

YDK: 7.036

BBK: 85.113(4)

DOI: 10.18688/aa2212-05-40

V. Kruljac

## Josip Seissel *alias* Jo Klek and the Zenitist Architecture

Zenitism was the first, originally Yugoslav avant-garde movement, articulated between 1921 and 1926 in Zagreb and Belgrade. Its *spiritus movens* and leader was Ljubomir Micić (1895–1971), writer and one of the first activists, promotional critics, and theorists of the avant-garde in the Yugoslav context. Motivated by the idea of creating new, authentic, and socially engaged art on the margins of Europe, he made a key contribution to defining ideology and poetics of the Zenitism through the series of manifestos and program texts published in the *Zenit* magazine. “Balkanization of Europe” was the notion settled in the very basis of the Zenitist program, implying a subversion of the thesis on the cultural hegemony of the Western Civilization, allegedly superior to the Balkans and the East. The realization of this mission was entrusted to a new man, the imaginary “Balkan Barbarogenius”, featuring as an original bearer of the pan-Slavic identity and creator of a new, revolutionary cultural model based on the affirmation of primitivism and barbarism in the Balkans as a negation of all aesthetic matrices and socio-cultural conventions of the West<sup>1</sup>. Despite this Balkan-centric matrix, the anti-traditional concept and the socially engaged, left-wing orientation of the Zenitist movement and its magazine, undoubtedly attracted a large number of associates, progressive intellectuals and artists of various profiles, both domestic and from abroad. Functioning as an international platform for the exchange of artistic ideas and experiences, the *Zenit* magazine played a key role in profiling domestic exponents of Zenitism<sup>2</sup>. Their artistic production successfully absorbed and creatively elaborated several divergent, but essentially innovative poetics from both the East and the West. In Zenitism, as well as in other avant-garde movements, the fine arts had a leading position in articulating the innovative solutions and mediating in their transmission into the domain of architecture [34, p. 73; 35, p. 94]<sup>3</sup>.

As the editor of *Zenit* magazine, Micić demonstrated a subtle talent for selecting reference topics, textual contributions and illustrations of architecture, all in accordance with the program principles of Zenitism, but also with other avant-garde and modern movements of the era.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the *Manifesto of Zenitism*, signed by Micić, Boško Tokin and Iwan Goll [22, pp. 1–16], exceptionally important in the process of articulating the ideology of Zenitism were Micić’s program texts published in the *Zenit* magazine: *Man and Art* [21, pp. 1–2], *Zenit Manifesto* [24, p. 1], *Zenitism as a Balkan Totalizer of New Life and New Art* [25], *Zenitosophy or the Energy of Creative Zenitism* [27], *Manifesto to Barbarians of Spirit and Thought on All Continents* [29].

<sup>2</sup> More details on Zenitism, *Zenit* and Ljubomir Micić, with reference literature [8; 9, pp. 85–122, 149–166, 305–319, 387–393, 425–463; 11].

<sup>3</sup> The program text of the Hungarian activist Lajos Kassák, *Architecture of a painting*, published in *Zenit* (No. 19–20) by the end of 1922, was crucial in the transfer of painting inventions to the domain of architecture [38].

Artistic concepts founded on geometric abstraction, mass-media principles and technical-technological innovations, which promoted a holistic approach to architecture as a synthesis of all arts, and insisted on its aesthetic component, social utilitarianism and humanistic character, were crucial to articulating the Zenitist architectural discourse<sup>4</sup>. Starting from Expressionism, based on an unrestrained imagination, and Futurism as a paradigm of dynamism and machinism of the modern age, through Cubism as a stabilizing factor, to the concept of architecture as a model of a new world inherent to Constructivism<sup>5</sup>, Purism, *De Stijl* and Bauhaus<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, Zenitism generated a relatively authentic architectural discourse, which was theoretically formulated in Micić's program texts and critically intoned articles<sup>7</sup>, and demonstrated in architectural projects by Josip Seissel (1904–1987)<sup>8</sup>, known as Josif Jo Klek in the context of Zenitism. Although he entered the Zenitist milieu as a high school student by the end of 1922, when as a member of the Academic Club *Traveller* Klek participated in the creation and performance of an experimental theater play at the Real High School in Zagreb [12; 11, pp. 127–128], he soon established himself as one of the leading exponents of Zenitism. His work essentially marked the mature, Belgrade phase of Zenitism (1923–1925), and his achievements in the field of fine, applied and performing arts represent an example of the interdisciplinary, syncretic and experimental nature of the movement's artistic production<sup>9</sup>. Klek's decision to enroll at the

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, texts published in *Zenit* by Jozef Peeters (*Catechism of a Friend of Art*, No. 26–33), El Lissitzky (*Modern Advertisement*, No. 34) and an architect signed with the initials PT, whose article *New System of Construction* (No. 34) was illustrated with a photograph of Erich Mendelsohn's *Einstein Tower* (1921) in Potsdam, were of particular importance [38].

<sup>5</sup> In 1926, Nikolai Ladovsky and El Lissitzky, founders of the Association for the New Architecture (ASNO-VA, 1923–1929), mentioned Micić as the only Balkan exponent of this association of architects of Constructivist orientation [2, p. 313].

<sup>6</sup> Positive reception of the Russian avant-garde on the pages of *Zenit* started in 1922 with a reproduction of Vladimir Tatlin's project for the *Monument of the Third International* (1920) in issue 11, culminating in the double issue 17–18 (1922), the so-called „Russian Notebook“, edited by Ilya Ehrenburg and El Lissitzky. The principles of functionalism elaborated within the *De Stijl* movement were promoted in *Zenit* (No. 24, 1923), with published excerpts of Theo van Doesburg's lecture *The Will to Style*, held at the Bauhaus in 1922. During 1926, *Zenit* (No. 40) promoted the Bauhaus editions (authors' publications of Walter Gropius, Paul Klee, Van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian and László Moholy-Nagy); Gropius's article *International Architecture*, illustrated with a photograph of the mock-up of the *Rosenberg House* (1923) by Van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren was published in the same issue, as well as a reproduction of the latter's first award-winning design for the renovation of Berlin's avenue *Unter den Linden* (*Under the Linden Trees*, 1925) [38].

<sup>7</sup> In the program text *Contemporary New and Presage Painting* (*Zenit* No. 10, 1921), Micić defines architecture as a construction and emphasizes that Cubism has the strongest potential to create a new architecture. In *Zenit* No. 26–33 (1924) Micić's article *New Art* was published. It was written on the occasion of “The First Zenit's International Exhibition of New Art”, held in Belgrade in 1924, and illustrated with a reproduction of the mock-up of Adolf Loos' *Villa Moissi* (1923). In the polemically intoned article *Belgrade without Architecture* (*Zenit* No. 37, 1925), Micić claims that only medieval sacral buildings and a few preserved examples of traditional Balkan architecture should be valorized as authentic and valuable. What he considers their original quality, calling it the „Zenitism of architecture“, are the harmonious proportions, simple cubic forms and clean facades devoid of any decorative elements [38].

<sup>8</sup> More about the life and overall artistic work of Josip Seissel [12; 4; 36; 11; 5, pp. 210–221].

<sup>9</sup> Klek's predominantly Constructivist approach to the organization of geometric forms and the methods of the realization of space is evident in those works, combined with elements of Dadaist and Futurist machinism, Suprematist self-referentiality and Bauhaus functionality. A paradigmatic example is *PaFaMa* (1922), the first abstract painting in Yugoslav art, through which Micić recognized the authentic contribution of Zenitist art. Klek's neologism *PaFaMa* is derived from the German words Papier-Farben-Malerei (Paper-Color-Painting)

Technical Faculty in Zagreb<sup>10</sup> was — as he mentioned in a letter sent to Micić in November of the same year — decisively influenced “only by the will to accomplish the Zenitist idea of the Balkan architecture and painting”<sup>11</sup>. Although closely related to Micić’s ideas and the ideology of the movement, Klek’s visionary projects of Zenitist architecture are strictly results of his independent artistic work. This is confirmed by his early experiments with “paper architecture”, more precisely by models of paper houses [10, p. 202], which unfortunately have not been preserved. However, some indications of the unconventional character of these models can be found in the series of paintings *Playing cards* and *The Bayadera* (1923), in which Klek dealt with the articulation of fluid architectural space. As a paradigmatic example we can single out the painting *The Tavern* (1924), where an architectural ensemble is created by continuous bending of one plane, a sheet of paper. It gradually transforms from the courtyard, across the sidewalk, to the fragmented structure of the tavern and forms an ambivalent space, in which the interior and exterior permeate.

*The Advertisement* (1923) is Klek’s first architecturally articulated watercolor-drawing (Ill. 71), published in *Zenit* (No. 34) in 1924 as an illustration to the article by Ell Lissitzky, *Modern Advertisement*. The building is conceived in the spirit of Cubism, Russian Constructivism, and Bauhaus functionalism. Set on a chessboard, the basic architectural unit consists of closed, cubic and static forms of a kiosk. It does not compete with the upper, physically independent, and open construction with dynamically arranged billboards. Its non-hierarchical geometric structure, pure colors, and clear communicative effect of advertising messages emphasize the urban character of the building. Irina Subotić finds certain analogies to Klek’s project in Alexander Rodchenko’s *Draft For a Kiosk* (1919), detecting similarities in the organization of space and intersection of horizontal and vertical elements, but notes that they are enriched in Klek’s design with Suprematist graphic symbols (square, circle, rectangle) [36; 11, pp. 114–115, 183–184]. Ljiljana Blagojević, on the other hand, cites Herbert Bayer’s *Newspaper Kiosk* (1924) as the closest parallel, but emphasizes that architecture and advertisements form a single whole in it, unlike Klek’s solution [1, p. 17]. Along with the names of well-known companies: *Ford*, *Arco*, *Berson*, *Bor*, *Box*, the word “Zenit” and Klek’s name as an integral part of the advertising ensemble provide this work with a programmatic and propagandist character. However, the work reproduced in the *Zenit* magazine slightly differs from the work preserved in the National Museum in Belgrade, where instead of the *Zenit* advertisement, letters SKF are highlighted on one of the panels in the center of the composition. Besides that, instead of the Futurist message “Time — important”, held by the figure presented in the lower right corner of the preserved artwork from Micić’s collection, the published (but lost) version has the word “Zenit”. Both versions reveal the author’s awareness of the role of mass media in creating public opinion and, consequently, a new view of the world.

---

and implies non-mimetic and functional materials and techniques. For this kind of painting Micić used the acronym *ArBoS*, derived from the Serbian words (h)artija, boja, slika [28].

<sup>10</sup> By researching the archives of the Technical Faculty in Zagreb, Dubravka Kisić corrected the information, otherwise regularly found in the professional literature, that Seissel started studying architecture in Belgrade [20, p. 136].

<sup>11</sup> Documentation of the National Museum in Belgrade, Legacy of Ljubomir Micić, Epistolary material, I/58 Letter by Jo Klek to Ljubomir Micić in Belgrade, 24.11.1923 [6].

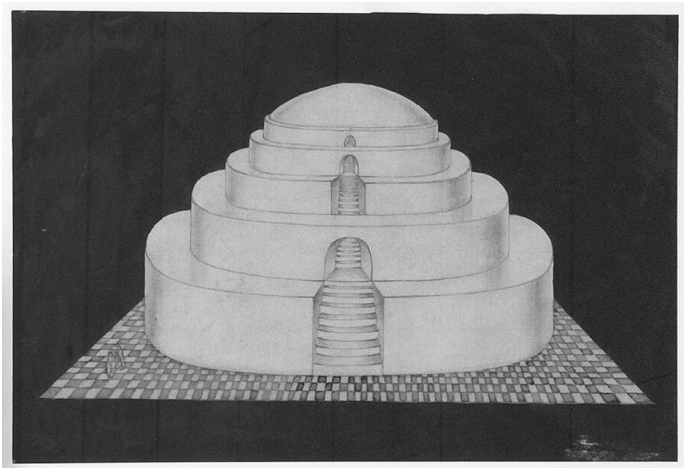


Fig. 1. Josip Seissel/Jo Klek. Zeniteum 1. 1924, pencil and ink on paper, 18,1×27,2 cm, Inv. No. 35\_2890, National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia. © National Museum in Belgrade

Klek's research and experiments in the field of architecture were not exclusively related to the poetics of Constructivism. Two completely different, utopian architectural designs for Zeniteum were created in 1924, and were also published in *Zenit* (No. 35, 1924). The idea of the temple as a center of the Zenitist art and philosophy, conceived upon the model of the ancient Pantheon, was first mentioned in 1923, in Micić's introductory text *Towards Opticoplastic*, for the monograph-album *Archipenko. New Plastic* [26]. Although in Micić's manifestos Zenitism was promoted as a "new theophany" or "new mysticism", the ideology of the movement was focused on a man of the modern age and antagonistic towards the traditional concept of religiousness. In Zenitism, it was all about emotional and intellectual spirituality — i. e. enlightenment which can be accomplished through the genuine, unconscious primitivism of the Balkans and the new god — "Barbarogenius" [21, pp. 1–2; 23, pp. 3–5; 24, p. 1; 25; 27; 28; 29]. Although designed in accordance with Micić's ideas, Klek's drafts for Zeniteum stemmed from independent formal research, personal imagination, and affinity for the fantastic. According to the reading line established by Irina Subotić and Aleksandar Kadijević, contemplating on Klek's projects for Zeniteum in the context of avant-garde and the Expressionist architecture "on paper" [36; 37, pp. 11–25; 11, p. 179; 19, pp. 68–69], the focus of further explication is directed towards horizontal analogies and comparisons with the first Rudolf Steiner's *Goetheanum* (1921/1922) in Dornach, and Erich Mendelsohn's *Einstein Tower* (1921) in Potsdam. The proposed approach is not based on the negation of different results of previous research, *de facto* analytically reliable, but rather on sophisticated nuancing of opinions, in which different assessments are perceived as a valuable contribution to a broader understanding of the subject, but not as a canon.

*Zeniteum 1* (1924) was conceived as a central plan building, based on a concentrically stepped, cylindrical structure with a dome at the top (Fig. 1). The entrance is accentuated by a truncated staircase, alternately opened and covered with semicircular arches. The access staircase accentuates the axis of symmetry and the hierarchical arrangement of the masses, but also

indicates the spiritual significance of the object. It gives the whole building the character of an urban cave as a metaphor of hidden knowledge and art, and the very same concept is immanent to some other paradigmatic examples of the Expressionist architecture, such as: Bruno Taut's *Glass Pavilion* (1914) in Munich, Hans Poelzig's *Great Theater* (1919) in Berlin and Steiner's first *Goetheanum* in Dornach [33, pp. 116, 120–121, 134, 157, 214]. With its line gradually ascending up to the top of the dome as a zenith point, the staircase of Klek's building suggests that the path to spiritual enlightenment through Zenitism has to be a long and gradual process. Deprived of decorative ornaments, simple white facades on a black background create the illusion of radiation of light, which gives the building the aura of a sacral object. Its hieratic appearance contrasts with the spatial illusion created by the chessboard. Two human figures in the lower left corner indicate the monumental dimensions of the building and together with the chessboard imply that it is the pivot of the urban ambience. Suggesting the atmosphere of "spiritual darkness" that surrounds the Zenitist temple, the neutral black background emphasizes the silhouette of this polysemic architectural structure. At the metaphorical level of reading, *Zeniteum 1* symbolizes the Zenitist universe in which man as an individual represents the center, while art and philosophy are the highest human accomplishments. Jelena Bogdanović and Miloš Perović cite the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, as well as other central plan churches of the Justinian epoch as exemplary models of *Zeniteum 1* [34, p. 69; 35, p. 92; 2, pp. 299, 311]. Despite the fact that the Constantinople church from the 6<sup>th</sup> century was generally known and widely accepted as one of the architectural models at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>, the non-imitative character of *Zeniteum 1* raises doubts about these claims. Before all, because Klek's method of transsemiotic citation makes it impossible to detect a specific source of inspiration, while the type of building with a central base, single entrance, and a dome has been present in architecture from prehistory to nowadays. Finally, Klek's draft was created in an ideologically, culturally, and sociologically completely different context comparing to those which generated formally similar examples in previous epochs. Horizontal analogies to Ivan Meštrović's *Kosovo Temple* (1911) which are — on the basis of common ideological origins of the Zenitist ideology and the political construct of integral Yugoslavdom, or a particular nationalist discourse — stressed by Aleksandar Ignjatović [13, p. 156] and Tzvetomila Pauly [32], seem inadequate. Primarily because Klek's artistic practice is essentially supranational, and the artist himself never pretended to participate in the struggle for supremacy on the institutional map of meaning. As Klek's position on the Yugoslav art scene was one of an outsider at the time, his Zenitist architecture projects remained resistant to subsequent loading of meanings that convened to the official political ideology and the artistic mainstream. The newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918) needed new models of national identification, which would act constructively within the "art system", and not outside it and subversively. Therefore, the State institutionally supported and generously financed only those artistic achievements, such as Meštrović's sculptural-architectural projects, which rhetorically represented an ideologically correct and politically desirable model for the identification of South Slavs.

<sup>12</sup> More about the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople as an architectural model and its semantic aspects and ideological implications in domestic and foreign architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries [16, pp. 379–392; 14, pp. 245–337].



The project for *Zeniteum 2* (1924) belongs to the category of fantastic architecture (Fig. 2). Like Mendelsohn's *Einstein Tower* in Potsdam, *Zeniteum 2* is designed as a free-standing tower in the spirit of Expressionism, but is enriched with Futurist, Constructivist, Purist, and Surrealistic elements. The main architectural structure of the central plan is set on an orthogonal basis. The vertical composition of condensed graded masses is made up of three ellipsoidal domes, placed one on top of the other. The closest parallels to their elongated forms Bogdanović finds in Taut's *Glass Pavilion* and the visionary projects of *Alpine Architektur* (*Alpine Architecture*, 1919). However, her interpretations of the three-level structure of Klek's building as an evocation of the Byzantine concept of the earthly and celestial hierarchy [2, pp. 305, 307–308, 310] remain questionable, because there is no confirmation that the young student of Architecture, at that time at least, had any knowledge about the Neoplatonic teachings of Dionysius the Areopagite. Horizontal and vertical planes intersect at right angles and form a cross, which functions as a key organizational principle of Klek's composition. In addition to parsing the compact structure of the building and dynamizing the space, their purpose is functional. As a kind of echo of Futurist footbridges and corridors in Antonio Sant'Elia's drafts for *Città Nuova* (*New Town*, 1914) or the project *Wohnberge* (*A Mountain to Live On*, 1918) by Walter Gropius, Klek's horizontal planes function as open terraces, allowing free circulation. The non-ornamental facades are enlivened by semicircular arches of multi-level arcade rows, which create contrasting relations of the full and the empty. The hypnotic effect is suggested by contrasting the light form of the object with a neutral, dark background. The impression of the surreal Klek, probably consciously, emphasized with shadows, misrepresented in relation to the hidden light source and the position of the object in space. Contrary to the first project, there are several equal entry parties here, which can be reached by the access platform stairway. The openness of *Zeniteum 2* on all four sides and several levels implies free access, or the democratic character of the Zenitist temple. Conceptual analogies to this draft Pauly finds in the project for the *Monument of the Third International* (1919) by Vladimir Tatlin, and the formal ones in the Mycenaean tombs (14<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century BC), better known as "beehives" [32]. However, careful analysis shows that *Zeniteum 2* was based on a balance of non-historical geometric forms and research into spatial relationships. For these experiments, which started in 1923 with Klek's Constructivist drawing *Zenit-Zenitism* [3, pp. 147–148], the closest morphological and conceptual parallels can be found in the PROUN works of El Lissitzky [11, pp. 180]. In general, Klek's projects for *Zeniteum* stand as autonomous visual creations, but also as a kind of ideological statement on the Zenitist view of the world. It was based on individual creativity and utopian faith in the potentials of archi-

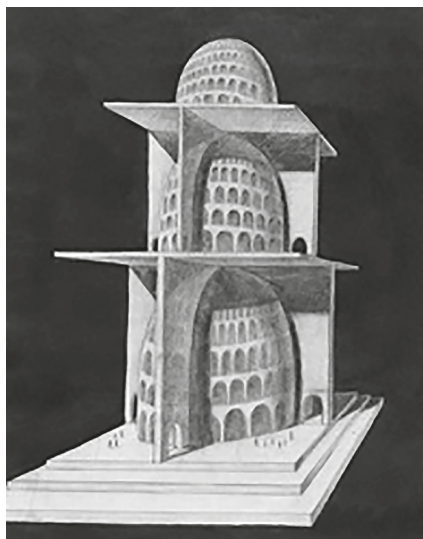


Fig. 2. Josip Seissel/Jo Klek. *Zeniteum 2*. 1924, pencil and ink on paper, 33,3×25,8 cm, Inv. No. 35\_2891, National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia. © National Museum in Belgrade

itecture to influence the transformation of the structure of the modern world and create a better and more humane society.

The final phase of Klek's Zenitist activity was marked by a draft for *Villa Zenit* (1924/25), which symbolically announces the end of his collaboration with *Zenit* (No. 36, 1925) and Ljubomir Micić. Here we have an asymmetrical free-plane structure (Ill. 72), based on the solutions of Adolf Loos (*Villa Moissi*, 1923, Lido near Venice), Le Corbusier (*Villa Besnus*, 1922, Vaucresson) and *De Stijl* (Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren, *Rosenberg House*, 1923; Gerrit Rietveld, *Schröder House*, 1924, Utrecht), as well as the principles of Constructivism and the Bauhaus. Despite that, Klek's synthetic procedure resulted in an authentic architectural creation. Its axonometric spatial representation offer several different views, none of which is dominant. The front, side and roof appearance of the building are equal and shaped with equal care. The flat roof construction and clean facades emphasize the cascading character of the entire structure. Purist cubic forms dominate, but the composition is dynamized by their superposition and shearing. Simple square openings of large dimensions parsing the façade surfaces and enhance the impression of interference of the interior and the exterior. The asymmetry and breaking of the mass of the frontal part at an obtuse angle, as well as the relocation of the entrance and the access staircase to the side of the building — represent a radical deviation from the conventionally conceived main facades. Achromatics of the facades indicate that the eventual realization of this project would involve application of new systems of construction and building materials (concrete, steel, glass). However, Klek's architectural idea does not insist so much on technical and functional aspects, but on the synthesis of rational analysis and free artistic expression. As the only polychrome element, the mural integrated into the roof construction indicates Klek's affinity for Constructivism, i. e. the Constructivist understanding of the domain of architecture as the ultimate possibility to produce a synthesis of all arts. And while Perović in the Klek's project sees only one "imaginative solution" close to Maurits Escher's fantastic architecture [34, p. 69; 35, p. 92], Blagojević here recognizes the direct predecessor to the *Zloković House* (1928), the first modern villa in Belgrade built upon the project of Milan Zloković [1, pp. 21, 27], a member of the Group of Architects of the Modern Movement (1928–1934)<sup>13</sup>. *Zloković House* can be described as the first detached, Modernist villa in the local context, while the family house of sculptor Petar Palavichini (1928), also in Belgrade, represents a pioneering example of a modern villa incorporated into a housing complex [30, p. 67; 18, pp. 111–126]. Unique in Klek's Zenitist opus and the entire Yugoslav architectural discourse of the third decade, the draft for *Villa Zenit* represents only an anticipation of a small number of projects by domestic authors conceived on the Modernist principles. Despite certain reminiscences of Klek's solution in the first-mentioned and other Zloković's family houses built in the Yugoslav capital (*Villa Zaborski*, 1930; *Villa Prendić* and *Villa Šterić*, 1933), as well as the unaccomplished Branislav Kojić's projects for *Villa on Topčider Hill* and *Villa for artists on Topčider Hill* (both from 1929), their connections were indirect and cannot be observed outside the influence of the aforementioned and other innovative achievements in the international architecture of the interwar period.

<sup>13</sup> More about the life and work of Milan Zloković [7, pp. 145–168; 31].

As the only protagonist in the context of Zenitist architecture, Klek made an authentic and relevant contribution to international avant-garde discourse. In the Yugoslav context, his projects represented not only a formal-linguistic innovation, but also a kind of ideological paradigm, which laid the foundation for a new understanding of the social function of architecture. Promoting the utopian concept of architecture as a model of a democratic society in which all antagonisms and differences (racial, class, national, religious, political) were annulled, Klek's architectural experiments of the Zenit phase had one quite apart, marginal position on the institutional map of meaning. Existing exclusively in the form of a conceptual project and outside the official "art system", they never led to significant shifts in local architectural practice. Based on the principles of Academism and the revival of traditional architectural concepts, during the third decade this practice was mainly focused on their modernization and search for the national identity in architecture, where the Serbian-Byzantine style was one of the leading, institutionally accepted currents of historicism<sup>14</sup>. Even for Serbian architects of progressive orientation, the Modernist paradigm did not represent a radical break with the past or an instrument for creating a new social order, but meant the emancipation of the local architectural heritage.

## References

1. Blagojević Lj. *Modernism in Serbia: The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture 1919–1941*. Cambridge; London, MIT Press Publ., 2003. 286 p.
2. Bogdanović J. Evocations of Byzantium in Zenitist Avant-Garde Architecture. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 2016, vol. 75, no. 3, pp. 299–317.
3. Briski Uzelac S. Visual Arts in the Avant-gardes between the Two Wars. *Impossible Histories: Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*. Cambridge; London, MIT Press Publ., 2003, pp. 122–169.
4. Bužanić V. *Josip Seissel: Katalog izložbe (Josip Seissel: Exhibition Catalogue)*. Bol, Galerija umjetnina Branko Dešković Publ., 1989. s. p. (in Croatian).
5. Denegri J. *Modernizam / Avangarda. Ogleđi o međuratnom modernizmu i istorijskim avangardama u jugoslovenskom umetničkom prostoru (Modernism / Avant-Garde. Essays on Interwar Modernism and Historic Avant-Gardes in the Yugoslav Art Space)*. Belgrade, Službeni glasnik Publ., 2012. 276 p. (in Serbian).
6. *Dokumentacija Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu, Zaostavština Ljubomira Micića, Epistolarna gradja, I/58 Pismo Jo Kleka Ljubomiru Miciću u Beograd (Documentation of the National Museum in Belgrade, Legacy of Ljubomir Micić, Epistolary material, I/58 Letter by Jo Klek to Ljubomir Micić in Belgrade)*, 24.11.1923 (in Serbo-Croatian).
7. Djurdjević M. The Life and Work of the Architect Milan Zloković (1898–1965). *Godišnjak grada Beograda (Annual of the Belgrade City Museum)*, 1991, vol. 38, pp. 145–168 (in Serbian).
8. Golubović V.; Subotić I. *Zenit i avangarda 20-ih godina : Katalog izložbe (Zenit and Avant-Garde of the 1920s: Exhibition Catalogue)*. Belgrade, Narodni muzej; Institut za književnost i umetnost Publ., 1983. 185 p. (in Serbian).
9. Golubović V.; Tutnjević S. (eds.). *Srpska avangarda u periodici (Serbian Avant-Garde in Periodicals)*. Novi Sad; Belgrade, Matica srpska; Institut za književnost i umetnost Publ., 1996. 518 p. (in Serbian).
10. Golubović V. From the Correspondence about Zenit and Zenitism: Anton Podbevšek, Jo Klek (Josip Sajsel) and Vladimir Škerl. *Ljetopis Srpskog kulturnog društva Prosvjeta (Annals of the Serbian Cultural Society Education)*, 1998, vol. 3, pp. 197–209 (in Serbian).
11. Golubović V.; Subotić I. *Zenit 1921–1926*. Belgrade; Zagreb, Narodna biblioteka Srbije; Institut za književnost i umetnost; Srpsko kulturno društvo Prosvjeta Publ., 2008. 515 p. (in Serbian).

<sup>14</sup> More about academism and national style in Serbian architecture [17; 15; 14].



12. Horvat-Pintarić V. *Josip Seissel: Katalog izložbe (Josip Seissel: Exhibition Catalogue)*. Zagreb, Galerija Nova Publ., 1978. s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
13. Ignjatović A. *Jugoslovenstvo u arhitekturi 1904–1941 (Yugoslavism in Architecture 1904–1941)*. Belgrade, Gradjevinska knjiga Publ., 2007. 500 p. (in Serbian).
14. Ignjatović A. *U srpsko-vizantijskom kaleidoskopu: arhitektura, nacionalizam i imperijalna imaginacija 1878–1941 (In the Serbian-Byzantine Kaleidoscope: Architecture, Nationalism and the Imperial Imagination 1878–1941)*. Belgrade, Orion Art; Arhitektonski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu Publ., 2016. 848 p. (in Serbian).
15. Kadjević A. *Jedan vek traženja nacionalnog stila u srpskoj arhitekturi (sredina XIX — sredina XX veka) (A Century of Searching for National Style in Serbian Architecture (mid-19<sup>th</sup>– mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century))*. Belgrade, Gradjevinska knjiga Publ., 1997. 343 p. (in Serbian).
16. Kadjević A. *Evocations and Paraphrases of Byzantine Architecture in Serbian Architecture from 1918 to 1941. Zbornik radova Niš i Vizantija (Collection of Works Niš and Byzantium)*, vol. 2. Niš, Prosveta Publ., 2004, pp. 379–392 (in Serbian).
17. Kadjević A. *Estetika arhitekture akademizma (XIX — XX vek) (Aesthetics of Academic Architecture (19<sup>th</sup> — 20<sup>th</sup> century))*. Belgrade, Gradjevinska knjiga Publ., 2005. 488 p. (in Serbian).
18. Kadjević A. *Palavichini's House on Kopitareva Gradina — An Architectural Achievement of Jaroslav Prhal and Vjekoslav Muršec. Godišnjak grada Beograda (Annual of the Belgrade City Museum)*, 2011, vol. 58, pp. 111–126 (in Serbian).
19. Kadjević A. *Expressionism in Belgrade Architecture (1918–1941). Nasledje (Heritage)*, 2012, vol. 13, pp. 59–77 (in Serbian).
20. Kisić D. *Jo Klek's Avant-Garde Painting and Josip Seissel's Architecture. Facta Architectonica*, 2011–2013, vol. 2, pp. 134–145 (in Croatian).
21. Micić Lj. *Man and Art. Zenit*, 1921, vol. 1, pp. 1–2 (in Serbo-Croatian).
22. Micić Lj.; Tokin B.; Goll I. *Manifest zenitizma (Manifesto of Zenitism)*. Zagreb, Biblioteka Zenit Publ., 1921. 16 p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
23. Micić Lj. *The Spirit of Zenitism. Zenit*, 1922, vol. 7, pp. 3–5 (in Serbo-Croatian).
24. Micić Lj. *Zenit Manifesto. Zenit*, 1922, vol. 11, p. 1 (in Serbo-Croatian).
25. Micić Lj. *Zenitism as a Balkan Totalizer of New Life and New Art. Zenit*, 1923, vol. 21, s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
26. Micić Lj. *Arhipenko. Nova plastika (Archipenko. New Plastic)*. Zagreb, Biblioteka Zenit Publ., 1923. s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
27. Micić Lj. *Zenithosophy or the Energy of Creative Zenitism. Zenit*, 1924, vol. 26–33, s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
28. Micić Lj. *New Art. Zenit*, 1924, vol. 34, s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
29. Micić Lj. *Manifesto to Barbarians of Spirit and Thought on All Continents. Zenit*, 1926, vol. 38, s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
30. Miletić-Abramović Lj. *Kopitareva Gradina III: Modern Architecture (1928–1998). Arhitektura i urbanizam (Architecture and Urbanism)*, 2002, vol. 11, pp. 65–71 (in Serbian).
31. Panić V. *Milan Zloković : afirmacija modernizma (Milan Zloković : Affirmation of Modernism)*. Belgrade, Arhitektonski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu Publ., 2011. 204 p. (in Serbian).
32. Pauly Tz. *Nation, Tradition and Regionalism in The Avant-Garde Magazine Zenith (Zagreb — Belgrade, 1921–1926)*. 2012. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/5026277/Nation\\_and\\_Tradition\\_in\\_the\\_Avant-Garde\\_Magazine\\_Zenith](https://www.academia.edu/5026277/Nation_and_Tradition_in_the_Avant-Garde_Magazine_Zenith) (accessed 11 September 2020)
33. Perović M. R. (ed.). *Istorija moderne arhitekture. Antologija tekstova. Kristalizacija modernizma. Avangardni pokreti (History of Modern Architecture. Anthology of Texts. Crystallization of Modernism. Avant-Garde Movements)*, vol. 2-B. Belgrade, Arhitektonski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu Publ., 2000. 568 p. (in Serbian).
34. Perović M. R. *Srpska arhitektura XX veka. Od istoricizma do drugog modernizma (Serbian Architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. From Historicism to the Second Modernism)*. Belgrade, Arhitektonski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu Publ., 2003. 419 p. (in Serbian).
35. Perović M. R. *Zenitism and Modern Architecture. On the Very Edge. Modernism and Modernity in the Arts and Architecture in Interwar Serbia (1918–1941)*. Leuven, Leuven University Press Publ., 2014, pp. 85–96.
36. Subotić I.; Kipke Ž. *Josip Seissel. Izložba slika i crteža : Katalog (Josip Seissel. Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings: Catalogue)*. Belgrade, Galerija Sebastian Publ., 1990. s. p. (in Serbo-Croatian).
37. Subotić I. *Od avangarde do arkadije (From the Avant-Garde to the Arcadia)*. Belgrade, Clio Publ., 2000. 452 p. (in Serbian).

38. *Zenit*, 1921–1926, vol. 1–43. Available at: <http://scr.digital.nb.rs/document/P-4284-001-319> (accessed 1 December 2020)

**Title.** Josip Seissel *alias* Jo Klek and Zenitist Architecture

**Author.** Kruljac, Vesna — Ph. D., assistant professor, University of Arts in Belgrade, Kralja Petra 4, Beograd 11000, Serbia. [vesna.kruljac@fpu.bg.ac.rs](mailto:vesna.kruljac@fpu.bg.ac.rs), [vesna.kruljac@gmail.com](mailto:vesna.kruljac@gmail.com) ORCID: 0000-0003-2863-4382

**Abstract.** Zenitism was the first, originally Yugoslav, avant-garde movement articulated in Zagreb and Belgrade in 1921–1926. Its *spiritus movens* was Ljubomir Micić (1895–1971), writer, promotional critic and theorist of avant-garde, editor of the Zenitist publications. As a stronghold of the Zenitist movement and an international platform for the exchange of ideas between progressive intellectuals and artists of various specialties, *Zenit* played a key role in profiling the artistic ideology and practice of Zenitism. Based upon the synthesis of different artistic disciplines, styles and genres, as well as new media, the production of this movement had a syncretic, experimental, and transnational character. Although he entered the Zenitist circle as a high school student and a member of the experimental theater group *Traveller* in 1922, Josip Seissel (1904–1987) — later, in the context of Zenitism, known as Jo Klek — established himself as one of the leading exponents of the movement. His artistic production essentially marked the mature, Belgrade phase of Zenitism (1923–1925). Apart from leaving his trace in the Yugoslav art with his first abstract paintings (*PaFaMa*, 1922) and intermedial works created in the Constructivist manner, inventively conceived posters and designs of the Zenitist publications, costume sketches and scenography for the Zenitist theater — Klek was also the author of several visionary projects of the Zenitist architecture created at the very beginning of his studies at the Faculty of Engineering in Zagreb. These achievements were preceded by the “paper architecture” (house models) and several drawings, watercolors, tempera and collages (*The Bayadera* and *Playing Cards*, 1923; *Tavern*, 1924), adorned with motives of a fictitious architecture and urban ambiances, articulated on the principles of dynamism, simultaneism, juxtaposition and fragmentation, inherent to new visual media and mass media (film, photography, radio, poster, advertising). Klek’s draft for the construction of *The Advertising* (1923), his utopistic designs for *Zeniteum 1* and *Zeniteum 2* (1924), as well as for the *Villa Zenit* (1924/25) remain the outstanding examples of the Zenitist architecture. Its closest conceptual and formal analogies can be found in the innovative architectural concepts of Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, *De Stijl*, Purism, Russian Constructivism, and the Bauhaus. In the context of the Yugoslav interwar period art scene, these projects represented not only a formal-linguistic innovation, but also a kind of conceptual-ideological paradigm that laid the foundation for a new understanding of the social function of architecture. However, having existed exclusively in the form of a conceptual project and outside the context of the established trends in Yugoslav architecture, they could not lead to any significant shifts in local architectural practice of the 1920s and 1930s. Although unrealized, Klek’s architectural projects represent a problematically current and authentic contribution to the avant-garde architectural discourse in Europe.

**Keywords:** Zenitism, avant-garde, architecture, Josip Seissel, Jo Klek, Yugoslavia, 20<sup>th</sup> century

**Название статьи.** Йосип Сейсель под псевдонимом Йо Клек и зенитистская архитектура

**Сведения об авторе.** Круляц, Весна — Ph. D., доцент. Университет искусств в Белграде, Краля Петра 4, Белград 11000, Сербия. [vesna.kruljac@fpu.bg.ac.rs](mailto:vesna.kruljac@fpu.bg.ac.rs) ORCID: 0000-0003-2863-4382

**Аннотация.** Зенитизм был первым, первоначально югославским, авангардным движением, возникшим в Загребе и Белграде в 1921–1926 гг. Его вдохновителем был Любомир Мичич (1895–1971), писатель, рекламный критик и теоретик авангарда, редактор зенитистских изданий. Будучи оплотом зенитистского движения и международной платформой для обмена идеями между прогрессивными интеллектуалами и художниками различных специальностей, журнал «Зенит» сыграл ключевую роль в формировании художественной идеологии и практики зенитизма. Основанное на синтезе различных художественных дисциплин, стилей и жанров, а также новых медиа, производство этого движения носило синкретический, экспериментальный и транснациональный характер. Несмотря на то, что он вступил в кружок зенитистов в качестве старшеклассника и члена экспериментальной театральной группы «Путешественник» в 1922 г., Йосип Сейссел (1904–1987) — позже, в контексте зенитизма, известный как Йо Клек — зарекомендовал себя как один из ведущих представителей движения. Его художественное творчество, по сути, ознаменовало зрелую, белградскую фазу зенитизма (1923–1925). Помимо того, что он оставил свой след в югославском искусстве своими первыми абстрактными картинами (*ПаФаМа*, 1922) и промежуточными работами, созданными в конструктивистской манере, изобретательно продуманными плакатами и дизайнами зенитистских изданий, эскизами костюмов и сценографией для зенитистского театра, Клек также был автором нескольких дальновидных проектов зенитистской архи-

тектуры, созданных в самом начале его учёбы на инженерном факультете в Загребе. Этим достижениям предшествовала «бумажная архитектура» (модели домов) и несколько рисунков, акварелей, темперы и коллажей (Баядерка и Игральные карты, 1923; Таверна, 1924), с мотивами вымышленной архитектуры и городской обстановки, сформулированными на принципах динамизма, одновременности, сопоставления и фрагментации, присущих новым визуальным средствам и средствам массовой информации (кино, фотография, радио, плакат, реклама). Проект Клека для строительства «Рекламы» (1923), его утопические проекты для «Зенитеума 1» и «Зенитеума 2» (1924), а также для «виллы Зенит» (1924/25) остаются выдающимися примерами зенитистской архитектуры. Его ближайшие концептуальные и формальные аналогии можно найти в инновационных архитектурных концепциях экспрессионизма, кубизма, футуризма, группы «де Стил», пуризма, русского конструктивизма и Баухауза. В контексте югославской художественной сцены межвоенного периода эти проекты представляли собой не только формально-лингвистическую инновацию, но и своего рода концептуально-идеологическую парадигму, которая заложила основу для нового понимания социальной функции архитектуры. Однако, существуя исключительно в форме концептуального проекта и вне контекста устоявшихся тенденций в югославской архитектуре, они не могли привести к каким-либо значительным изменениям в местной архитектурной практике 1920–1930-х гг. Несмотря на нереализованность, архитектурные проекты Клека представляют собой актуально проблемный и оригинальный вклад в авангардный архитектурный дискурс Европы.

**Ключевые слова:** зенитизм, авангард, архитектура, Йосип Сейсель, Йо Клек, Югославия, 20 век



Ill. 71. Josip Seissel/Jo Klek. The Advertisement. 1923, ink and watercolor on paper, 33,6×21,5 cm, Inv. No. 35\_2893, National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia. © National Museum in Belgrade



Ill. 72. Josip Seissel/Jo Klek. Villa Zenit. 1924/25, watercolor on paper, 39,3×29,4 cm, Inv. No. 35\_2894, National Museum in Belgrade, Serbia. © National Museum in Belgrade