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Minimum Documentation Fiche 2003

composed by national / regional working party of:



0.1 Picture of building/site
depicted item:

source:
date:

Offices of the “Romanian Waters National
Administration”, 6, Edgar Quinet Str.
Photo arch. Adrian Bălteanu
2011 (e)

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International working party for
documentation and conservation
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

1. Identity of building/group of buildings/urban scheme/landscape/garden

1.1 current name of building	Offices of the “Romanian Waters National Administration”, 6, Edgar Quinet Str.
1.2 variant or former name	“Albina” Bank
1.3 number & name of street	6, Edgar Quinet Str.
1.4 town	Bucharest, sector 1
1.5 province/state	Bucharest Municipality
1.6 zip code	010018 (cod poștal)
1.7 country	Romania
1.8 national grid reference	44° 26' 07.13" N 26° 05' 55.01" E
1.9 classification/typology	ADM
1.10 protection status & date	Included in the Protected Built Area no. 6, “Regina Elisabeta” and proposed for listing as historic monument, group B (local importance)

2 History of building

2.1 original brief/purpose	Headquarters of the Bucharest branch of “Albina” Bank in Sibiu (founded in 1871) which has also functioned in the previous building, being mentioned at the same address in <i>The Official Guide of Bucharest city</i> (1934)
2.2 dates	Finalised post-1935 (c)
2.3 architectural and other designers	No data available
2.4 others associated with building	I. Rosental – the architect who signed in 1925 a project for extending the old two-storey building on the plot by adding five storeys and an attic floor – never realised
2.5 significant alterations with dates	Repairs / partitions (1960, 1961, 1963, 1968, 1972)
2.6 current use	Office building of the “Romanian Waters National Administration”
2.7 current condition	Generally good - the main facade is well preserved, with the exception of the ground-floor caryatids whose upper part was removed at an unknown date (probably after 1945), and the interiors are well maintained, yet with modifications of the initial partition and finishes.

3 Description

3.1 general description

The building is part of the continuous street front and develops on the plot as a three wings structure surrounding an internal courtyard: the six-storey main wing, a north-oriented compact block, and two five-storey secondary wings forming an articulated bar and occupying the western and southern sides of the plot. From the street there is a direct access, which was originally leading to the ground-floor public space of the bank, and an indirect one, to the internal courtyard through a covered passageway.

The building was designed expressly as headquarters for “Albina” bank (as indicated by the decorative motifs of the main portal) with a large street-oriented public space at the ground floor, strongrooms at the basement floor, offices, and, at the upper floors of the back wing,

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dwellings (probably) destined for the personnel. The street facade is the most valuable component of the building, characterized, in terms of stylistic expression, by a refined synthesis between the modern classicism of the 1930s and the Art Déco aesthetics. The compositional pattern of the façade is based on a major symmetrical motif set against a dissymmetrical field which clearly differentiates the main and the secondary entrances.

The horizontal partition of the facade, emphasized by the ground-floor canopy, is articulated by the vertical motif of the central projecting “portico”, composed of three central arches supported by colossal pilasters with stylized Corinthian capitals. The recessed plan of the façade is coated with travertine at the caryatid-punctuated ground floor level, while the rest of the surface is rigorously ordered by the stereotomic grid of decorative joints. The decorative elements (capitals, medallions, lion heads, ornaments of the main portal) are sculptured in marble, with the exception of the cast-stone caryatids.

The classical language is interpreted in the ludic and decorativist key of the Art Déco aesthetics, which also adds specific elements: the decorative ironwork of the two entrance doors, which combine abstract ornaments such as the spiral (a stylized foliage scroll), the undulating line, the festoon line and the octogon; the portal flanked by quarter-cylinders jambs, treated in horizontal strips with alternate textures (marble and travertine) and fine sculptured details; the decorative medallions with symbolic images connected to the progress of society, whose optimistic rhetoric belongs to the vein of social realism; the decorative lettering inspired from advertising and, last but not least, the modern motif of the continuous canopy with built-in lighting fixtures.

At the interior, the spaces which were accessible to the public were subject to substantial modifications following successive renovations, but they still preserve certain Art Déco details, such as the wrought iron stair balustrades or the simplified capital of a semi-column in the entrance hall.

3.2 construction

The structure of the building consists of reinforced concrete frames with brick masonry filling and a flat gable roof with sheetmetal covering.

3.3 context

The building is threatened with demolition because of the intention of the owning institution to replace it with new headquarters.

4 Evaluation

4.1 technical

The building uses common materials and methods and does not include valuable technical components.

4.2 social

For the collective memory, the 6, Edgar Quinet building is a familiar landmark thanks to the unusual detail of the cut-off caryatids, whose original image remains unknown. The sculptured decoration of the main portal, which represents a beehive surrounded by bees, is also singular, representing an allusion to the name of the bank (“Albina” is the Romanian for “bee”).

4.3 cultural & aesthetic

The building is notable for the good insertion into the urban context, but mainly for the the elegance of the overall composition, the balanced proportions and the presence of valuable artistic components (the main portal with a marble and travertine frame, the decorative ironwork of

both the entrance doors, the geometrically stylised capitals, the low-relief medallions with specific motifs for the social realism of the period).

The stylistic expression of the main façade combines the classical language, which was preferred in the 1930s-1940s for the public buildings with a representative function, and the Art Déco aesthetics, favoured for office and apartment buildings, leisure and entertainment programs, hotels and commercial spaces.

4.4 historical

The architectural treatment of the building is typical for the stylistic formula of synthesis between interwar modern classicism and Art Déco, as well as for the architecture of the period public institutions and for the historic epoch of the authoritarian reign of king Carol II, characterized by a classicising tendency that manifested itself in 1930s' Europe and America with the ideological connotations of social realism.

4.5 general assessment

The building in 6, Edgar Quinet Street and particularly its street facade are representative for the architectural culture of the late interwar period, both in Romania and in the entire world, and for the specific stylistic expression of déco classicism. This frontier "dialect" combines monumental classicism, which echoes the tendency to consolidate state authority in a period of generalised crisis, and the Art Déco aesthetics in the hypostasis of an eclectic and softened variant of interwar modernism.

5 Documentation

5.1 principal references

Publications:

- CRITICOS, Mihaela, 'Art Deco sau modernismul bine temperat / Art Deco or Well-Tempered Modernism', Bucureşti, Simetria, ISBN 978-973-1872-03-2
- BĂLTEANU, Adrian, 'Edgar Quinet nr.6', Arhitectura (Romania), nr. 4, 2011, pp. 16-19
- CRITICOS, Mihaela, 'Din nou Edgar Quinet 6 / Again Edgar Quinet 6', Arhitectura (Romania), nr. 5, 2011, pp. 32-37

5.2 visual material attached

Aerial black-and-white photographs, Compagnie Aérienne Française, 1927

Color photographs: Adrian Bălteanu, Mihaela Criticos

Satellite photographs - Bing Maps (<http://www.bing.com/maps>)

5.3 rapporteur/date

Mihaela Criticos 2012

6 Fiche report examination by ISC/R

name of examining ISC member:

date of examination: 2012

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comments:

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