

Summary

DOROTA CHUDZICKA/ Stanisław Szukalski's Design for Christopher Columbus Memorial Lighthouse, Pre-Columbian Art, and a Search for "New Alphabetic Values"

The years following the World War I witnessed an intensified interest in the pre-Columbian art, resulting in its appreciation and appropriation, particularly among artists in search of new, revitalized forms. In the United States, the development of the anthropology accelerated by the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 was followed by a gradual elevation of pre-Columbian artifacts to the fine art category in the 1920s, the phenomenon that had its counterparts in Europe. Stanisław Szukalski (1893–1987), a Polish artist who led an émigré life on both sides of the Atlantic, may have come in contact with the pre-Columbian art during his stay in Chicago in years 1913–1923 through the anthropological collection at the Field Columbian Museum and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, particularly Midway Gardens (1914). In effect pre-Columbian art became an important component of Szukalski's strife for a new visual language. The article discusses Szukalski's design for Christopher Columbus Memorial Lighthouse in Santo Domingo (1928/29) as an example of the artist's search for what he termed, 'new alphabetic values'. Szukalski's design was submitted to the first stage of the international competition organized by the Pan-American Union and directed by Albert Kelsey. It remained one of the artist's unrealized "projects in design" and survived only in a partial documentation in a program for the second stage of the competition, published in 1930. Szukalski's drawings for Columbus Memorial reveal the importance of pre-Columbian art as a source of the new esthetic and an embodiment of uncorrupted and original art envisioned by the artist.