clashing avant-garde concepts with the real world, and is dependent on mass media messaging and advertising. Piotr Dehnel is convinced that the observed apparent shallowness and superficiality of popular culture is related to the spread of access to it and is a derivative of the costs we have paid for [...] *freedom and justice in civil society. And it is – let us admit it – a price not too exorbitant compared to the price of human existence* (Dehnel 2006, 292). On the other hand, Gianni Vattimo, another Italian philosopher who explored the crisis and death of art already in the 1980s, warned against the end of modernity and proposed his own interpretation of culture, which he called late modernity. He saw evil in mass culture and the culture widely disseminated by the mass media, which should be opposed in order not to lead to the demise of high art. He wrote that aesthetic experi-

ence arises only as the negation of all its traditional and canonical characteristics, starting with the pleasure of the beautiful itself (Vattimo 2007). We have known for a long time that contemporary architecture is tied with painting and sculpture in the concept of the so-called great reality, which is based on three principles: first – every manifestation of reality is worth presenting as per Ruskin's belief in "selecting nothing, rejecting nothing"; second – every form of creativity is allowed, and art is to fully reflect the "anarchy of life"; and third – in all external manifestations of reality we can find indications of the most internal layers of nature (Krakowski 1981).

### *New trends in 21<sup>st</sup>-century architecture*

An analysis of recent European projects shows that we are now seeing a multidirectionality of aesthetic postures. The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have shown that new trends and currents in architecture have begun to emerge. Most of those that emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have remained, but we can also observe the emergence of new ones, which are not numerous but are becoming noticeable by their distinctiveness (Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich 2014).

One of the first to appear was Biomorphism, which originated from a virtual architecture that was initially built only in the digital realm. Biomorphism proposed soft, rounded forms, often inspired by nature, biology, botany and even anatomy (Zellner 2000).

Then we have New Topography, which protects the natural landscape and the fluidity of the terrain. Topographic architecture displays changing events, the motion of passers-by, and the flow of media images (Nyka 2006). During the 9<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2004, with the permission of exhibition commissioner Kurt W. Forster, this trend was represented by numerous designs and projects which, by imitating the forces of nature – earthquakes, soil delamination, landslides caused by wind and water – show a landscape that, in its end result, looks as though it had never been developed by humanity (*Metamorph* 2004).

Another direction is New Expressionism, reminiscent of the work of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century architects. In recent years we have also encountered new buildings that are characterised by dynamism, which achieve an effect of slenderness, and which depict motion and fluidity in architecture. We encounter buildings with bold, elongated straight or undulating lines that suddenly become jagged or are twisted, bent, building forms that are – seemingly – alien, different from those found in the surrounding environment (Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich 2018).

In contrast, one of the most recent trends is New Decorationism. It appears that since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have been observing a loss of interest in Minimalism and Reductionism in architecture, which appeared in Europe in the 1980s and 90s. This style is understood as the introduction of decoration and ornamentation into the external envelopes of new buildings constructed using various construction materials: metal, glass, concrete, ceramics, stone or wood. This is most commonly seen in

cultural facility projects. In Western European countries there have been publications and articles in prestigious journals presenting elements of New Decorationism (e.g. Snodin, Howard 1996; Chevrier 2006; Makowska 2008b; Frei 2003). Research into new trends in 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century architecture has been carried out in our country by, among others, Wojciech Bonenberg, Marcin Giedrowicz, Kacper Radziszewski (2019), Krzysztof Ingarden (2017), Ewa Kuryłowicz (2013), Agnieszka Mańkowska and Artur Zagula (2022), and Józef Tarnowski (2009). In 2003, at the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology, Beata Makowska defended her doctoral thesis entitled *O ornamentyce w architekturze współczesnej* [On ornamentation in contemporary architecture] and in the following years published her research in peer-reviewed journals (Makowska 2008a)<sup>1</sup>. Architects from Europe who have designed flagship projects in this trend include Herzog and de Meuron from Switzerland, Rudy Riccotti and Amelia Tavella from France and Marcel Ferencz from Hungary.

### *Projects by Herzog & de Meuron*

One group that decided to change the previous Minimalist aesthetic was the Swiss studio of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron. These were architects who had worked with well-known visual artists and sculptors for years<sup>2</sup> (Haduch 2018). Earlier, in the 1980s, they were major representatives of Minimalism or Reductionism. Geometry and regularity predominated in their work, and they used archetypes of simple geometric forms. *We are interested in such elementary questions as: What is a wall? What is a surface? What is transparency? These questions have an immediate impact on the sensual, perceptual abilities of the observer and the user. We insist on the world's materiality, on the multiplicity of sense as a central condition of humanity. In our opinion, the spiritual quality of architecture and art lies exactly in this emphasised materiality* (Davidson et al. 1996, 49, 50).

Here are excerpts from their laudation upon receiving the Pritzker Prize in 2001: *We arrive at solutions on two levels: the first is based on the manifestations of present-day life: art, music and other contemporary media, and the second is based on the technologies we may discover or invent [...]* (Davidson et al. 1996, 57). For years, their projects, located all over the world, have attracted attention with the variety of materials they introduce.

<sup>1</sup> In her research, Makowska explored, apart from Western Europe, also projects from China, Japan, Australia and the US, discussing many interesting cases. One of them the author of this article is inclined to classify more as Structuralism, since, for example, Herzog and de Meuron's Beijing Stadium (the so-called Bird's Nest) from 2008 presents a new texture not only on the surface of the shell, but on the entire structure of the body. The ornamental effect is not achieved by applying a decorative envelope ("skin") to the outside of the body, but through the innovative design of the entire structural system.

<sup>2</sup> The following visual artists and sculptors have been amongst those who have worked with their studio: Rémy Zaugg, Ed Rusch, Robert Cottingham, Michael Craig-Martin, Mathew Barney, Thomas Ruff, Tina Giese, Hannah Villiger, Pipilotti Rist, Andy Goldsworthy, Olafur Eliasson, Anish Kapoor, Ai Weiwei.



Fig. 1. Library at the University of Cottbus (photo by E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)

Il. 1. Biblioteka na Uniwersytecie w Cottbus (fot. E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)

Exterior façades, made of bricks, stone, concrete, glass, as well as a variety of metals with floral reliefs or with paintings or etched photographs printed on them, surprised the public with their innovation and unique approach to the matter of buildings.

**The University Library in Cottbus**, Germany, is an original work that stands out from its surroundings, designed by Herzog & de Meuron and built in the years 2001–2005. Located on a small hill, it can be seen from a distance, surprising visitors with its distinctiveness. The soft, flowing shape of the library building gives the impression of a cloud, and in fact brings to mind in its shape the giant vase by Alvar Aalto, well known to all architecture students and graduates<sup>3</sup>. The façades of the 32 m high library are partly made of strong reinforced concrete and partly of glass, but the whole is clad in a uniform coating – double-layered insulating glass with pixels printed onto it, which are an important part of the façade's decoration, determining its visual perception (Fig. 1). The white and ash-blue body was inspired by the look of a flickering TV screen (Haduch 2018).

The building in Barcelona, designed for the **2004 Universal Forum of Cultures**, constructed in the years 2001–2004 as a result of a successful architectural competition, is also a major item in their body of work. The building, in the shape of an equilateral triangle that is 25 m high, with one side being 180 m long, was sited near the Diagonal Mar park and the entire complex of parks by the sea in the eastern part of the city (Gyurkovich M. 2012). Finished mostly in dark blue render with a rough texture, the body was characterised by numerous exposition interior illuminations through the so-called light wells. Even then, in this avant-garde building, in several places, most importantly in the deep arcade created by raising the building above the ground and freeing the ground floor to

<sup>3</sup> The very popular extravagant vase was designed by Alvar Aalto in 1936 for the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris.



provide shelter from the sun, one was surprised by the introduction of a different texture to the surface of the overhang (the ceiling above the ground floor, walls, columns) of crumpled polished silver metal sheets that appeared like silver, wrinkled candy paper, which created a surprising, variable decoration of refracted light (Figs. 2, 3). This surprising and innovative form of decoration creates a peculiar atmosphere of nobility and the metallic coolness desired here.

Decorationism can also be found in the well-known project by the same company, the **Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg**, which opened in 2017 with a long delay of

seven years. It is one of the most important elements in the restoration of the harbour and the Hafencity district, located directly on the Elbe River, and the building, measuring 110 m in height, immediately became an icon of the city. The Elbphilharmonie is situated above the old brick walls of the Kaispeicher granary, built in the years 1963–1966, with a height of 37 m, and used to store cocoa, tea and tobacco. This former granary has been converted into several levels of car parking for the new philharmonic. An open terrace was built between the former granary building and the new large form across the entire width of the building. A gap, visible from a distance, separates the two



Fig. 2. Barcelona, building of the Universal Forum of Cultures (photo by E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)

Il. 2. Barcelona, budynek Forum Kultur Całego Świata (fot. E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)



Fig. 3. Barcelona, building of the Universal Forum of Cultures – detail of the wall and ceiling texture (photo by E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)

Il. 3. Barcelona, budynek Forum Kultur Całego Świata – detal faktury ściany i stropu (fot. E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)



parts of this complex body – the existing brown section and the new, taller one, that glimmers in the sun and is fully glazed. The second part of the body is constructed from 1,089 glass blocks, many of which are curved and bent, and all of which are printed to prevent overheating. Each piece is 3 m high and 4–5 m wide and weighs 1.2 t. The Philharmonic's roof looks like a wind-spread sail, although most people look for references to sea waves. The surface of the corrugated roof is clad with 6,000 oval-shaped elements to protect it against the sun. The whiteness of these elements can be associated, according to the designers, with the foam that often appears on sea waves (Gyrkovich J. 2012).

The **CaixaForum Madrid** centre for contemporary art (Fig. 4) is located in the very centre of the city next to the Museo del Prado and the Queen Sofia Museum of Contemporary Art on the Paseo del Prado avenue, which runs on the site of the former royal route. The gallery was opened in 2008. It is not a new building, but a typical example of the adaptive reuse of a post-industrial building. The Spanish bank La Caixa, which uses part of its income to promote the arts, bought the dilapidated building of the former small Mediodía power station, dating from 1899, in 2001. The façades of this historic building were finished in red clinker bricks set on a stone plinth. All four brick façades have been placed under heritage conservation. The design of the adaptive reuse of the former power station as a contemporary art gallery was undertaken by the Swiss firm of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron. They made the decision to demolish the stone plinth, thus obtaining a shaded area under the building. This intention was aided by the city's terrain (Gyrkovich M. 2017), in which the neighbouring narrow streets rise markedly upwards. The structure of the entire building with its now new use was based on just three large columns and a softly

carved staircase. This arcade is also the main entrance to the gallery, and the entire building appears as if it were suspended above the site. The contemporary art world, which we meet underneath the body, surprises us, and is prepared by a space shaped like the inside of a crystal. It is made up of triangular elements with numerous facets covered with smooth steel sheets that visually integrate the ceiling, walls and floor. The real world disappears and the user loses their sense of reality.

The architects decided to change the topmost part of the building, adding two storeys. This section of the building is finished with 1 × 1 m weathering steel sheets, which in the lower part of the upper façade are solid, all the more strongly exposing the topmost part of the building with a light, openwork structure of the outer shell. Perforated panels made of this sheet metal were used. The perforations form a decorative ornament, repeating the complex floral motif many times, while also serving to ventilate certain rooms. On the one hand, this part of the building references the colour scheme of the four brick façades with its red hue, while at the same time demonstrating a contemporary design. The historic power station was covered by two gabled roofs. Now, in the new body, the roofs are slightly sloping and in different directions, as a result of the reference to the climate of the site and the context of the surrounding buildings. Most of the existing windows in the power station have been bricked up, but leaving their external bands and frames. Four new windows, much larger than the pre-existing ones, were made in the brick façades

The blind wall of the neighbouring six-storey high building has been converted into a 450 m<sup>2</sup> vertical garden. On top of the steel structure, PVC and polyamide felt panels were placed there instead of soil. This garden was built with 15,000 plants, belonging to 250 species (Poveda,

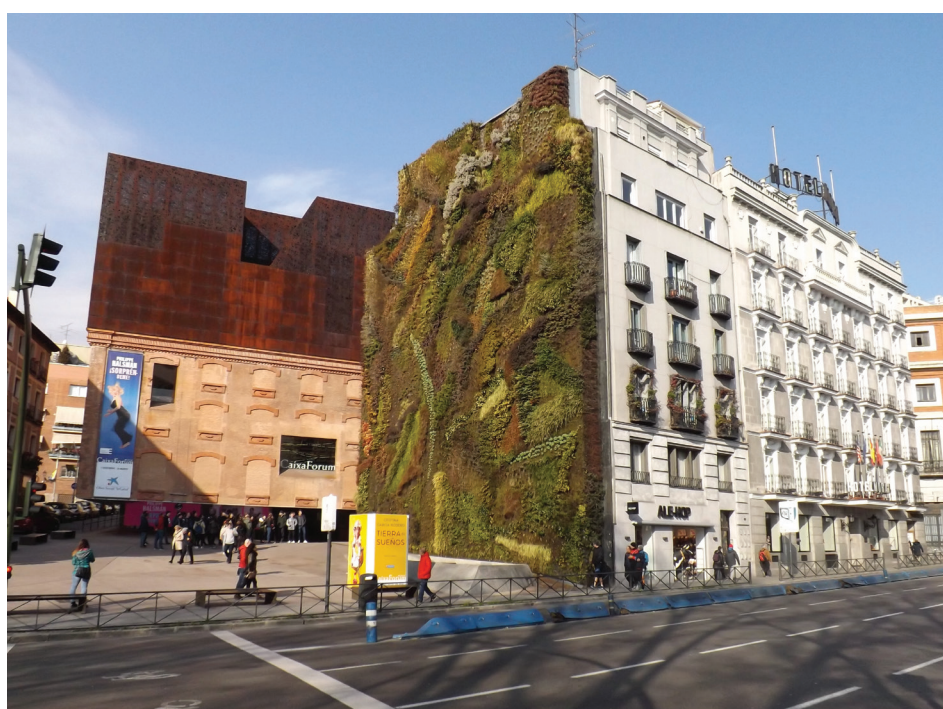


Fig. 4. Madrid, Center for Contemporary Art CaixaForum (photo by M. Gyrkovich)

Il. 4. Madryt, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej CaixaForum (fot. M. Gyrkovich)

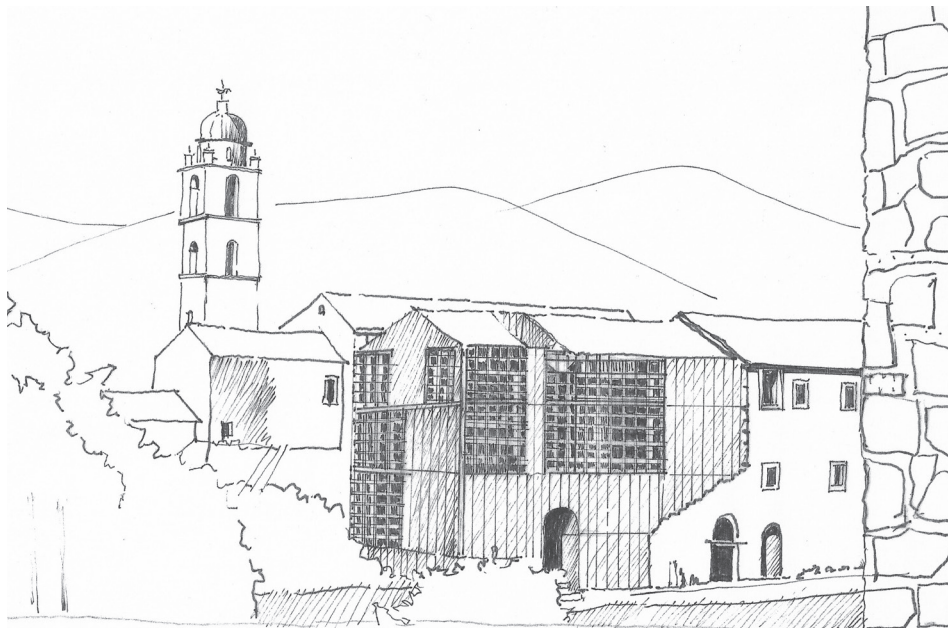


Fig. 5. Lucie-de-Tallano (Corsica), cultural centre in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century monastery – addition of a new wing fragment (draw by E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)

Il. 5. Lucie-de-Tallano (Korsyka), centrum kultury w klasztorze z XIV w. – dobudowa nowego fragmentu skrzydła (rys. E. Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich)

Marquez 2013). The author of this design is Patrick Blanc. At the Caixa Forum, the creation of the building's aesthetic climate is clear through the introduction of differentiated external façade coatings – the clashing of smooth and perforated sheet metal with a rich floral pattern with natural vegetation on a vertical green façade with a distinctive, decorative composition.

### ***Cultural centre in the former Convent Saint-François***

In European countries, we are seeing an increasing number of cases where pre-existing historical urban fabric is supplemented with new structures. Particularly fascinating tasks are given to architects who specialise in the adaptive reuse of high-historical-value buildings. In such cases, humility, elegance, frugality of means of expression of contemporary interference with the existing structure, as well as an awareness of the delicacy of the material, which is the historical substance of each monument, should be the leading inspiration. Such additions also represent the most recent trends in 21<sup>st</sup>-century architecture. In 2020, in Sainte-Lucie-de-Tallano (Corsica), in the former monastery of St. Francis of Assisi, a new culture centre was opened. Earlier, in the Middle Ages, there was a castle on a hill 450 m a.s.l. there, which was converted into a Franciscan monastery in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Two centuries later, the monastery suffered significantly during the French Revolution. Over the following years, it fell into disrepair and one of the wings was demolished. To stop further deterioration, in 1927 the monastery and church were included in the Supplementary Inventory of Historical Monuments (*Inventaire Supplémentaire des Monuments Historiques*) (Kowalski 2023b). New development has now been built, complementing the demolished part of the monastery. Its designer is Corsican-born architect Amelia Tavella (Fig. 5). This is what she wrote about her project: *I chose to keep the ruins and replace the torn part, the phantom part,*

*in copper work which will become the House of the Territory. I walked in the footsteps of the past* (EU Mies Award, “Rebirth of the Convent Saint-François”). The entire monastery was remodelled and revitalised with a clear division into two parts. The pre-existing historic section has been finished in stone, while the modern form, complementing the structure, has been given an outer skin of copper sheet panels, whose current red colour will develop a patina over time and colourfully relate to the historic fabric. The copper sheet covering the façade is made up of longitudinal, vertical panels, solid in parts of the façade and partly perforated in the upper parts and corners of the building. Delicate cut-outs in the form of repeated small square holes have been used here. This solution allows daylight to be filtered and the rooms to be ventilated. The simple, geometric graphical pattern of the panels seem to fit in with the austerity of the historic surroundings. The simplicity of the new texture harmonises with the atmosphere of the historic buildings<sup>4</sup>. The essence of the aesthetic of this architecture is the expression of the juxtaposition between the lightness of the geometric pattern of the building's perforated outer shells and its solid – metal or stone – walls.

### ***Museum of Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean in Marseilles***

The MUCEM – Museum of Civilisations of Europe and the Mediterranean (Figs. 6–8) appears to be a flagship case. It was opened on 7 June 2013 by French President François Hollande. That year, Marseilles was designated the European Capital of Culture. Situated in an old harbour right on the Mediterranean Sea, the museum consists of three parts with a total area of 44,000 m<sup>2</sup>. One is

<sup>4</sup> The renovation and extension of the historic monastery was recognised by the submission of the entire complex for the Mies van der Rohe Award competition in 2024.



Fig. 6. Marseille, MUCEM Museum – view of the new museum building from the south (photo by I. Dudek-Blaise)

Il. 6. Marsylia, Muzeum MUCEM – widok nowego obiektu muzeum od południa (fot. I. Dudek-Blaise)

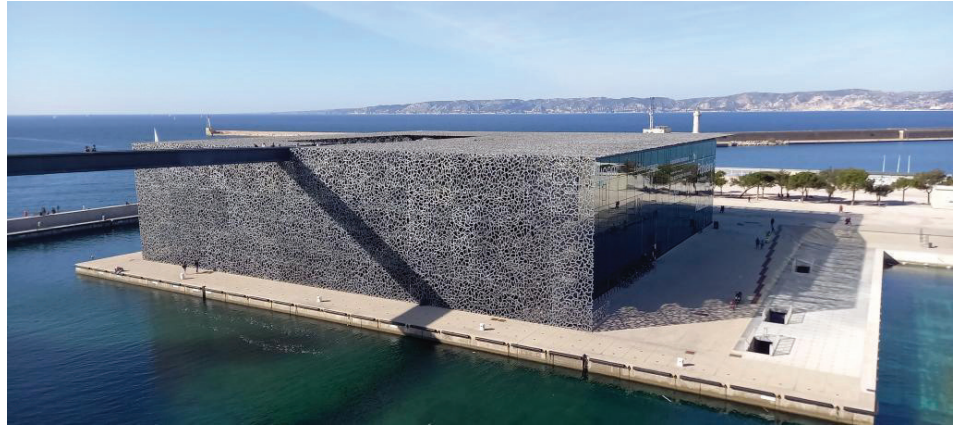


Fig. 7. Marseille, MUCEM Museum – recreational terrace on the roof of the building (photo by I. Dudek-Blaise)

Il. 7. Marsylia, Muzeum MUCEM – taras rekreacyjny na dachu budynku (fot. I. Dudek-Blaise)

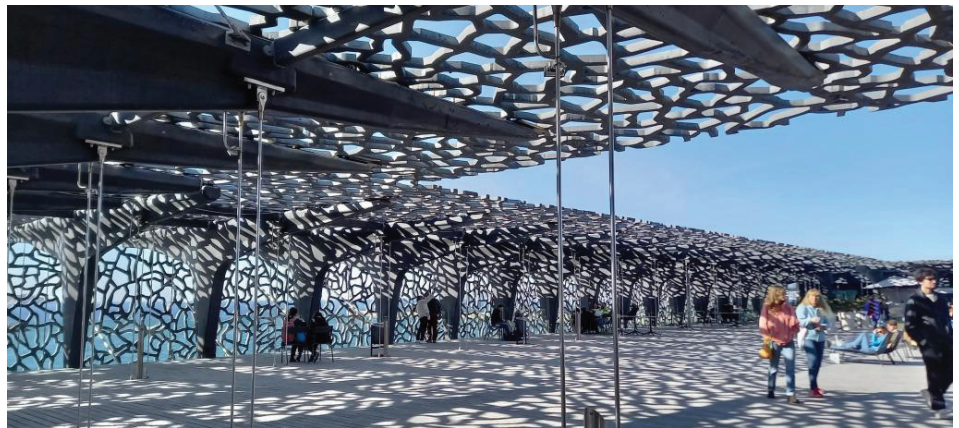
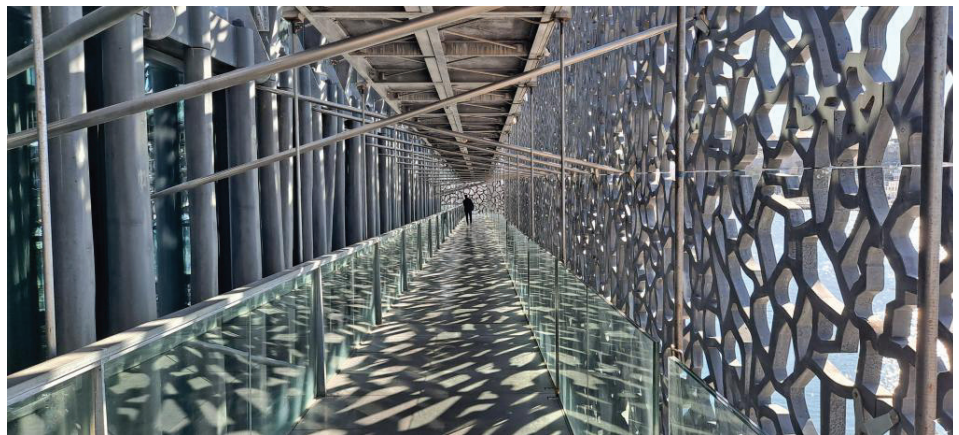


Fig. 8. Marseille, MUCEM Museum – corridor in the interior of the building (photo by I. Dudek-Blaise)

Il. 8. Marsylia, Muzeum MUCEM – korytarz we wnętrzu budynku (fot. I. Dudek-Blaise)



a new three-storey cubic structure made of steel and glass, 18 m high, which is based on a 72 m square plan. The new volume is connected by a 115 m long footbridge to the historic 17<sup>th</sup>-century St. John's Fort<sup>5</sup>. The third structure is a new building, built on the site of a former tobacco

factory, which houses complementary uses. The museum was commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture. The designers of the museum were architects Rudy Riccotti and Roland Carta (Lewandowski 2014).

On the roof of the new main building, where the exhibition rooms are located, there is a wooden terrace with a magnificent view of the sea and the Marseilles coast. The 16,000 m<sup>2</sup> terrace was made of heat-treated American ash wood, which is resistant to the elements (Fig. 7). Relaxing on the terrace after visiting the museum's exhibition is facilitated by the blue and turquoise lights, designed by Yann Kersalé, and the sound of the waves. Stainless steel

<sup>5</sup> St. John's Fort was commissioned by Louis XIV to increase the city's defensibility in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The fort was created in the north-western part of the harbour on the remains of Greek and Roman fortifications. The name is linked to the Order of Malta (Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta), which organised and commanded the Crusades in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

cables allow for the stability of the terrace and concrete pergola, which rests on cantilever beams placed on the main vertical columns of the structure<sup>6</sup>.

What catches the eye are the openwork decorations, self-supporting and made of a special kind of concrete, which, like a giant sea net, have been applied from the outside over the entire height of the glass walls on the west and south sides of the museum body (Fig. 6). This external organic decorative shell also breaks over the upper terrace, building a partial cantilevered canopy. The elements of this decoration cast shadows, so necessary in a hot climate, rippling, filtering and diffusing the harsh sunlight, enveloping the interiors and the users moving within them with this shimmering net. The authors of the project believe that they represent the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. This decorative outer shell is fundamental to the aesthetic climate of the building, both when viewed from the outside and when viewed from the inside. The decorations on these two walls were made of fibre-reinforced concrete, and was assembled from over 380 prefabricated elements. This fibre-reinforced concrete is smooth, reminiscent of stone, and the precast elements used in the façades reach dimensions of  $3 \times 6$  m with a filigree thickness of 7 cm. The fibre-reinforced concrete technology introduced here is innovative and particularly resistant to the permanent effects of the aquatic and especially the marine environment “Muzeum Cywilizacji Europejskiej i Śródziemnomorskiej”, 2014). The exhibition, which contains more than one million artefacts from the Mediterranean, is housed on two floors. In the interior of the museum, a ramp approximately 10 m wide was introduced on the outside of the building to serve as an internal circulation space<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 8).

### *Budapest Ethnographic Museum*

In May 2022, an ethnographic museum opened in the centre of Budapest. The new museum building is one of the largest museum buildings of its kind in Europe. Its collection now includes more than 200 thousand artefacts from the Carpathian Basin region and around 40 thousand from around the world. The Budapest Ethnographic Museum began operating in 1872, but had been housed in various buildings over the years, most recently in a curia building. Now, for the first time, it has been housed in a building specifically designed for such a function. Its body was built as a result of an international architectural competition held in 2014. It is part of Europe’s largest urban design and cultural project, the Liget Budapest Project at Ötvenhatosok Square (Kowalski 2023a). The building is a sort of gateway between a park and the city, and is harmoniously integrated into the surrounding environment, both the greenery and the fabric of the existing city. The Hungarian studio NAPUR designed the building and Marcel Ferencz is its chief architect. This integration with the environment is ensured by an immense green roof, on

which a variety of grasses, low-growing shrubs and flowers can be found growing wild. Strolling paths for visitors are planned on the outer edges of the roof and on the axis, with hundreds of comfortable stairs leading to the two outer wings of the building. The dynamic yet simple form stands out from its surroundings not only because of its large scale, but also because of its unusual shape. Indeed, by raising the two outer wings upwards symmetrically, the building resembles a giant skateboard ramp or two hills with a wide valley in the centre (Figs. 9, 10)<sup>8</sup>.

The outer glass façade was covered with a metal grid, onto which half a million pixels were superimposed to form a raster depicting patterns taken from Hungarian or Balkan folk embroideries, examples of which can be found in the museum. Almost half a million pixels were inserted into a laser-cut aluminium mesh. This decoration was attached to the building by more than 2,000 elements. This is one of the most interesting solutions in this project, clearly indicating the function of the building. Another interesting piece of information is the use of a rare and innovative technological solution, where the arched outer wings are based on a post and tensile structure, which we can find in the construction of bridges (Białas 2022).

### *Conclusions*

Krystyna Wilkoszewska, citing the words of Vitruvius, who in his work *Ten Books on Architecture* urged architects to listen to the teachings of philosophers, points out that since the 1960s we have already seen changes in the approach of both philosophers and the community on this issue. Wilkoszewska states that currently the situation is such that it is rather the philosophers who are listening to architecture, for time and space are the most important elements that are constantly present in our lives (2005). Leszek Kołakowski, on the other hand, believes that human nature would always want to find novelty in art and architecture: *The need for novelty as novelty, independent of any means, lives in us; novelty attracts us in and of itself. That the novelty lures us, in turn, is perhaps linked to our peculiarly human experience of time. We would always like to be at the beginning, to feel that the world is open to us, that it is just beginning* (2009, 46).

European star-architects who define themselves as avant-garde in architecture create buildings that show a constant exploration and pursuit of a new aesthetic language in opposition to the existing world. Their attitudes and projects are a necessity for them. They create buildings that stand out from their surroundings, different from those that already exist. Architecture seeks new forms and new directions that seize the opportunities offered by today’s advanced technologies and materials to create solutions that emerge from the imagination of outstanding artists. The avant-garde in architecture, as has happened for years

<sup>6</sup> The reinforced fibre concrete used here achieves a compressive strength six to eight times higher than normal concrete.

<sup>7</sup> In 2015, the museum won a prestigious Council of Europe award.

<sup>8</sup> The building had already won important prestigious architectural awards before opening. It was voted the best Mega Futura project in Europe at the 2017 MIPIM Awards. It also won the 2018 World’s Best Architecture at the International Property Awards (IPA), where it was selected from 1,700 entries from 115 countries.





Fig. 9. Budapest, Ethnographic Museum  
– detail of the metal lattice on the glass exterior wall  
(photo by M. Wdowiarz-Bilska)

Il. 9. Budapeszt, Muzeum Etnograficzne  
– detal metalowej kraty na szklanej ścianie zewnętrznej  
(fot. M. Wdowiarz-Bilska)

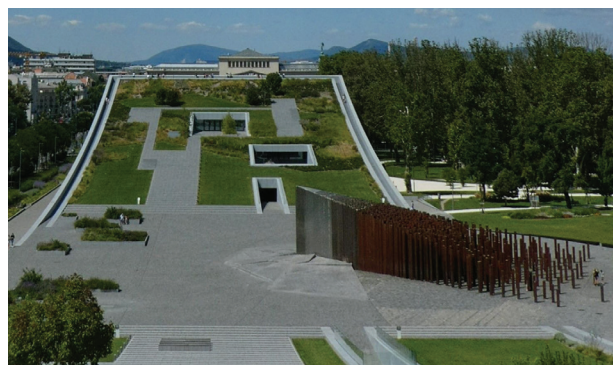


Fig. 10. Budapest, Ethnographic Museum  
– view of the roof garden  
(photo by M. Wdowiarz-Bilska)

Il. 10. Budapeszt, Muzeum Etnograficzne  
– widok ogrodu na dachu  
(fot. M. Wdowiarz-Bilska)

in the visual arts, relies on multi-directionality in exploration and must be committed to constant transformation.

The descriptive analysis of selected examples, presented in this study as a result of the author's research, made it possible to formulate a general characterisation of the new trend called New Decorationism. The essence of this trend is the use of decorative envelopes of the external surfaces of buildings that are not elements of their structural systems.

The examples of selected works of architecture, presented and analysed in this paper, associated with New Decorationism, bring an air of freshness to the existing space, a delicate and sensitive search for formal relationships even with the most obliging context of the historic urban fabric. The innovative and unexpected textures, made from materials that refract light, are perforated or ventilated, that appear on the external surfaces of buildings, as well as envelopes with simple geometric patterns or ones that are created out of soft forms of ornaments that reference the world of nature, introduce a new dimension into the perception of this architecture and its functioning. We are dealing here with a return, redefined by the contemporary concept of the pixel-composed image, to the saturation of building bodies and façades with a density of detail forgotten from bygone periods but still subconsciously desired, but which completely breaks with any reference to history.

In Poland, the reception of new trends and styles that emerge in Western architecture has often been significantly delayed. Among other things, Postmodernism, which was present in the United States and Europe at the end of the 1960s, did not reach Poland until after the year 1980,

after the social and political revolution. Now, in the era of open access to the latest news, any changes in the aesthetic style of art and architecture are much more quickly adopted. In our country, we can currently observe several projects that follow the trend under analysis. The highly distinctive and typical of the trend include: The Warmińska Gallery building in Olsztyn in Tuwima Street<sup>9</sup>, the external façades of the Tadeusz Kantor Art Documentation Centre – Cricoteka in Kraków at 2–4 Nadwiślańska Street<sup>10</sup>, or the marble exterior façades of the Museum of Polish History at 13 Dymińska Street in Warsaw (one of the elements of the remodelling of the Warsaw Citadel)<sup>11</sup>.

Translated by  
Krzysztof Barnas

<sup>9</sup> A project by Kuryłowicz & Associates, built between 2009 and 2014, is located at a boundary between natural and urban space of Olsztyn. Covering the entrance glass façade, the concrete structure represents a contemporary transformation of the city's historic stone walls.

<sup>10</sup> Its design was selected in an international architectural competition in 2009. It presents an architectural processing of Kantor's idea of emballage – packaging. The authors are Sławomir Zieliński, Piotr Nawara, Agnieszka Szultk and Stanisław Deńko. The building was opened in 2014. Made of sheet metal, the external façades feature small, repeating, modular cut-outs.

<sup>11</sup> Opened after several years of development in August 2023, the museum was designed by WXCA. The marble on the façades, as well as in the interiors, has been arranged in horizontal layers, which sometimes with different patterns and ornaments, are intended to depict successive epochs and events in the history of our country that are visually processed.

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## Streszczenie

### *Nowy dekoracjonizm w architekturze XXI w. – ogólna charakterystyka nurtu i analiza wybranych przykładów*

W artykule przedstawiono kilka przykładów nowego nurtu w architekturze najnowszej, zwanego nowym dekoracjonizmem. W realizacjach europejskich jest on obserwowany od niedawna, od pierwszej dekady XXI wieku. Pojęcia estetyczne zarówno w sztukach plastycznych, jak i w architekturze nie są trwałe, podlegają zmianom. Realizacji architektonicznych w ramach tych nowych kierunków i nurtów jest niewiele, w różnych miastach europejskich spotykamy pojedyncze obiekty. W tym wypadku istotne w architekturze jest pojawianie się nowego podejścia do kształtowania klimatu estetycznego formy architektonicznej poprzez stosowanie dekoracyjnych faktur zewnętrznych powłok – „skóry” budynku, przy wykorzystaniu różnorodnych materiałów – szkła, metalu, drewna, kamienia, nowoczesnych technologicznie betonów. Badania oparto przede wszystkim na studiach in situ, także studiach literatury przedmiotu oraz studium przypadku. Przeprowadzono analizę opisową wybranych przykładów, co pozwoliło na charakterystykę nowego nurtu w architekturze, który ukazuje dekoracyjne powłoki zewnętrzne obiektów. Pomocą w rozumieniu działań awangardy w architekturze wydało się przedstawienie wypowiedzi kilku filozofów. Do omówienia i zilustrowania problemu wybrano przykłady europejskich realizacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** architektura najnowsza, faktura i materia ścian zewnętrznych