

## **SEFO – FAQ**

It is very legitimate that the project SEFO draws a lot of public attention and that even abroad. The new building is to fill the gap in Denisova Street which is situated in the middle of the historic city centre of Olomouc. It is evident that the modern architecture in such a delicate location evokes



*Visualization of the SEFO building*

emotions – both positive and negative. More or less insightful discussions are often reduced only to comments and opinions on the façade of the building directed to the Denisova Street and minimize any argumentation to “like-dislike” only. Moreover, they often contain a lot of misrepresented or even false information about the architectural design and about the complete project, too. Herewith we offer the answers on the most frequent questions.

### **SEFO in Olomouc? Why?**

Olomouc is situated in the middle of the Central European region. In the past, it has been an important cultural and spiritual centre firmly connected with the history of the Habsburg monarchy. The rich history and valuable art collections of old art need to be confronted with the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to achieve the much-needed balance between the past and the present.

Through SEFO, the Olomouc Museum of Art also continued its long-term international activities, cooperation with a number of partner institutions and also its long-term efforts to perceive culture in the widest possible interdisciplinary scope.

### **Central Europe? What does it mean?**

The Central European question was for a long time associated with the relationship of the Habsburg monarchy to the rest of the world, later with the relationship of the Slavs and Germans, respectively their state-building efforts. After 1918, it became an example of general republicanism, after 1938 the dialectic of totalitarian practices and

ideologies, and after 1989 a model example of building a world "without history".

Moreover, Central Europe itself is so diverse that it requires a number of labels and approaches. At the same time, the need to speak about it in the sense of the "past" seems to be characteristic - the loss of national and linguistic diversity, the ethos of the monarchy, Jewish culture, etc. However, with each dramatic moment in history, the attention returns to Central Europe again. Last time this happened after 1989, respectively with when the V4 countries joined the European Union.

From a methodological point of view, it seems that the global context and local contexts - Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Polish... - are closely related, but still differ from each other - and are connected mainly by the effort to integrate into a larger context. The same is, after all, the main theme of modern art history. However, with the development of postcolonial approaches, the position of local or regional scenes is also changing: suddenly their own establishment becomes possible.

The question of whether Central Europe exists and whether one can speak of a Central European cultural and artistic tradition is irrelevant - Central Europe is a certain geographical area that shares specific historical experience and



*SEFO interior visualization*

cultural attributes. They are also constantly

changing in response to the big world. However, they still represent the first context in which one lives here and to which one relates. It is all the more valuable that the plurality of approaches in a globalized world is growing exponentially and simple guidelines are no longer valid.

### **Why forum?**

A museum is traditionally perceived as a memory institution that presents various fields of human activity in a preserved form, as it would be closed chapters of history. We want to break free from this conservative perception of museum institutions. That is why our project is a forum - a free, public place, a marketplace of ideas, and we believe that it is also a centre of social life.

The museum of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is supposed to have the character of a forum somehow naturally - it is a space that is entered from different ideological positions, with different experiences, priorities and knowledge, in order to share and discuss. All this happens without claiming the one and only truth, but with the aim of approaching it at least. The forum seeks to refine opinions and create interpretations motivated by a common interest in understanding; it means the responsibility of the individual to the whole and vice versa. SEFO has ambitions to a 21<sup>st</sup> century museum of this kind.

### **Does the museum need a new building?**

The Olomouc Museum of Art is the third most important memory institution in the Czech Republic. It owns approximately 100,000 collection items with an estimated total value of two billion Czech crowns. However, it now has no more free capacity necessary to store new acquisitions. In addition, the library, study room or archives are now in substandard condition, which forces us to provide limited services to the public only. Moreover, additional exhibition spaces for permanent exhibitions, air conditioning and standard facilities for the public (dimensioned entrance areas, including a museum shop, sanitary facilities and barrier-free entrance) are necessary so we can truly realize the idea of presenting Central European art.

### **What about the architectural competition?**

In the years 2008-2009, the Olomouc Museum of Art sought to announce an open architectural competition for the new building of the Central European Forum Olomouc (SEFO). The



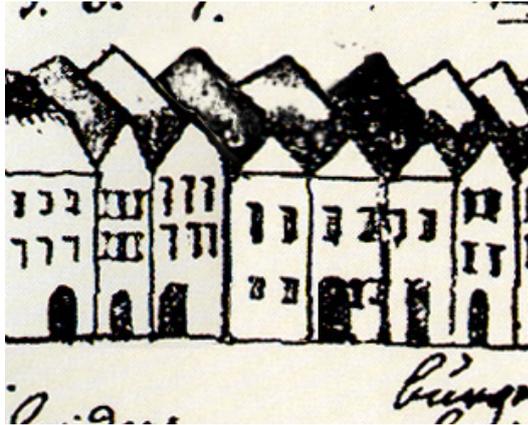
*The gap in which will stand SEFO*

complications, which could not be overcome, led finally to a

reasonable decision to award the construction project "by hand". The architects Jan Šépka and Michal Sborwitz started to work on the design. Both have already completed a number of award-winning works, including those they have prepared in cooperation with the Olomouc Museum of Art. The international professional audience is well acquainted with the restoration of the Upper Square in Olomouc or with

the local Archdiocesan Museum, where Jan Šépka, the author of the design of the new SEFO building, was the designer, too. The Olomouc Museum of Art has invested considerable financial means in the preparations, and therefore, together with the Ministry of Culture, it has now finally given up on thinking about announcing a new architectural competition.

**Why does one building consist of five different parts and why is it no longer pushed into the gap?**



*Medieval parcelling of the original buildings*

The condition of the conservationists was that the new building in the gap would respect the original parcelling of the medieval buildings. Therefore, given that there used to be five houses here, the SEFO design also consists of five segments. Their concept forms a distinctive block, which together with the Museum of Modern Art represents one functional unit. This is also related to the height of the ledge or compliance with the so-called street line - the line

that defines the distance of the outer border of buildings from public space. And because it is a public building that stands in one of the narrowest and most frequented places in the city, one of the houses is retreating to create an open space, a kind of a piazzetta entry.