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The First Healthcare Building in Latvia in the Style of Functionalism

Aleksandrs Klinklāvs (1899—1982) was the most successful architect of the interwar Latvia. He graduated the 2nd non-classical secondary school of Saint-Petersburg. He was very impressed by the ballet of the Mariinsky theatre in Saint-Petersburg, and took dance classes at a private ballet school in addition to studies in his secondary school.

After Latvia gained independence, Alexandrs Klinklāvs returned to Riga in 1920, where he served two Gods at once. He became a ballet dancer at the Latvian National Opera and a student of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Latvia. Learning from the leading European architects, he embraced functionalism deep in his soul and became one of the main proponents of this style in Latvia's interwar architecture.

Having graduated from the university in 1930, he became supervisor of the engineering department of the Latvian Red Cross. Before the war, he supervised the construction of a great number of healthcare facilities in Latvia. Klinklāvs became the author of over 40 projects, including many buildings designed for healthcare purposes, which earned him a reputation of “an architect of healthcare facilities”.

The Hoffmann-La Roche (Roche) office building in Riga, Miera street 25 belongs to the early period of Klinklāvs's creative work. Roche selected the architect based on the style he was preaching, his rigorous commitment to functionalism and rationalism of Bauhaus architecture. This coincided with the new trends in Roche's architectural identity. Stylistically, the Riga building will closely echo Salvisberg's design of the Roche headquarter office building in Basel (Switzerland).

The building design was approved on May 2, 1931. Klinklāvs was commissioned to design the office, laboratory and warehouse to be located in the same building. The building construction commenced on 29 May 1931 and completed on 1 August 1932. Total cost for construction was 300,000 lats.

The exterior of the building was decorated with 335 sq. m of ceramic tiles manufactured by the German-based Siegersdorf company. The Roche building was the first functionalist style healthcare building in Latvia. It established the most advanced technologies of the time.

In September 1940, the building was nationalized by the Soviet authorities and until 1991 it was the Sanitary & Epidemiological Station of the Soviet Military in Baltic's. After restoration of independence of Latvia in 1991, the building was used by Latvian State institution — Road Traffic Safety Directorate. Roche was able to return it property in 2015. Reconstruction process, including lifting parts of the building for 57 cm was done during 2018—2020. Inauguration of the restored Roche building in Riga will take place in August 26, 2020 and will part of the ISHM 47-th Congress in Riga.

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