

Victoria Tveritneva

History of Russian Art, Lomonosov Moscow state University

André Lurçat and the Soviet architecture

The soviet constructivists, creators of new architecture in USSR, saw Le Corbusier as one of their teachers. However, it seems that the ideas of the maître, fascinating by the grandeur and radical innovativeness, often were difficult in realization. Nevertheless, in the “Modern Architecture” magazine («Современная архитектура») since 1920’s already some projects of André Lurçat were published. He was a functionalist architect who worked in the shadow of Le Corbusier, but managed to match his ideas with real life. To do this he used a certain compromise between the shelter of the spirit and the human needs, the need in comfort as it is. So we can consider that looking at Lurçat’s ideas the soviet architects took and assumed the forms and findings of French functionalism.

While working in the USSR his style was touched by the change of the artistic views produced in soviet architecture. The culture in the Soviet Union at this period was in the transitional phase, the stylistic change from avant-garde (constructivism generally) to so called Stalinist style or Art-deco on the soviet ground was produced. So Lurçat’s architecture got a decorative character, the pure modernist planes got sculptural accents, the free developed asymmetrical floor-plans were changed by symmetrical hierarchical organized compositions. Obviously, Lurçat heard the official rhetoric of state structures, that accompanied the stylistic change of 1930’s in the Soviet Union.

In this transitional time the artists looked for the new examples so to form a new system of artistic expression in architecture. So our observations about the projects and realized buildings of André Lurçat in Moscow can be starting point for comparing and discovering the nuances of forming the style of 1930’s.

Focusing on André Lurçat who worked in the Soviet Union in 1934-1937 and drew up several projects there, we want to open a new perspective on the change of stylistic views in the soviet architecture in 1920-1930’s, clarify the mode of interpretation of the tradition while forming the style of socialistic architecture. This will allow us to nuance a kind of monolith which is of use to name “Stalinist” architecture. On the other hand, we count on creating a new perspective on French functionalism and its inner contradictions as well as discovering

political implications of working in the Soviet Union of 1930's and its outcome for a French architect whose beliefs seemed to be tragically broken.

Towards this end we carry out a review of the main directions of the French architecture of 1920's, a period of the architect's artistic method formation. In the 1920's Lurçat emerges as a convinced modernist who successfully competes with Le Corbusier although sometimes adopting the formal finds of the latter. We present an analysis of Lurçat's most important works of 1920's beginning of 1930's to demonstrate all of the above. We precede the description and the interpretation of the architect's "soviet" period by a research on the meeting points of Russian and French architectural practice of 1920-1930's.

The analysis of Lurçat's soviet projects are attached to the critical reviews and other publications in the soviet architectural press as well as the memoirs of the contemporaries and the historical information, which allows to highlight the character of the time and to define the context of Lurçat's artistic quest in the second part of 1930's.

French architect lived and worked in USSR, communicated with Russian architects, his projects were published in the soviet magazines, he had a big personal exhibition in Moscow. All of it left a trace in the history of soviet architecture and influenced a lot the architect himself. A convinced communist, who had to run in a hurry from the country of the Soviet. Then working in France, he continued meditating the change that he lived in 1930's.