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THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF FREDERICK KIESLER

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the problem of a national identity in architecture as well as in design of a world renowned architect – Frederick Kiesler. The author analyses the different building and theoretical ideas and their being influenced by the traditional elements of Bukovyna culture as just Bukovyna is the place, where Kiesler was born and spent his childhood.

Key words: Frederick Kiesler, national architecture, design, Bukovyna culture.

1. Introduction

According to a very popular thesis architecture is national because it is closely connected with a certain territory, ethnicity, a national culture and customs. Design is more universal. It is not connected with a certain territory that is why, it is not national. The aim of design is to improve the functional and aesthetic properties of a certain things or surroundings. Therefore, it can be easily explained that design is oriented towards the newest materials and technologies, modern trends and customers of all the levels. It remains loyal to eclecticism and indifferent to something national. It allows combining the elements of different origin. For example, one can see the Italian furniture, the Japanese electronics and some national Ukrainian elements in one room at the same time. Moreover, all these things exist harmoniously in one space.

However, staring at architectural and design practice let us have doubts of the thesis about a national nature of architecture and an international character of design. It isn't always possible to determine architecture according to a national criterion. Conversely, it becomes universal due to globalization, more active than whenever communication between specialists from different countries (Internet plays a great role), migration of building methods, ways of using some materials, technologies and etc. At the same time design of things and space can be extremely various depending on geography and some national or local features. It concerns not only interiors or exteriors but a monumental design as well. Its objects first and foremost include and present the cultural peculiarities and traditions of architecture and design schools and, at that, in ethical way. It is obviously we should recognize a national character of design.

2. Basic Theory Part

Can we really delimit exactly the national and international in architecture and design?

In the era of an international style in architecture that was formed as a result of a scientific and technological revolution and needs of industrial period the same buildings have been built in different

parts of the world. However, at the end of the XX century or it will be better to say at the turn of XX and XXI centuries there was a period of crisis when designers, architects and representatives of different cultural spheres began to appeal to individual sources of inspiration in art, especially to a national culture as one of the most powerful stimuli. First of all, this reorientation was shown in a design of things and also in different types of buildings that are universal, because they are equally needful all over the planet. In such a way the transport objects such as railway stations and airports have got the local features in different cities all over the world. In days of old the sacral architecture got a similar way of development from universality to individualization. For instance, a public building of ancient Rome was a prototype of a basilica, typical for Christian temples. Earlier, the military structures have also got a similar way of development (from a typical military city in ancient Rome to excellent urban creations). This architecture (transport, sacral and military objects) can be seen on different continents and in various countries. It is especially interesting due to the combination of the global and national features. Global is caused by functionality of these objects regardless of their place of location. National is caused by taking root into a local ground: in cultural and professional traditions, in symbolism and imagery.

Speaking about the national and international in architecture and design it is important to mention a human factor, namely, a user, which can uniquely combine and individualize the universal mass objects of design and first of all about the author. In our opinion, the author and his vision are the main factors. It is not a social and historical, cultural, national or local context; professional traditions or schools; an influence of a certain style or a concept; achievement of scientific and technical progress; a functional purpose of architectural and design objects that form their shape. Due to previously mentioned reasons an architect, a designer or a planner creates and makes a final decision forming either a content and an idea of his own project or presence and way of manifestation of the national/cosmopolitan, local/global in it.

That is why, when we talk about the importance of author's figure, we can use as an example a personality of a famous architect, a designer and an artist Frederick John Kiesler.

It should be noticed that Frederick Kiesler's life story is curiously unusual. He was Jew that was born and grew up in Ukrainian town Chernivtsi (Austria – Hungarian Empire at that time). He studied in Vienna and realized his creative potential in the USA, working as an architect, a teacher, a sculptor and a designer of theatre and art – exhibition surroundings. That's why he is supposed to be an Austrian and American architect.

F. Kiesler is considered to be the artist aspiring to push the established boundaries. He has developed a lot of theoretical and practical ideas that changed understanding of an architecture radically. He challenged to a mechanized architecture in the epoch of the Early Modernism. F Kiesler wrote: "We became slaves of an industry in a lost mechanical world, a building is not a machine for living and a machine is not a creation of an art, a building is live organism, it is not a combination of dead materials, it is like a skin of body" [2]. In this paradigm we don't see a passion for technical progress. It only includes refusal connected with an idea of "architecture of a box": mechanized, technological and industrial architecture that tries to control a place and a way of a man's life. This architecture is stationary and unchangeable. That's why it is not able to satisfy different generations of people with their absolutely new and different needs. Contrary to it an idea of bionic and human architecture that was interpreted as continuation of a man and a cover of his life has become a central one. It means that architecture has to be mobile and satisfy today's needs of people according to the dynamics of their lives. F. Kiesler has just created theoretically the idea of functionally flexible architecture that allowed the development – the endlessness of the surrounding, theatre and building as well. At the same time he tried to realize his own surreal visions (architectural projects "An endless theatre", "An infinite building" etc). In 1960th he created a model of an infinite building for New York. It was a bionic structure raised on piers that could develop itself like a coral reef: each next part of this structure grew up using a previous part and showed a purpose of these or those surroundings. The architect affirms that a man, a dwelling and nature are the parts of the holistic system where they should interact and shouldn't

be in opposition to each other or pre-dominate each other [3]. He realized this vision in the experiments, such as a pavilion for shows in one of the international exhibitions, a theatre for the festival "Woodstock" or a space house in New York. F. Kiesler worked not only with three-dimensional architecture but also in the sphere of a design of surroundings (interior, exterior), in particular, in their filling with different objects. All these things he combined in so-called "a nuclear conception". According to this conception there is only one principle of the Universe building. All the smallest structures of the Universe as well as the biggest ones are created according to the only one principle. Among them there are the space global systems, cells of a human organism, molecules and atoms. They don't include right angles, they aren't long. They are in the shape of a circle or an ellipsis. F. Kiesler confirms that architecture continues the nuclear conception: a circle, a sphere, spherical, elliptical or egg-shaped forms are of more potential. They are more universal than usual dated back to the ancient times approaches or the modern ones based on technology and industrialization, bar-beam or wall constructions.

3. Result and Discussion

F. Kiesler can be called a cosmopolitan artist and architect because he worked in different cities (Vienna, Paris, New York, Jerusalem, etc.) and the universal problems that he treated theoretically had a great influence on an architectural process in the world. Observing some of his works we can suppose that a place of his birth and childhood – Bukovyna – influenced his imagination and became apparent in architecture, too. For example, reading his "nuclear conception" we can find a confirmation of this thesis: in technological design a priority of a round and elliptical form appeals to an egg-shape. An egg is a universal symbol. It symbolizes a beginning of the world and initiation of life in mythology of different nationalities. There is a term of a world or a space egg. A lot of people confirm that the Universe was created from this egg. The own attributes connected with honoring an egg as a symbol of life, birth and the sun existed in the ancient culture of Egypt, Rome, China and other countries. The Slavs had own traditions, too. In the olden days an egg was a symbol of the sun cult, initiation of life and the God of the sun. It is also a symbol of Immaculate Birth, Life and Resurrection in the Christian religion. A pysanka (a painted egg) has become a symbol of joy and belief in Jesus Christ Resurrection. It is known that in Ukraine symbolism of a pysanka is developed according to a region (a sign of endlessness, a solar and a plant ornament, etc.). Certainly, Bukovyna has its favourite signs and images (Fig. 1). Similarity between F. Kiesler's "nuclear conception" and symbolism of an egg in Ukrainian culture was a great motive for using a pysanka from Bukovyna as a visual symbol of a conceptual projects exhibition held in honor of the 115th anniversary of F. Kiesler's birth. The exhibition took place in 2005. The works represented at the exhibition were fulfilled by students and lecturers of the Lviv Polytechnic National University. Professor V. Proskuryakov was the first one who delivered a speech and told about influence of pysanka from Bukovyna on architectural ideas of F. Kiesler in his lecture "Phenomenon of F. Kiesler" in October, 2001 at the international conference "Architectural legacy of Chernivtsi dated back to the Austrian period" [5].

The Temple-museum of a Book in Jerusalem is known to have become a masterpiece of F. Kiesler's architectural skills. A lot of rare manuscripts are kept in this museum, among which the unique Kumran masterpieces are of particular value. They were found by archeologists in the middle of the XX century in the caves of Kumran near the Dead Sea. The dome of the central hall is a main element of the building. A shape of this dome is extraordinary. There are different interpretations of this Kiesler's architectural decision. The most popular one is that the dome is similar to the cover of the ceramic jar in which the valuable manuscripts were found. It is obviously that this dome appeals to traditions of sacral architecture, to the Jewish one first of all (a synagogue) and, at the same time, it reminds a traditional Christian sacral architecture of Ukraine (Fig. 2). We mean that the dome in a shape of an onion on Kiesler's building is similar to a traditional Ukrainian church. We can draw a parallel

with the Cossack Baroque (Kyiv-Pechersk lavra) and the Ukrainian Modern (the church named after Saint Nicholas in the village of Vyzhnytsia, Chernivtsi region). Therefore, Bukovyna as one of the centers of Ukrainian culture is supposed to have had a partial influence on the formation of a creative person of the world – a well-known architect F. Kiesler.

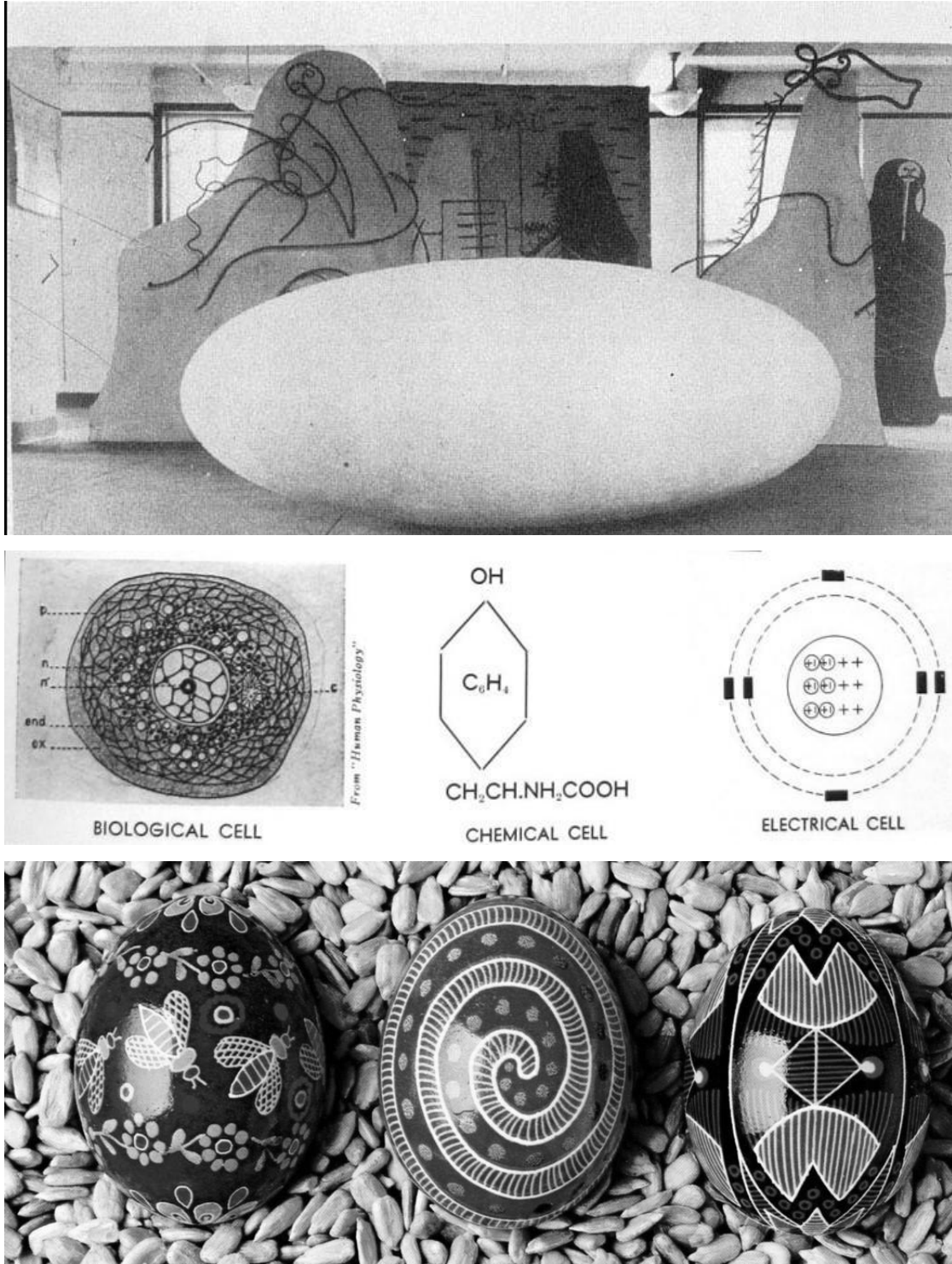


Fig. 1. An egg as a universal symbol of F.Kiesler's projects and of his "nuclear conception" [4] and traditional Easter colored eggs (pysanka) from Bukovyna as a visual symbol, which have an influence on his design

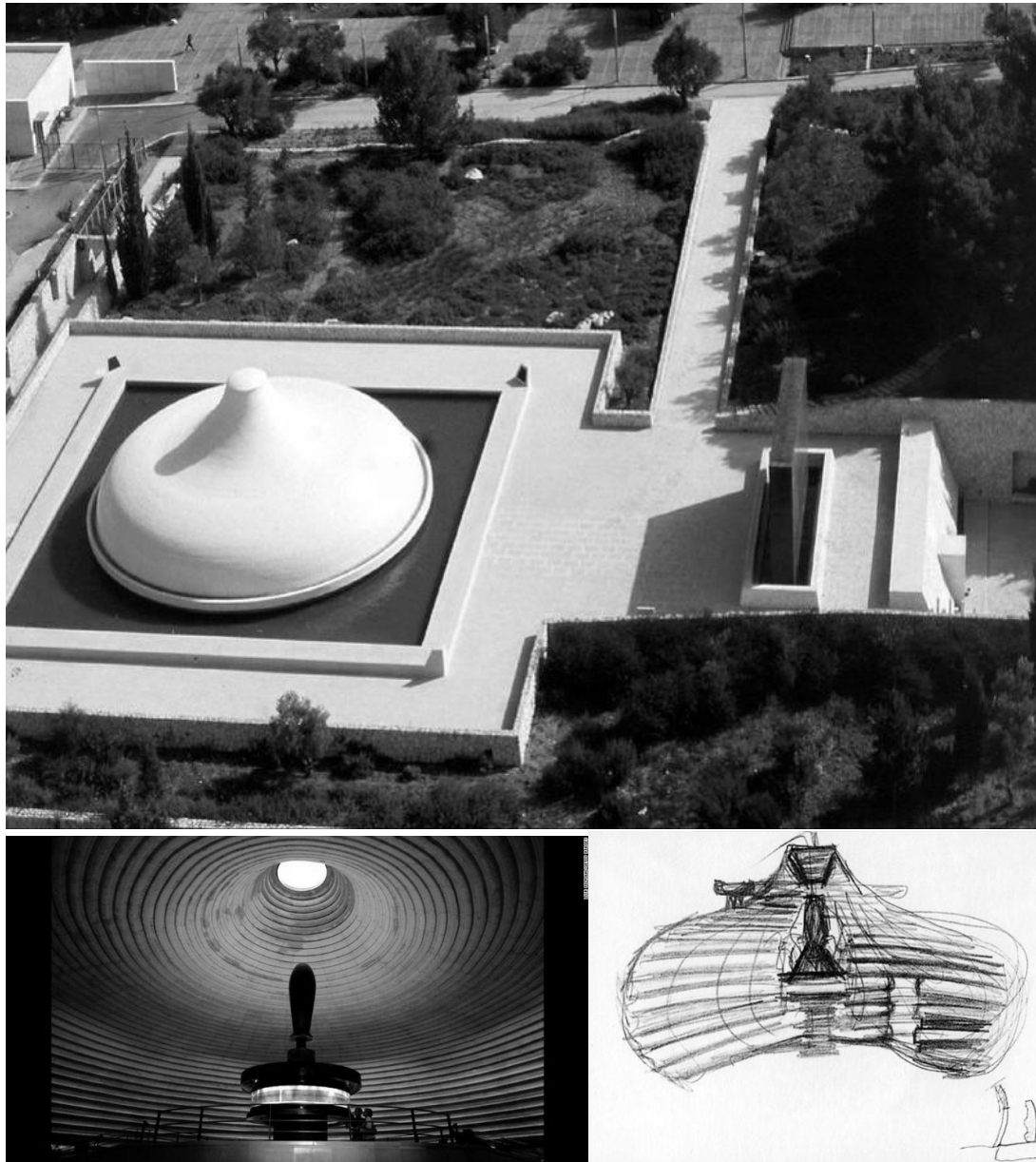


Fig. 2. Dome of the Temple-museum of a Book in Jerusalem – exterior and interior view and the sketch by Frederick Kiesler [1]

4. Conclusion

Summing up all these things we can make several important conclusions. As we know from the practice it is hard to separate clearly national and international either in architecture or in design. In this case each separate work of art is an unrepeatable combination of the global and local at the same time in their unique relation that is determined by an author (an architect). In any case his creative priority and tastes are of great importance. Some architects show a preference for reinterpreted national and religious traditions and the other ones prefer cosmopolitanism and separate themselves more or less from their “roots”. Can we break with ethnic, national and cultural relations at all? Each of us has a possibility to absorb images, symbols and legends of places where we were born, grew up, were formed and lived. These images will be kept in the author’s memory for years even if he cannot identify them clearly. Thus, it’s just a purpose of the next generation to look for parallels and find new interpretations as well as to continue studying F. Kiesler’s creative work.

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**НАЦІОНАЛЬНЕ І ЗАГАЛЬНОЛЮДСЬКЕ
В АРХІТЕКТУРНІЙ ТВОРЧОСТІ ФРЕДЕРІКА КІЗЛЕРА**

***Анотація.** Статтю присвячено питанню національного самовизнання у архітектурі та дизайні одного з найвідоміших архітекторів світу – Ф. Кізлера. Автор робить аналіз різних побудованих будівель і його теоретичних ідей і визначає вплив на них традиційних елементів Буковини. І обґрунтовує це тим, що саме Буковина є місцем, де Кізлер народився і провів своє дитинство.*

***Ключові слова:** Ф. Кізлер, національна архітектура, дизайн, культура Буковини.*