

## Exhibition Grounds in the interwar period

In 1917, on the initiative and with participation of the City of Wroclaw, a joint-stock company was founded called Breslauer Messe A.G. It contributed to the regular organisation of industrial fairs (mostly building trades) from 1918, initially in Fall and later also in Spring. They took place in the Centennial Hall and Historical Exhibition Pavilion, in temporary wooden pavilions and also out-of-doors in the southern section of the Exhibition Grounds.

In 1919-1921 Max Berg (together with Ludwig Moshamer and Richard Konwiarz) presented a new conception for the city centre which also concerned the Exhibition Grounds. In his visionary proposal the architect designated three principal zones: "business city", "residential city", and "monumental city". The "monumental city", intended as the centre of the arts, culture and administration, was to accommodate institutions of higher education and dormitories for students. The "monumental city" was to include a fairground situated in the area surrounding the Centennial Hall. Designing the redevelopment of the sites formerly occupied by the temporary pavilions of the Centennial Exhibition, Berg envisioned the following layout: the Centennial Hall, located at the crossing of two principal axes, would remain the dominant feature of the entire complex; the monumental Main Entrance to the Exhibition Grounds on the western side leading to the forum in front of the Centennial Hall with a new pavilion erected on the site formerly occupied by the Pavilion of the Association of Silesian Artists; a new exhibition hall on the site of the demolished pavilion of the Garden Design Exhibition, flanked by two eleven-storey circular towers on its southern and northern side. Berg also envisioned the remodelling of the restaurant and new footbridges leading to the area of the former Amusement Park. The symmetrical layout and strong Classical emphasis imbued the design with monumentality referring to the Wilhelmian era and echoing Berg's designs for the 1911 competition for the expansion of the Exhibition Grounds in connection with the Zoological Garden. Only the circular towers and remodelled interior of the restaurant revealed the Expressionist tendency, reflecting the architect's fascination with skyscrapers and, to some degree, American architecture.

During the first years after World War I, the Exhibition Grounds were used to stage art exhibitions and cultural events. In 1920 a major contemporary art exhibition was presented there. Over the following years it was followed by a number of exhibitions showcasing modern art and architecture, including the famous *Wohnung und Werkraum* ("Living and Work Space") exhibition in 1929 organised by the Wroclaw branch of the Deutscher Werkbund. Concerts were also regularly staged at the Centennial Hall. In 1922 Gerhart Hauptmann's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated with the festival of his plays.

Although at the time there was no real chance for the expansion of the Exhibition Grounds, Berg continued to elaborate new conceptions for the complex in 1922-1924. Working together with the Executive Board of the Breslauer Messe A.G., he designed new exhibition hall to accommodate industrial and building trades exhibitions organised several times a year. During this period he designed four exhibition pavilions adjoining the Centennial Hall and crowned with terraced domes. New pavilions flanking the Main Gateway to the Exhibition Grounds were to house the administrative offices and

accommodate guests. The complex would also feature the "House of Nations" (Haus der Nationen), Hall of the Arts (Kunsthalle), and also a hotel, textile industry hall, machine-building industry hall, crafts hall, industry hall and also a concert hall connected with a garden and restaurant. Of this ambitious plan, the municipality and Breslauer Messe A.G. decided to go for just one exhibition hall located on the site of the temporary Pavilion of the Association of Silesian artists and to erect the monumental Main Gateway to the Exhibition Grounds.

In early 1924 the City Executive Board commissioned Berg to design the new large Exhibition Hall (Messehalle). Both the short deadline and limited funds excluded the reinforced-concrete structure and Berg was forced to look for a different solution to erect a monumental building well suited to its exhibition function. He came up with a brick structure with buttresses of reinforced concrete, covered with a wooden ceiling. Like the Centennial Hall, it featured innovative, custom-designed structural solutions realised in a traditional material (wood). Berg devised a system of wooden arches supporting the roof with binding joists. The arches rested on ferro-concrete bearings placed on the gallery level. The construction allowed for large expanses of glazed walls and skylights. The colour design was by the painter Hans Leistikow, alumnus of the local Academy, who had already collaborated with Berg.

The courtyard of the monumental Main Gateway was aligned with the Centennial Hall's main entrance. Its rectangular layout referred to Antiquity (Greek *dipteros* with the colonnade projecting before the elevation of the Messehalle) From there broad stairs led to the large rectangular square-cum-forum built in 1913. The columns were covered with a flat roof reinforced with crossed beams. The ceiling and eaves were painted with a geometric pattern of overlapping triangles.

During World War II, the roofing over the colonnade was destroyed leaving the concrete columns intact while the Messehalle suffered considerable damage (only fragments of its brick walls and galleries survived). As a result, this innovative structure has been almost totally forgotten.

After Max Berg had left Wroclaw in 1925, he was succeeded as site architect of the Exhibition Grounds by Richard Konwiarz, the designer of the then largest sports stadium in Europe located near the Szczytnicki Park. Konwiarz had collaborated with Berg on the Centennial Hall. In 1926 two concrete footbridges were erected to Konwiarz's design to connect the southern section (former Amusement Park) with the northern part of the Exhibition Grounds (the wooden footbridges designed by Poelzig had been dismantled once the Centennial Exhibition closed). In 1936 Richard Konwiarz designed a new gateway to the southern section of the Exhibition Grounds (today Main Entrance to the Zoological Garden).

In connection with the plans to organise in Wroclaw an international fair in 1937, another building was planned to house an exhibition hall and administrative offices of the Breslauer Messe A.G. It was designed by Richard Konwiarz assisted by young local architects Harry Weiss and Oscar Zimbal and called "Hall of States" (Staatenhalle). It was erected opposite the Messehalle built in 1925 as part of the complex planned already in the early 1920s. In May 1939 the newly erected Hall of States hosted presentations of countries of Eastern and Southern Europe: Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Turkey.

#### **XIV. Exhibition Grounds in the interwar period**

##### **Panel XIV/ 23**

1. Max Berg, design for the expansion of the Exhibition Grounds in Wroclaw, 1919–1920 (after: Deutschlands Städtebau Breslau, Berlin 1921)
2. Max Berg, design for the expansion of the Exhibition Grounds in Wroclaw, 1919–1920 (after: "Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst" 1921–1922, 6)
3. Max Berg, design for the expansion of the Exhibition Grounds in Wroclaw, 1919–1920 (after: "Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst" 1921–1922, 6)

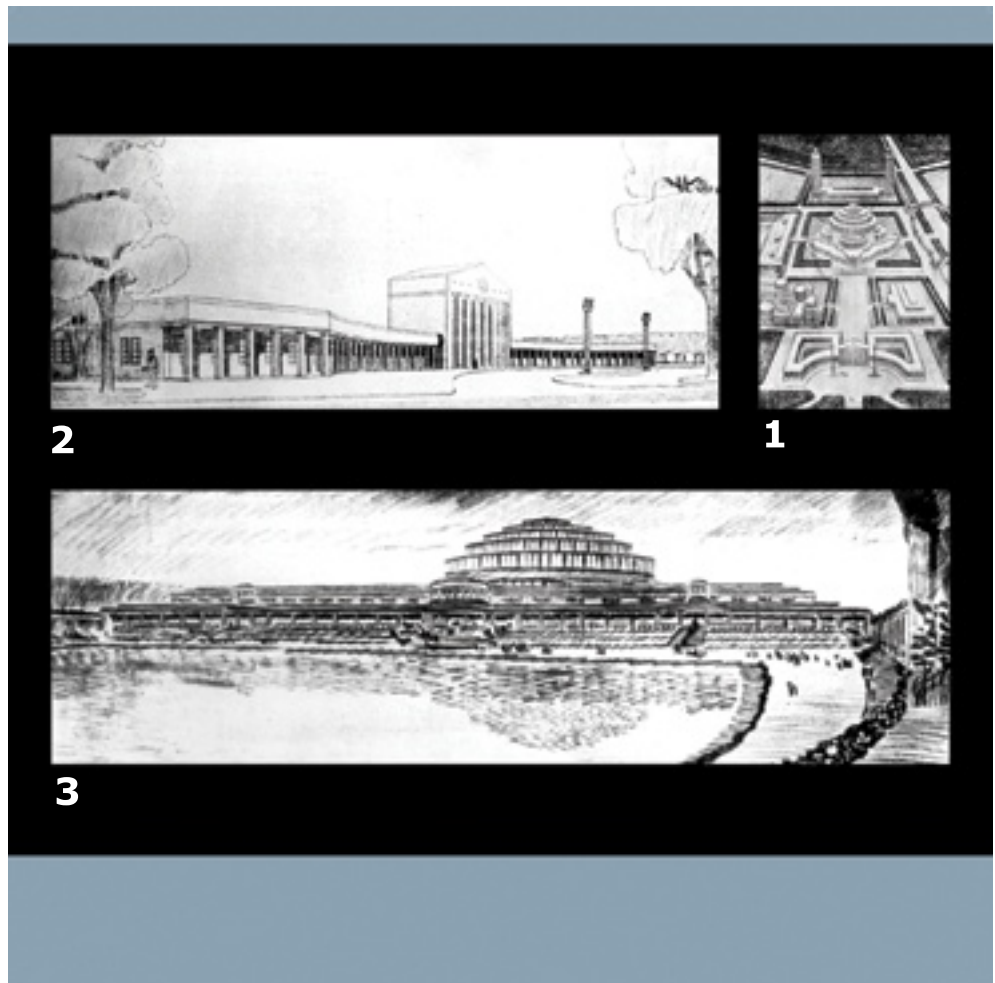
##### **Panel XIV/ 24**

- 1, 2, 3. Max Berg, new Exhibition Hall ("Messehalle"), model, 1924 (Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung, Erkner by Berlin)

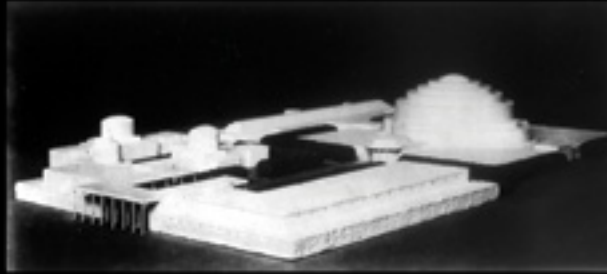
##### **Panel XIV/ 25**

1. Max Berg, new Exhibition Hall ("Messehalle"), photograph from the interwar period (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)
2. Max Berg, new Exhibition Hall ("Messehalle"), photograph from the interwar period (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)
3. Max Berg, new Exhibition Hall ("Messehalle") and courtyard ("Messehof"), photograph from the interwar period (private collection)
4. Max Berg, new Exhibition Hall ("Messehalle") and courtyard ("Messehof"), photograph from the interwar period (Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung, Erkner by Berlin)
5. Richard Konwiarz, "Hall of States" (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw)
6. Richard Konwiarz, "Hall of States" (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw)

##### **Panel XIV/23**



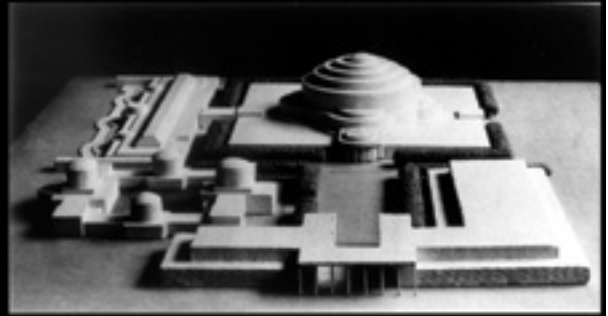
Panel XIV/24



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Panel XIV/25



1



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