

Strand 3: The Challenges facing Art Nouveau Heritage (Looking Towards the Future)

Art Nouveau buildings of Riga for the future

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A rich and dynamic cultural life has always been one of the most characteristic features of Riga, the more than eight centuries old capital city of Latvia. Diverse and internationally recognised architectural heritage¹ together with recent daring structures will greet thousands of visitors in 2014 when the city becomes the European Capital of Culture and the host of the eight World Choir Games.² The city can be very proud of its recent cultural achievements; nevertheless, the turn of the 19th and 20th century was one of the most intense periods of economic development in the history of Riga, and the city reached a cultural and architectural peak. The magic number of Art Nouveau buildings in the entire city is estimated to have been over eight hundred,³ constituting 40% of apartment houses in the city centre.⁴ The large number and immense architectural diversity of Art Nouveau buildings constructed during the 15-year-span prior to World War I is not only an asset, but also a challenge for the northern metropolis. Still as important a centre of international trade and transit as in the previous centuries, currently Riga is facing increasing globalisation and unpredictable economic problems of European scale, complimented by the shifting habits and lifestyle of the urban population – real challenges for established practices of maintenance and preservation of cultural heritage.

A poetical spirit and close connection with the processes and forces of Nature are some of emotional features associated with Art Nouveau, along with characteristic formal expression, distinct lines and iconography of the style. A hundred-something-years old church in the snowy winter of 2012/2013 somehow bridges the gap between

¹ The historical centre of Riga was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/852>, accessed 30.04.2013.

² See the programme of events at <http://www.riga2014.org/eng/news/>, accessed 30.04.2013.

³ <http://www.latvia.travel/en/article/art-nouveau-riga>, accessed 30.04.2013.

⁴ <http://www.jugendstils.riga.lv/lat/JugendstilsRiga//%20jugendstils/>, accessed 30.04.2013.

the distant generations of artists and entire societies of the past and present. Krusta baznīca (Cross Church) in the distant outskirts of Riga, Ropažu iela 120 (1909, arch. Wilhelm Ludwig Nikolai Bockslaff, Edgar Woldemar Eduard Friesendorff)⁵ is one of the few Art Nouveau churches not only in Riga but also in Latvia. Asymmetrical massing, rustic fieldstone masonry around the entrance to the church, and strict geometrical details on façades mark the building as rooted in local ancient traditions (while never applying any historical elements directly) and also as looking forward into the future, towards a society and human relations the world has never known before. Through the decades, the building has remained in continuous use despite the artistic neglect or ideological contradictions with the official regime, somehow surfing along the margins of the general functional and ideological flows of a changing society. [Fig. 1]

Compared to Art Nouveau as an architectural style of long neglect, the Art Nouveau period as an era has never been absent from the public cultural and social discourse of Latvia. It was a great period of social and national awakening in the territory of Latvia, then part of the Russian Empire. The literature and music of the period even managed to fit well into the context of Soviet Union's dubious ideological patterns, allowing people to feel a connection with the immaterial heritage of the past. The realistic albeit poetical heritage of art and painting of the period remained an integral part of the general education curriculum of the post-WWII era. The names of the three most prominent Art Nouveau painters Janis Rozentāls, Vilhelms Purvītis, and Jānis Valters⁶ are embedded in Latvian culture due to their huge importance in the history of Latvian art. The Museum of Janis Rozentāls was established as early as 1973 at his former apartment and studio in an Art Nouveau building at Alberta iela 12.⁷

With architectural heritage, the situation was more complicated and not just due to the artistic features of the style but also due to the history of real estate development

⁵ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ *Rīgas Jūgendstila ēkas. Art Nouveau buildings in Riga*, Rīga, 2012 (Rīga, 2007), p. 344.

⁶ Also called Johans Valters and, later in life, Johan Walter-Kurau; see full biography in: Kristiāna ĀBELE *Johans Valters*, Rīga, Neputns, 2009.

⁷ <http://memorialiemuzeji.lv/muzeji/jana-rozentala-un-rudolfa-blaumana-muzejs/#>, accessed 30.04.2013.

at this time in Riga. The majority of the Art Nouveau buildings of Riga are apartment houses with rental flats, large apartments (six to seven rooms) located in the buildings facing the street and smaller ones in the courtyard edifices. Members of the middle class owned the buildings, while apartments were rented out to other members of the middle-class or to the working class. Both owners and tenants were severely affected by WWII: entire families were either deported to Siberia or emigrated to Western countries. Those who remained in Riga had to squeeze into one room out of many as the flats got divided in smaller units (the so-called communal flats) under the Soviet regime. The issues around private property and the process of gaining profit from real estate, common in the free-market economy, were a forgotten territory in the public discourse of the second half of the 20th century. Bank loans helped to create the first building boom of Art Nouveau Riga; however, the general public found it hard to imagine the concept for as long as up to the early 21st century. The differences between the concepts are still substantial: in the early 20th century some individuals applied for loans to construct for others while today individuals apply for loans to buy their flats constructed by anonymous companies.

However, the 70s of the 20th century was a period of awareness rising for cultural heritage, and 1974 became the year Art Nouveau made it towards its well deserved place among architectural styles of Latvia.⁸ In 1978 the Art Nouveau heritage was highlighted in the context of general processes of the period in a monumental survey of the history of Riga⁹. Two years later a fundamental book by Jānis Krastiņš¹⁰ was published, bringing more than 600 buildings and over 30 architects into spotlight while clearly stating the importance and international context of the Art Nouveau architecture of the city.

Renovation of the apartment houses of Art Nouveau areas is an ongoing but also a slow process. After more than hundred years of life, a large part of the buildings have not had a major renovation yet; some have received treatment of façades and/or

⁸ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ: “Rīgas arhitektūras stilistiskie novirzieni XX gs. sākumā”, in *Pilsētu attīstība un arhitektūra Latvijas PSR*, Rīga, 1974, p. 79–113.

⁹ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ, Juris VASIĻJEVS: “Rīgas izbūve un arhitektūra 19. gs. otrajā pusē un 20. gs. sākumā”, in *Rīga: 1860–1917*, Rīga, Zinātne, 1978, p. 413–450.

¹⁰ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ *Jugendstils Rīgas arhitektūrā*, Rīga, Zinātne, 1980, 224 p.

interiors, but at various times and of variable quality. It took ten years since the first publications and a change of the political and economic situation for the first renovations to happen and, subsequently, to highlight the full splendour and beauty of the style to the public. The renovation of the stairwell at Alberta iela 2a (1906, arch. Mikhail Eisenstein) revealed the hidden beauty of the greying edifices.¹¹ Then the commercial renovations gradually started. As the descendants of the original owners were given the opportunity to reclaim their property, ever more buildings became privately owned once again. Individuals or family members, either the wealthy from countries of the West or the locals short of means, had to take full responsibility for the maintenance and renovation of the buildings and deal with a diverse flock of tenants whom the state had granted several years of residence inside the denationalised buildings. Some of the owners chose to sell their buildings; thus, companies became important actors as well.

Currently part of the historical buildings are comprised of rented apartments while a large part are owner-occupied condominiums, a predominant type of residential real estate in Riga and in Latvia. The reasons behind the renovation of the Art Nouveau heritage, or lack of it, tend to be similar to other heritage buildings in the historical centre. The potentially high costs of renovation of a listed or simply old building as well as the potential risk of an inadequate demand for the finished property are some of the reasons the owners are reluctant to choose a thorough renovation. One of the saddest results of divided ownership is that the historical windows tend to be replaced with diverse plastic ones, an issue hard to tackle since tens of thousands of owners do that. However, the renovation of the interiors of apartments is the most complex issue because the protection measures are not as strict as in the case of the façades.

Some of the issues regarding the renovation of historical apartments were highlighted recently when the former president of the Republic of Latvia requested a well-located apartment. Situated in an Eclecticism building at Elizabetes iela 17 amidst Art Nouveau structures, the expensive flat turned out to be in a very poor condition after

¹¹ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ *Rīga. Jugendstilmetropole. Art Nouveau Metropolis. Jügendstila metropole*, Rīga, Baltika, 1998, p. 136–139.

some recent renovation with cheap materials, furnished with very cheap-looking and poorly made kitchen and bathrooms.¹² That resulted in a loud outcry in all the media against the inadequate use of public money on such an unworthy purchase, and also highlighted the dubious taste of the current middle class, the owners and inhabitants of historical properties. In contrast, some of the opportunities for renovation of historical interiors have been emphasised in an apartment of a Modern Movement building with Art Deco features from the 1930s at Zaubes iela 10. Here the client is one of the owners of the architects' office in charge of the renovation, "Vincent's", and all the Art Deco details still present have been carefully preserved in the interior and supplemented with interior elements and furniture of top contemporary design.¹³

The 1990s were the time of first commercial renovations. Due to economic factors, renovation often involved a change of function to satisfy the specific needs of a wealthy corporate client. For example, two different banks moved into two impressive edifices in the prestigious area called "Klusais centrs" or the Quiet Centre (the very north of the World Heritage Site, a territory unperturbed by transit traffic and commercial activity). A former apartment building at Elizabetes iela 23 (1903, arch. Hermann Hilbig) displays a well-renovated elegant façade with subtle decorations of early Art Nouveau (the renovated interiors are closed to the public) while the historically eclectic façade of a building at Vīlandes iela 1 (1898, arch. Rudolph Heinrich Zirkwitz)¹⁴ is not giving away the rich and well-renovated Art Nouveau interiors, which also are inaccessible to the public. The last example illustrates a very important feature of Art Nouveau in Riga – a building constructed in Eclecticism with historical elements on the façade was often likely to contain a vast amount of Art Nouveau elements in its interior due to the rapidly changing taste. Subsequently, some of the latest Art Nouveau buildings might display neo-classical or even Art Deco elements in their interior decoration. Although a lot of the original decoration and most

¹² <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/zurnals-zatleram-tika-nopirkts-letakais-nevis-labakais-piedavatais-dzivoklis.d?id=43182224>, accessed 30.04.2013.

¹³ "Dzīvokļi Zaubes ielā", in Ieva ZĪBĀRTE (ed.): *Process. Jaunā arhitektūra Latvijā*, Rīga, Arhitektūras veicināšanas fonds, 2013, p. 78–80.

¹⁴ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ, Ivars STRAUTMANIS *Lielais Rīgas arhitektūras ceļvedis*, Rīga, PUSE, (2002-year not mentioned in the book), p. 83, 86.

of the furniture of apartments was lost in the turbulent times of two World Wars and during the Soviet period, the first book devoted entirely to the Art Nouveau interiors of Riga shows there is much left to discover.¹⁵

An example of mixed gain and loss is the current Riga School of Economics, situated in two buildings – one originally an apartment house at Alberta iela 13 (1904) and the other originally a private school at Strēlnieku iela 4a (1905), both by civil engineer Mikhail Eisenstein. Several original tile stoves, fireplaces, mouldings, and stencil paintings have been renovated and preserved in a number of interiors in the first building while the other has lost all its interior elements as a result of severe long-term misuse.¹⁶ The extremely rich decoration of façades highlighted in traditional period colours is a real treat for tourist eyes. A similar treat located in the medieval Old Town is an apartment house with shops at Smilšu iela 8 (1902, arch. Heinrich Scheel, Friedrich Scheffel), a strikingly decorated building of early Art Nouveau renovated at the turn of the 20th and 21st century.¹⁷ It boasts one of the most impressive and well-preserved entrance halls in the city. However, the original sculpture of a lady resembling the Statue of Liberty topping the façade on the street corner has been long lost and is only depicted on some rare postcards.

Commercial reuse includes hotels – another option of high demand. Central locations, proximity to historical sites, good restaurants, and entertainment attract conversion into style or design hotels while parts of the interior remain accessible to the public as, for example, at Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 23 (1901, Heinrich Scheel, Friedrich Scheffel).¹⁸ The building is a characteristic example of a modest early Art Nouveau, with subtle and romantically stylized decoration whose richest elements are the stained glass windows with floral patterns in the stairwell. Solid and spacious in planning, such structures are easily adaptable for both business and contemporary residential purposes. After a careful renovation of the exterior masks and stylized masonry decoration, another hotel – originally an apartment house with shops owned by building contractor

¹⁵ Vita BANGA *Rīgas Jūgendstils. Interjers. Art Nouveau in Riga Interior*, Rīga, Jumava, (2009-year not mentioned in the book), 111 p.

¹⁶ J. KRASIŅŠ, I. STRAUTMANIS *Lielais...*, p. 194.

¹⁷ J. KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas Jūgendstila...*, p. 58–61.

¹⁸ J. KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas Jūgendstila...*, p. 166–167.

Ludvigs Neiburgs – at Jauniela 25/29 (1903, Wilhelm Ludwig Nikolai Bockslaff) in the very heart of the medieval Old Town moves a step further by exploring contemporary design trends through local colours and light elegance in its interiors, and, subsequently, attracts critical acclaim for melting the old and the new together very well.¹⁹

It has not been easy to keep the residential function and to ensure the renovation according to the original style of the flats in the apartment buildings. While the renovation of façades and, in some cases, entrance halls is carried out to the highest authenticity and artistic standards, interiors of contemporary flats become an uneasy mix of the glorious past and contemporary trends. For example, the Quiet Centre was a place of several innovative and healthy urban planning experiments and a vibrant construction site for the wealthy in the early 20th century. Similarly, at the beginning of the 21st century, the renovation for rich and filthy-rich took place in this area first. Both the exuberant buildings by Eisenstein (at Alberta iela and Elizabetes iela, 1901–1904) and the more modest structures by Konstantīns Pēkšēns (at Vīlandes iela and Vidus iela, 1908–1910) have regained their proud and smooth former glamour and beauty while the flats are renovated according to the needs of the new owners as the former rental apartment buildings have become condominiums.

One of the first and most thoroughly renovated buildings is an apartment house at Elizabetes iela 10b (1903, Mikhail Eisenstein, based on the design of two architects from Leipzig).²⁰ The façade impresses with the abundance of decorative elements in pure white enhanced by the background of light-blue glazed bricks on the top two floors while the interior displays sculptural decoration in white and pale greens with accents of gold. Architect Mārcis Apsītis supervised the renovation of the building and the impressive entrance hall and stairway,²¹ but the flats were later sold and renovated separately. The most recent renovation in the area is an apartment house with shops at Strēlnieku iela 1 (1910, Ernests Pole). As with most of Art Nouveau buildings in Riga, the façade has been renovated with great care; however, the renovators have not taken the risk to bring back a historical cornice that adorned the corner of the façade just

¹⁹ Ilze MARTINSONE: “Neiburgs Hotel”, *Latvijas Architectūra*, 89, 2010, p. 30–35.

²⁰ J. KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas Jūgendstila...*, p. 124.

²¹ J. KRASIŅŠ, I. STRAUTMANIS *Liela...*, p. 90.

above the three-floor-high columns, dismantled in 1966 due to a misconception about its structural instability.²² In the interior the original spacious flats have been made even larger by merging adjacent flats or two floors into one to create a huge two-floor-high space in one of the flats.²³ The achieved result feels like a suburban villa floating high above the city.

The so-called “Perpendicular” Art Nouveau, National Romanticism, or a mix of both dominates the Art Nouveau landscape of the busy central part and the more relaxed, even a bit shabby, southern part of the World Heritage Site. The same is true for the peripheral areas of the city. However, the exuberant Eclectically Decorated²⁴ early Art Nouveau can be found even on the outskirts of the city, just less frequently than in the northern and central areas.

A very important feature of the developing Art Nouveau in the early 20th century was the increased demand for natural materials in the finishing of façades that enhance the emotional impact of the building yet remain durable in the Latvian climate, as noted in several theoretical writings on the Art Nouveau period,²⁵ which is especially emphasised in the Nordic trend of National Romanticism, widely embraced in Riga. However, the high standards advanced professionals called for could not be met in every building when put up against actual construction speed demands. Approximately a quarter of a million people flooded into the booming industrial city during the two decades prior to WWI, reaching the staggering number of 520,000 inhabitants.²⁶ Considering 150–220 multi-storey apartment houses were constructed per year, it is hard to imagine all of them being of what we could call today advanced and expensive sustainable ecological design.

Nevertheless, a very distinctive and creatively unique representation of early principles of sound and durable regional architecture can be found at Alberta iela 13

²² Interview with Jānis Krastiņš, 25.04.2013.

²³ The project, currently in the final stages of construction, is available at http://www.sudraba-arhitektura.lv/#portfolio/apartment_in_riga, accessed 30.04.2013.

²⁴ Terminology of trends in Art Nouveau of Riga as in: J. KRASTIŅŠ *Rīgas Jūgendstila...*, p. 19–21.

²⁵ Jānis KRASTIŅŠ: “Latvian Art Nouveau in the European Context”, in Silvija GROSA (ed.): *Jūgendstils. Laiks un telpa. Art Nouveau. Time and Space*, Rīga, Jumava, 1999, p. 202–203.

²⁶ J. KRASTIŅŠ *Jūgendstils...*, p. 28.

(1908, arch. Eižens Laube), a “solidly serious, restrained, dark grey and yet so colourful”²⁷ building. The natural materials used here are local travertine and natural slate and copper for ornamental suns. However, with several recently renovated edifices nearby, the grey surface of the building starts to slide into emotional obscurity and dilapidation, similarly to several other prominent apartment buildings of National Romanticism, for example, the ensemble at Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 67 (1909, arch. Eižens Laube), 69, 71 and 73 (1909, 1910 and 1910, arch. Aleksandrs Vanags and Pauls Kampe).²⁸ The same is true of a famous apartment house with shops at Aleksandra Čaka iela 26 (1905, arch. Konstantīns Pēkšēns, Eižens Laube) and other unique and dynamic structures on the grid of the main streets of the city centre. A recent renovation in bright colours of the façade of an apartment house at Krišjāņa Barona iela 30 (1907, arch. A. Vanags) reveals truly marvellous creativity and the artistic and composition prowess of the Riga Art Nouveau masters striving to depict the spirit of the time.

The wise and thorough planning process in the mid-19th century ensured the city was provided with several significant public buildings fashioned in various impressive trends of Eclecticism already prior to the building boom that hit the city in the late 1890s.²⁹ Nevertheless, there were several dozens of rational and rather modest Art Nouveau schools and other public buildings constructed in the early 20th century for the rapidly growing urban population, but only a few public buildings were constructed in the rich styles of Eclectically Decorated Art Nouveau or National Romanticism in Riga.

Still, several public buildings stand out for their highly individual design. The best known among them is a former private school, which is also one of the earliest examples of National Romanticism, at Tērbatas iela 15/17 (1905, arch. Konstantīns Pēkšēns, Eižens Laube), commissioned by a famous Latvian poet, lawyer, and education administrator Atis Ķeniņš.³⁰ Renovated just a couple of years ago, the building tightly fits in the general urban landscape of the city. The wide window

²⁷ J. KRASIŅŠ: “Latvian Art Nouveau...”, p. 203

²⁸ Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen. Riga, 1907–1913, 1–7.

²⁹ On the development of the city centre in the context of other major European cities see Jānis KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas arhitektūras stili. Architectural styles of Riga. Архитектурные стили Риги*, Rīga, Jumava, 2005, 240 p.

³⁰ J. KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas jūgendstila...*, p. 314.

openings, the cave-like entrance, and the expressively accentuated assembly hall on the top floor are the most distinctive features that separate the building from neighbouring residential structures. However, constructed to help to enhance the Latvian education and spirit, the school provides education in Russian since the second half of the 20th century. In addition, the kids today often complain about forced physical activity to migrate between classrooms and premises located on seven different levels (including the basement and attic of the original 5-floor-structure) while there is no actual gym available. [Fig. 2]

Despite the questionable functional adaptability of such structures for middle school and high school, a recent renovation of a former apartment house (converted into a school as early as 1947)³¹ at Skolas iela 32 (1904, arch. Konstantīns Pēkšēns *et al.*)³² has considerably improved the quality of the urban landscape in the area. The gym is tiny, the assembly hall is located on the top floor, and all the classrooms are of different sizes; however, the playful façades adorned with dandelions, geometrical ornaments, original tiles, and metalwork create a playful atmosphere. The influence of southern German Art Nouveau belongs in an educational institution that emphasises German language education. [Fig. 3]

Among public buildings inspired by national spirit and influenced by the strictly rational trend of Art Nouveau are two centres for cultural activities – the building of Riga Latvian Society in the very heart of the city at, Merķeļa iela 13 (1909, E.Pole, E.Laube)³³ and the cultural edifice Cultural Centre “Ziemeļblāzma” (meaning “aurora borealis” or “northern lights” in Latvian) on the far northern outskirts of the city, Ziemeļblāzmas iela 36 (1913, architect unknown), just undergone renovation and opening in May 2013³⁴. Murals of mixed fresco and mosaic by Janis Rozentāls on the top of the entrance façade of Riga Latvian Society building are testimonies to the romantic and poetic spirit of Art Nouveau captured so well, so well carried out in Latvian poetry, playwriting, and music of the period, while the building itself has a very

³¹ <http://herderavidusskola.edu.lv/%D0%BE-%D1%88%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B5/>, accessed 30.04.2013.

³² J. KRASTIŅŠ *Rīgas jūgendstila...*, p. 154.

³³ <http://www.rlb.lv/index.php?p=9185&lang=1510>, accessed 30.04.2013.

³⁴ <http://ziemelblazma.riga.lv/en/home/>, accessed 30.04.2013.

strict aura of Neoclassical tendencies about it. With all the due respect for the paintings present in urban space and city life continuously for more than a century in urban space and city life, now provided with night-time illumination recently, it is actually in fact quite hard to fully appreciate and perceive the artwork from the street level. The façade itself is a rather different political manifestation than the earlier statements of the national spirit – the general simplicity, clear geometrical elegance, modest, yet but classically inspired granite columns on at the entrance, stylized motives of the flag of parliamentary Great Britain architecturally place the building among the examples of emerging Neoclassicism that represents at the same time the forward-looking and deeply international spirit of the Latvian community of the period: ready to take the full power of the realm yet confident to wait ten more years (as it turned out later) for the storm of WWI to die down in the world. However, in its early days as well as at present, the building somehow fails to attract youthful and rebellious activities, leaving *nouveau* and fun to be discovered elsewhere.

On the other hand, “Ziemeļblāzma” Culture Centre (renovation 2007–2013, arch. “JS & Partneri”),³⁵ with its immense garden and schools for arts and music nearby, is almost entirely youth-friendly. A spacious modern playground and multi-purpose area/skate park have been built in the territory as part of an expensive renovation funded by the municipality, a new observation tower in reinforced concrete was constructed on the site of the original collapsing water tower, and garden pavilions have been fully renovated. The building itself floats as a white ship in the park again. The main assembly hall has recovered its original spacious and bright character as later partitions have been removed. New amenities and technical facilities ensure cultural activities of the highest contemporary standards. The renovation of the interiors has been carried out with great respect for original elements and details akin to the artistic character of the building added during several minor renovations carried out through the 20th century. [Fig. 4]

³⁵ Agrita LŪSE: “Kultūras nama “Ziemeļblāzma” rekonstrukcija. Renovation of the recreation centre „Ziemeļblāzma”, *Latvijas būvniecība*, 35, 2012, p. 22–31.

A new, contemporary addition (2010–2012, arch. “SZK un partneri”) to the historical building of the Academy of Fine Arts, originally the School of Commerce, at Kalpaka bulvāris 13 (1902–1905, arch. Wilhelm Ludwig Nikolai Bockslaff) exemplifies another trend in the integration of historical structures with contemporary needs. The original building is an eclectic “brick Gothic” edifice designed with a clear Art Nouveau methodology and displaying various Art Nouveau ornamental motifs.³⁶ In the new courtyard addition, “the new meets the old”³⁷ as the new structure is inserted into the shell of the old brick wall of the former service building, displaying the powerful new geometry towards the inner courtyard for all the young artists to enjoy instead of invading the surrounding historical park.

Just next to this, the Latvian National Art Museum at Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 10a (1903–1905, Wilhelm Johann Carl Neumann), the home of all the history of Latvian fine arts adorned with a number of Art Nouveau elements in its interior,³⁸ is to undergo a huge renovation and construction of additional underground premises as a result of international architectural competition.³⁹ Here, with all the heavy restrictions for interventions and new spaces, the historical roof structure will undergo both functional and physical changes because the never-repaired original timber is in very poor condition. Meanwhile, as of April 30th, 2013, large-size reproductions of fine art masterpieces of Art Nouveau and later artistic trends are on display on the fence around the building and will remain there for the public to enjoy until the construction and renovation activities that began on the same day will be completed.⁴⁰

With Latvia’s accession to the European Union in 2004, international recognition of the architectural heritage of Riga has considerably increased the tourist interest about the city, its atmosphere, urban landscape, and distinctive architectural character. As in the Art Nouveau period a hundred years ago, the face and spirit of Riga

³⁶ J. KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas jūgendstila...*, p. 177.

³⁷ Ilze MARTINSONE: “Skats uz pandusu. If you continue looking at the ramp for three days”, *Latvijas arhitektūra*, 104, 2013, p. 18–23.

³⁸ J. KRASIŅŠ *Rīgas jūgendstila...*, p. 176.

³⁹ Anita ANTENIŠĶE: “Museum extension, Riga”, *A10. New European Architecture*, 37, 2011, p. 14–15.

⁴⁰ <http://www.lnmm.lv/en/lnmm/info/explore/exhibition/2013/makslas-muzeja-buvzhogs-partapis-kosha-pilsetvides-izstade/>, accessed 30.04.2013.

has changed during the first years of the 21st century. It might not be as noticeable in the new architecture along everyday routes as it was during the vibrant construction period of Art Nouveau, but the renovation of the historical heritage combined with creative activities and the presence of young people in green squares or on bikes, moving swiftly around the predominantly motorised metropolis, has become a very characteristic feature. “Radošie kvartāli” or Creative Areas bordering on or even encompassing some of the Art Nouveau sites and buildings have become important landmarks for cultural activities in the city, combining performing arts, fine arts, and arts and crafts.⁴¹ They are envisaged to become an integral part of the events in Riga when it will become the European Capital of Culture, and young architects vigorously take part in all events that have to do with enhancing the quality of urban life, public participation, and belonging.

Besides the very thorough architectural guides on Art Nouveau and the city’s architecture mentioned above, there are some photography albums, tourist guidebooks in several languages that cover Art Nouveau architecture by districts,⁴² leaflets issued by the City Architect’s Office and the Art Nouveau Museum of Riga, as well as books focused on specific subjects, such as the recently-published brief but well-designed biography on civil engineer Mikhail Eisenstein.⁴³ A book devoted to the work of German architects in Latvia⁴⁴ has been published this year, trying to bridge another gap in the very broad cultural landscape of the country. Notwithstanding the vast amount of the architectural heritage of Art Nouveau in the city as well as all the publications, some misconceptions on amount and value of Art Nouveau in Riga have remained that can surprise researchers and heritage professionals in most unexpected situations.

It is the Art Nouveau Museum of Riga, just four years old⁴⁵ and located in the same building as the Museum of Janis Rozentāls, at Alberta iela 12 (1903, arch. Konstantīns Pēkšēns, Eižens Laube), that is becoming an increasingly important actor in promotion and dissemination of knowledge and appreciation of the style. The fully

⁴¹ <http://radosiekvartali.wordpress.com/>

⁴² Silvija GROSA *Art Nouveau in Riga*, Rīga, Jumava, 2003, 96 p.

⁴³ Solveiga RUSH *Mikhail Eisenstein. Themes and Symbols in Art Nouveau Architecture of Riga 1901–1906*, Rīga, Neputns, 2003, 103 p.

⁴⁴ *Vācu arhitekti Latvijā. Deutsche Architekten in Lettland*, Rīga, 2013, 252 p.

⁴⁵ <http://www.jugendstils.riga.lv/lv>, accessed 30.04.2013.

renovated, furnished and richly adorned interior of the former apartment of architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns, the original owner of the entire building, gives a very warm and human insight into the life and aesthetics of the Art Nouveau period. Interior furnishings on display allow people to recognise similar artefacts in their own possession, increasing the feedback: people both learn from and teach the museum the details of the past life. Temporary exhibitions in cooperation with enthusiasts and researchers diversify the visitors' experience; for example, a small Art Nouveau fashion exposition combined with a much larger thorough exhibition at the premises of the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in 2012 attracted huge public interest. With additional premises in the basement of the building still under renovation, there is much to be expected in the future.

Art Nouveau is a huge asset, both physically and emotionally, but there are several threats and weaknesses that might jeopardise the good intentions of professional and amateur enthusiasts of the style. Economic issues and the changing aesthetical taste of the public might compromise the preservation of the remaining interior elements of the style. However, there are opportunities to enhance local and international promotion of the spirit and diversity of the style and to look for new legal and economic instruments to ensure maintenance, preservation, and renovation of the heritage buildings and interiors. Carefully executed regeneration projects such as the "Ziemeļblāzma" Cultural Centre give a completely new sense of perspective to the general public regarding the cultural value of Art Nouveau. In the context of a dynamic contemporary life, the urban landscape of hundred-years-past is neither more nor less than the representation of the highly creative and daring spirit of the inhabitants of Riga suggesting that the present generation has a wonderful basis for a new, hopefully even more amazing take-off for the future.