

**Lovra, Éva. *A miskolci modernizmustól New Yorkig: Böhm Viktor építésze* [From Miskolc Modernism to New York: The Architecture of Viktor Böhm]. Miskolc: Észak-Keleti Átjáró Egyesület, 2023. 264 pp.**

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Éva Lovra, author of several books on urbanism and numerous publications, published her latest book, a monograph on the work of Viktor Böhm, in 2024. Despite the depth of academic research conducted to prepare the volume, it can be warmly recommended not only to architects but to all readers interested in the cultural history of the twentieth century. This research required an investigative approach, involving archives, field research, and visits to Viktor Böhm's descendants. This meticulous and objective fact-gathering work is merely one of the book's undeniably great values. The author's profound humanism and understanding of Böhm's personal fate, while avoiding any excessive nostalgia or idealization, shines through even in her objective, academic syntax. A picture of the Janus-faced twentieth century, with all its beauty and horrors, which laid the foundations of modernity, of our present-day culture, cityscapes, and way of life, is also subtly drawn between the lines.

The book is also a multi-layered chronicle, following the life of Böhm as he set out from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It is a profoundly twentieth-century story, but not exceptional among its peers. And that is what makes it so inspiring: Böhm does not become an idealized hero, a historical figure; he remains an approachable and relatable human being throughout. What is striking in the chapters that trace out his life is how close the author manages to bring him to the reader. His emigration to the New World meant an entry into an extremely new world for him as well. Although Miskolc, as portrayed in the book, provided a notably receptive environment for Böhm's modern—later termed contemporary—style, the cities of the United States presented an entirely different scale. Böhm found his place in this frighteningly expansive and, in the circumstances of the time, accelerated consumer world, both as a creator and as a private individual, by starting from scratch and working his way up.

There is a reason why even the non-professional reader can be captivated by all this. However, the readers who are architects will certainly be familiar with the difficulties described in the book—the resolutions of the planning council, the administrative and construction tasks—and they will sometimes find themselves smiling as they recognize their own everyday struggles

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amidst the difficulties of one of the characters. The fate of Böhm's houses depended on regulations, modifications, changing client requirements, local official objections, and special permits from the Ministry of the Interior. Meanwhile, we can browse through the pages richly illustrated by plans and drawings, which are also a peculiar reflection of the building culture and lifestyle of the time: the maids' rooms were still part of the larger dwellings, but single-room apartments were already being built, as a sign of a transition to a more modern society.

The houses remain the focus throughout, while everyday life, administration, and the human tragedies of the twentieth century take place in and around the buildings. Reading Éva Lovra's book, the social life of Miskolc in the 1930s, and of the United States in the years that followed, flashes before our eyes like a movie. The architectural works are the central points of focus. The author, while confidently handling this multi-layered, complex, and systematic research, also reveals herself in a subjective way: we can get a glimpse into the secrets of the book's creation, the difficulties and successes of the research, its adventurous turns, or even the meticulous and systematic work, without, however, dominating the text. The book follows a coherent structure, with chapters that nicely continue the arc of the story but also function separately as complete essays.

As versatile as Viktor Böhm's work is, Éva Lovra's presentation of his oeuvre is just as colorful. With astonishing thoroughness, she presents the architect's planned, implemented, or even demolished buildings and interior designs. She analyses and places Böhm's theoretical work in the context of his time and international professional discourse with great confidence. The debate between the "modern" and the "traditional" styles, as well as the relationship between architecture and psychology, remains a relevant area of discussion in our profession today. In addition to his urban scale and theoretical works, his furniture, small-scale artworks and objects are also discussed in the monograph, which is otherwise in fine harmony with its content through its appearance: simple yet sophisticated typography and cover graphics.

Viktor Böhm's buildings in Miskolc include some of Hungary's most outstanding modern works, while others would not attract attention if you were to walk past them. However, many of them have been either demolished or completely redesigned. The names of their designers are not in the national architectural consciousness, and when one thinks about this, one cannot help wondering what cultural memory and historiography have to do with which monuments are preserved or considered significant. What percentage of musical works are never played again? Architecture, if the plan is realized and embodied, has a better chance of being actualized, yet the story of a building's creation or creator can be forgotten, its original character can be rewritten by transformations, and the fate of its designer can easily be lost to the storms of history. After his emigration, Viktor Böhm did not set foot on Hungarian soil for forty years, and if Éva Lovra had not written her monograph, his name might have been forgotten forever.

The architectural heritage he left behind is now slowly disappearing: no serious effort has been made to save it from demolition or redevelopment. Éva Lovra's means of conserving this heritage has been through research and writing, through visual documentation, through the digitization of plans and their presentation in the exhibitions accompanying the publication of the book. The result of this valuable documentation effort is a book that links two halves of Böhm's architectural oeuvre from across two continents.