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Construction of new premises of Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

The new headquarters of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MSN Warsaw) is being built at the foot of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. The new building has already reached its target height. Work is underway to reach the shell of the building, installing skylights on the roof and windows, pouring floors and finishing the interiors. The new headquarters, which will total 19788 square metres, is scheduled to open in 2024. Glazed and open to all, the ground floor, as well as extensive arcades and tall trees next to the building, will play a grand role in creating a new space in the heart of the city. The opening of the new MSN headquarters is one of the most anticipated events of 2024 in Poland.

The new premises is part of a two-building complex: the museum and TR Theatre. Both institutions will be a part of the emerging new development of the area around the Palace of Culture and Science. The museum and theatre projects will complete the space of Warsaw's future Central Square (now called plac Defilad), the heart of the modern metropolis. Their creation will open new opportunities for the residents of Warsaw, as well as visitors and guests to the capital, to participate in culture.

The New York-based studio Thomas Phifer and Partners is responsible for MSN's and TR theatre's silhouettes. The construction works of the museum, with architects from the APA Wojciechowski studio as Polish partners and Warbud S.A. as the general contractor onboard, began in 2019. Their progress can be viewed from the very beginning on Instagram's profile @muzeumwbudowie. Today, the building's structure is ready, as are the white façade, the cinema tower and the spacious circulation routes including the monumental central staircase. The construction of TR Warszawa is scheduled to commence in the nearest future.

The museum covers an area of almost 20,000 m² (with over 4,500 m² of exhibition space). It has four floors above ground and two located underground. The building will also feature educational rooms, a conservation workshop, art warehouses and a cinema with a screening room for 150 people. An open auditorium, a reading room, a modern bistro and a bookshop will complete the picture of the future Museum.

The new building will also house a recording studio, a reconstruction of the historic Polish Radio Experimental Studio (SEPR) designed in the 60s by a prominent and worldwide recognized architect Oskar Hansen. In the future SEPR will be available to artists working on musical projects. For the past year, the Museum has been home to the Polish Radio Experimental Studio Supporters Circle, which has prepared a rich programme of events for the whole of next year. Workshops and sound walks, lectures and even concerts are planned. The Polish Radio is a strategic partner of MSN in this project.

The main galleries are planned on first and second floor, concentrated around a monumental geometric staircase. Those located on the top floor will be illuminated by diffused sunlight from skylights in the roof. Both exhibition levels will also feature so-called City Rooms, i.e. rooms with panoramic windows overlooking Marszałkowska Street and the southern part of plac Defilad. They will enable visitors to experience the centre of Warsaw from a completely new perspective.

Architectural and engineering challenges

The construction of MSN Warsaw is a story of challenges. The architects and engineers were tasked with designing a building right above the tunnels and underground station. Almost 60 % of the building is set directly above the underground rail infrastructure. Collisions with the city's strategic technical network, an area subject to a restrictive local plan illustrate the degree of difficulty in both design and execution. The body of the building is supported on 128 concrete foundation piles that extend more than 30 metres into the ground, wrapping the underground structure. Due to the station's potential deformation, this stage of construction was carried out in close cooperation with representatives of the Warsaw Metro and scientists from the Warsaw University of Technology.

Modernist minimalism

Thomas Phifer's design evokes the philosophy of modernist architecture, based on simplicity of materials, ergonomics and a mission to build a framework for social life. The new MSN building refers to the neighbouring legendary department stores: Wars, Sawa and Junior. It does not compete with them, but creates a relationship based on respect and complementarity. Situated at the foot of the Palace of Culture and Science it also dialogues with the social realist and art deco 42-floor building, a gift from the Soviet Union to Poland.

You can't be weak next to the Palace of Culture with all its history. You have to create a facility that can stand up to it – says Thomas Phifer. - I judge every detail of the museum myself. It has to be built beautifully. Imperfections don't bother me. This is not casting plastic, but a material that is in a sense living, changeable, which is concrete. The concrete will not be shiny, it will be matt. It will not give a reflection. It will be a beautiful, solid, strong building.

The monumental surface of the white façade cut by strips of windows that illuminate the gallery spaces will give the building a sculptural character. Thanks to the glazed ground floor, the whole will gain additional lightness, and the façade of the upper floors, made of white architectural concrete, will optically hover above the ground. The ground floor will be

withdrawn in comparison to the upper floors, giving the Museum a comfortable arcade, opening up to the public and inviting the passers-by inside. In the new Museum, the life of the city, the street and plac Defilad will intermingle with art. The emerging building, according to the architect's idea, is also to be a screen (for new artistic interventions, projections or illuminations).

Handmade

The choice of materials - predominantly white architectural concrete - was guided primarily by their durability. The construction process proved to be very complicated, as all the devices present in the concrete had to be selected before they were built in, and their location had to be precisely defined. Obtaining such a light-coloured concrete face involved months of testing to determine the proportions of the aggregate mixture. The concrete elements are cast by hand. Workers construct the moulds, pour and de-vibrate the concrete so that it is perfectly distributed in the moulds. The colour, quality and strength of the individual elements are checked. This process requires pinpoint accuracy. Every movement is carefully planned. The construction of Warsaw's new space for contemporary art has proved to be an art itself.

Construction work is scheduled for completion in the second half of 2023. Intensive preparations are also underway for the opening exhibition, which will showcase the Museum's collection that has been under development for more than 15 years. The audience will be able to enter the museum in the second half of 2024.

The construction of the Museum of Modern Art is financed by the City of Warsaw.

Warbud S.A. is the general contractor for the Museum of Modern Art building in Warsaw. The architectural studio Thomas Phifer and Partners from New York and the studio APA Wojciechowski Sp. z o.o. are responsible for the design of the building. The designer of the structure and installations for the building is BuroHappold Engineering. The consortium of Ecm Group Polska Sp. z o.o. and Portico Project Management Sp. z o.o. is acting as contract engineer. Investment legal care for the MSN is provided by the law firm KKLW Kurzyński Łyszyk Wierzbicki Sp. K.

Patrons of the Museum and the Museum's Collection:



allegro

Legal advisor:

