

As part of our urban explorations in Vienna, one of the most interesting sites to me was the visit at Erste Campus, the Erste Group headquarter located in a new district next to the main railway station, the Quartier Belvedere. Erste Group Bank AG has expanded its branches to Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe. For its new headquarter in Vienna, the company invited ten artists from those geographical regions to develop site-specific or present existing works on the campus. To me, Erste Group's approach for commissioning and presenting art in architecture at their headquarters emphasizes a division that runs across Europe, notably along the borders of former Eastern Bloc countries in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe. This particular corporation's interest in artistic production in these countries is reflected in the focus of their Kontakt Art Collection and works included in *The Canaletto View* and goes hand in hand with the bank's territorial expansion and "the larger context of the geopolitical arena in which Erste Group operates" (see: *The Canaletto View Guide*).

During our visit, we were introduced to the art in architecture project *The Canaletto View* by Kathrin Rhomberg, artistic director of Kontakt Art Collection of Erste Group and Erste Foundation. She explained that the selection "focuses on art from those parts of Europe that are currently undergoing radical political transformation" (see: *The Canaletto View Guide*) and talked extensively about positive economic and artistic progress in Austria after 1989 in comparison to Eastern and South Eastern Europe and how in the 1990s, artists in Austria had the freedom to experiment with forms and formats and develop new ideas although society in general was still quite conservative. One of the most emblematic examples from that time is a project by Marcus Geiger: *Rote Secession* from 1998. At the same time, the political situation in Eastern and South Eastern Europe still embodied the limitations of the previous regime and did not allow such creative freedom.

Related to the regional focus of *The Canaletto View* project, in their book "Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism" Igor Štikš and Srećko Horvat state a "huge transformation, with equally colossal social and economic consequences" for post-socialist countries, on the one hand. On the other, they criticize that "the notion of an incomplete transition still dominates the media and academic discourse, while political elites are using it to justify yet another wave of privatization. It is as if no one dares to say that the transition as such is long over".

Our visit at Erste Campus made me think of examples of art in architecture in my home town, Sofia, Bulgaria where during the 1960s and 70s, many public buildings were built that included monumental art in architecture as integral part. After 1989, a lot of these buildings were abandoned and have not been renovated since. Until 2007 (when Bulgaria became a member of the European Union), none of the big foreign companies, franchises, supermarkets, banks, food and clothing chains had established branches in the country, nothing typical from the Western world had made its way here – not yet. Later on, Western companies bought these particular buildings in large, and private corporations became the main owners of buildings formerly used as cultural and sports centres. Foreign economic expansion, which is seen as one of the most crucial factors for the development of the country, began extensively in the 2010s. Throughout this decade, international companies have taken over and remodelled more and more existing public buildings with their distinct examples of art in architecture. By repurposing the buildings – now entirely reshaped and converted into profitable spaces – these have been stripped from their cultural value.

While in *The Canaletto View* project in Vienna the topics of economic and cultural development peacefully coexist, in Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries art in architecture is mainly related to the privatization of culture, and with this means the disappearance of an increasing number of existing examples.

The Canaletto View, Art in Architecture project, Erste Campus

Sanja Iveković, 'The Invisible Women of Erste Campus', 2016
Film Project, Elevator areas, Level 0–9, Building A–F

Franz Erhard Walther, 'Thirteen Action Shapes', 2015
13 work pieces, some meeting rooms, Level 3–9, Building A–F

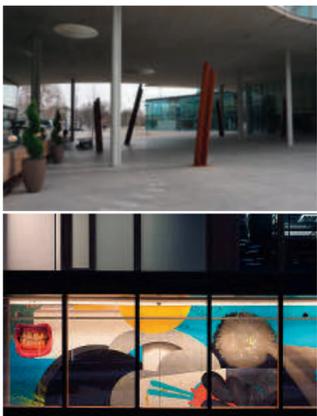
Edward Krasinski, 'Retrospective', 1984
Installation, Level 12

Clemens von Wedemeyer, 'Esiod 2015', 2016
Film, 38 min., Grand Hall, Annual screening until 2051

Slaven Tolj, 'From Ten to Zero', 2015
Soundinstallation, Atrium

Florian Pumhösl, 'Design for a Curtain', 2015
Grand Hall, Polyester, Fiberglass

Olga Chernysheva, 'Protected by', 2015
Series of 25 drawings, Level 1, Building C and D



Roman Ondak, '3015', 2015
Sculpture, Main Entrance (outdoors)



Tomislav Gotovac, 'Watch on the Rhine', 2015
Photograph, Level 12, Executive Meeting Area

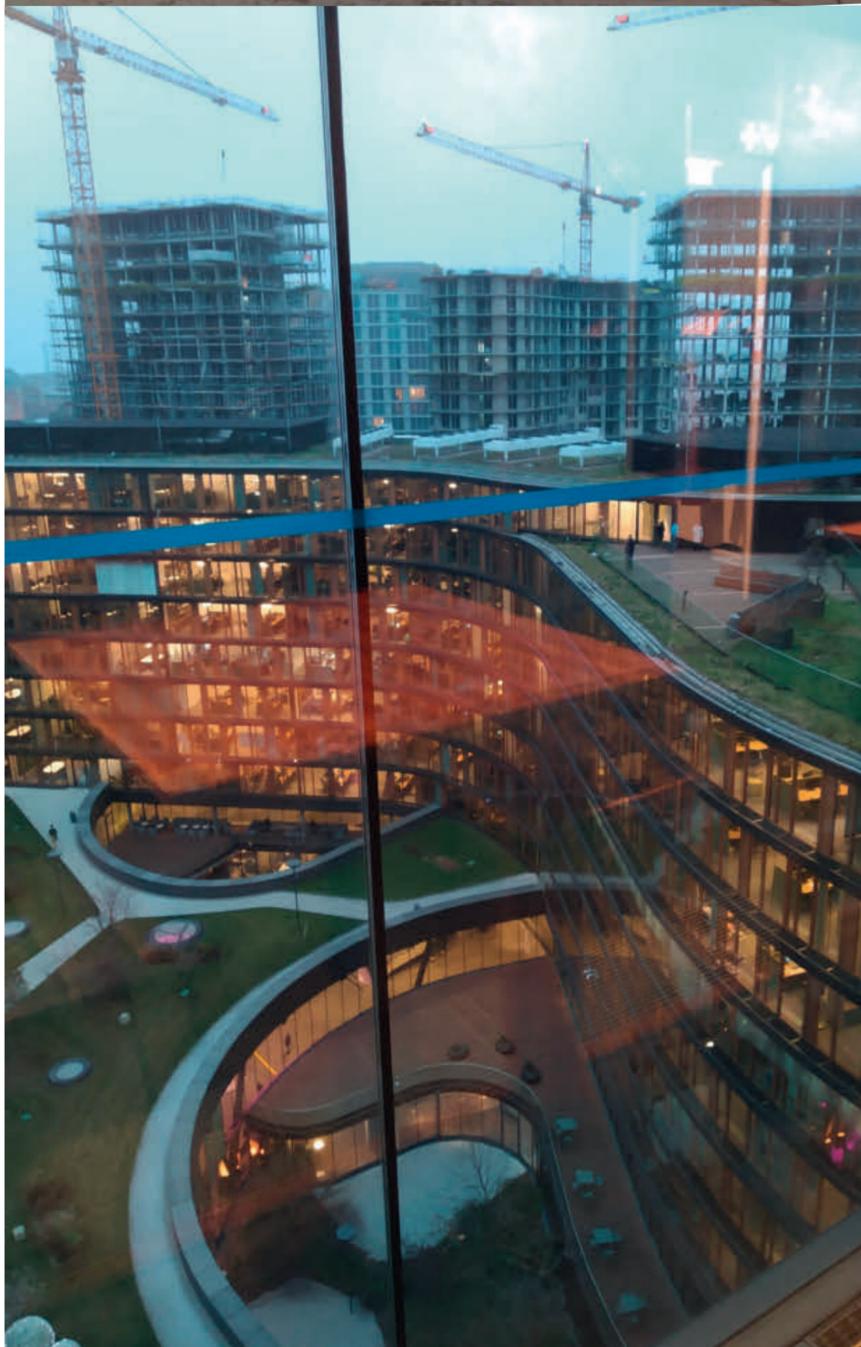
Ashley Hans Scheirl, 'Libidinal Economy's Special Effects', 2016
Wall painting, Restrooms, Level 0, Building D



Sports Hall ASICS ARENA, Sofia, 1968 (former Festival Hall '68), Ivan Tatarov and Doncho Vladyski (architects)

In 1968, the Festival Hall '68 was designed by architects Ivan Tatarov and Doncho Vladyski. With this distinctive monument they desired to create a landmark in, and thus put an emphasis on the district "Geo Milev" in Sofia. The building is one of only few striking examples of Brutalist architecture in Sofia and joins art and architecture, both monumental and typical for that time. Today, it has been converted with no advise or consultation of experts and has an entirely different appearance; one that hardly gives a hint of its former use and representation. The Sports Hall now belongs to an international sports brand, has a new name and purpose that neglect its former function and aesthetics.

Economic investments and Art in Architecture in Bulgaria



Cinema Klokotnitsa, Haskovo, 1980

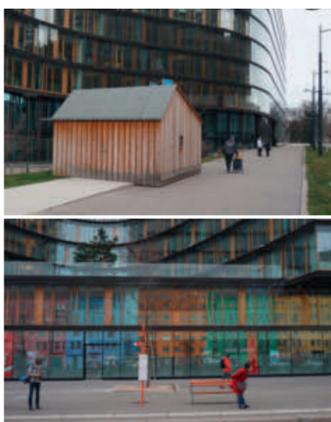
Cinema Klokotnitsa was built in 1980 in the city centre of Haskovo, Bulgaria. The building that used to host film screenings and cultural events is now transformed and its cinema hall has been turned into a BILLA supermarket. The relief on the façade and the supermarket's logo indicate the coexistence of the building's previous use for a cultural purpose and the present prevalence of economic investments.

Urban explorations – Field trips to public art/spaces

Art in Architecture from Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe

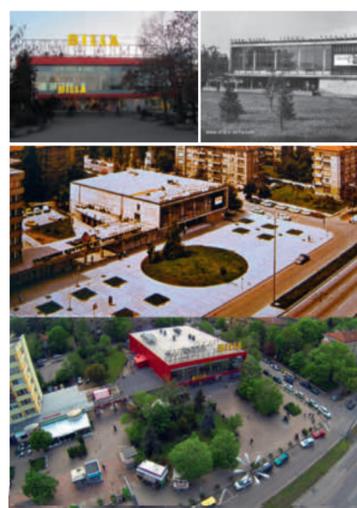
Cinema and Cultural Centre Iztok, Sofia, 1979, H. Tzvetkov and H. Genko (architects)

In 1979, H. Tzvetkov and H. Genko designed and built this cinema and cultural centre with the aim to embrace the cultural life in the so-called "Iztok" district in Sofia. The building used to accommodate a large cinema hall for 800 viewers as well as a library and conference halls for cultural and political events. Nowadays, the building has been transformed into a BILLA supermarket, and both its function and appearance have completely changed. When the building was sold and repurposed in 2010, the cultural centre was allocated to the rear part of the building and promised future modernisation; however, to date this has never happened.



Lois Weinberger, 'Laubreise', 2016
Object, Canettistraße Entrance (outdoors)

Marcus Geiger, 'Project 2 for Erste Campus', 2014-2016
Painting, Building façades at Wiedner Gürtel 2-10





“As such, the artist’s naked body appears within eye- and earshot of real fighting — not only incapable of putting up any meaningful resistance against possible attack, but actually seeming entirely defenceless and painfully vulnerable”.

text: The Canaletto View Guide

What exactly is “art in architecture”?

A means of supporting artists?

Is it decoration for architecture?

A source of kudos?

An image factor?

And given how profoundly the world is changing, how might the interaction of art, architecture, and reality be revised and reimagined?

Questions: The Canaletto View Guide