

Skirting the Center:
SVETLANA KANA RADEVIĆ
on the Periphery of Postwar Architecture



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Collateral Event of the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

April 13, 2021

*The extensive built work of a celebrated Yugoslav architect to be brought to light at the Biennale Architettura 2021 from **May 22 until November 21 at the Palazzo Palumbo Fossati.***

Svetlana Kana Radević (1937-2000) among the most prominent architects in socialist Yugoslavia, designed anti-fascist memorials, hotels, and residential projects—celebrated for their deft synthesis of local materials and international tendencies, as well as a generosity of proportions and informal spaces for leisure and exchange. The exhibition will show original drawings, photographs, and correspondences from her personal archive, a trove of newly-discovered materials that make it possible to contextualize and historicize an exceptional, but overlooked figure of postwar architecture.

Her private archive shows that in the geopolitical circumstances of her professional life, Svetlana Kana Radević was an architectural figure across societal registers: regionally, negotiating between vernacular building tradition and the globalizing tendencies of late modernism; nationally, designing celebrated civic spaces and social condensers that facilitated a progressive public sphere between the socialist state and its citizenry; and internationally, articulating a decentered, post-colonial axis by which the Montenegrin architect simultaneously and seamlessly worked between Philadelphia, Tokyo, and Podgorica.

She studied and worked under both Louis Kahn and Kisho Kurokawa but already as an established architect with her major works such as Hotel Podgorica, already built while working on her Master degree in Kahn’s studio.

The exhibition, curated by **Dijana Vucinic** and **Anna Kats**, aims to significantly expand her representation within the architectural canon by exhibiting the highlights of her built work for the first time: the Hotel Podgorica (1964-1967) and the Hotel Zlatibor (1979-1981), with expansive public spaces that welcomed both locals and visitors to commingle in environments that made socialist broadly luxury accessible; the Petrovac Apartment Building (1967), with its sculptural façade and expansive apartment layouts; as well as the Monument to Fallen Fighters at Barutana (1980), a sculptural memorial landscape that commemorates local anti-fascist fighters.

“Radević subverted hierarchies that privilege cosmopolitan centers over provincial peripheries by locating her personal practice in Montenegro. Yet her architecture was ultimately supranational, simultaneously digesting vernacular building traditions as well as her global study and work experience. By positing how to re-center a historical figure and geopolitical context that have long been at the peripheral fringes of architecture’s normative history, this exhibition recovers her distinctive role as a negotiator of the spatial contract—between state and citizenry, between center and periphery—as a case study in facilitating social consensus and cultural exchange for contemporary practitioners,” the curators noted.

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Radević remains the only woman and, at 29, the youngest architect to ever win the prestigious Borba Architecture Prize, socialist Yugoslavia's highest architectural honor which she received in 1969.

The exhibition is supported by the President of Montenegro, its Capital City and numerous private companies from Kana's hometown of Podgorica.

About the curators:

Dijana Vučinić is a practicing architect, founder of an interdisciplinary practice [DVARP](#) and research and educational platform [APSS](#) Institute. In her work she tends to introduce structures and spaces that reveal the process of critical thinking and sustainable solutions. Her work is based on research on post-transitional city and interactive contemporary city ambience. She was a commissioner for [Project Solana](#) - Montenegro pavilion at Biennale Architettura 2016 and co-curator of the exhibition [Treasures in disguise](#) - Montenegro Pavilion at Biennale Architettura 2014.

Anna Kats is an architectural historian, curator, and critic whose work historicizes the political economy of architectural production and technical transfer across the socialist sphere of influence in the 20th century. As a member of the curatorial team in the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Kats was an organizer of the 2018 exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia: 1948-1980*.

About the organizing institution: APSS Institute is a non-profit organization founded in Montenegro that serves as a platform for architecture and design thinking and development focusing on several conditions, including the shift in post-war cities of Yugoslavia and urban conditions under transition in coastal cities in Montenegro. It seeks to redefine the approach on urban planning and design in the region and improve architectural education in Montenegro. With its summer program it has established a small Montenegrin town of Kotor as an international hot spot for architectural thinking and advanced the debate on decaying places of the recent past and their possible futures. Over the years it had carried out many programs including workshops, symposiums and debates.

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