

# MIAAW

## 2023

# Archives of Memory

**Politecnico Di Milano**

**School of Architecture Urban Planning  
Construction Engineering**

 LetteraVentidue



**POLITECNICO  
MILANO 1863**

SCUOLA DI ARCHITETTURA URBANISTICA  
INGEGNERIA DELLE COSTRUZIONI

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## **MIAW**

The MIAW-Milan International Architecture Workshop is the international intensive programme at the Politecnico di Milano, School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering, that provides an international design forum for schools, teachers and students, but it is also an informal platform to discuss issues and share ambitions that education implies. Its aim is to stimulate cross-over thinking between researches and practitioners in the design field, involving different scales and encouraging an interdisciplinary approach towards design problems. Each class has an international guest professor of high profile whose activity and interests are related to the different study courses and disciplinary areas characterising our School.

# Contents

<b>01. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>007</b>
MIAW 2023 <i>Andrea Campioli</i>	
A New Course <i>Massimo Ferrari</i>	<b>010</b>
Memory and its Tomorrow <i>Domenico Chizzoniti</i>	<b>016</b>
Show Memory! <i>Massimo Ferrari, Claudia Tinazzi, Annalucia D'Erchia</i>	<b>024</b>
<b>02. CONTRIBUTIONS</b>	
Jigsaw Puzzle. Architectural Archives <i>Francesca Belloni</i>	<b>042</b>
The Architecture of the Archive: Memory, Typology, City <i>Tommaso Brighenti</i>	<b>058</b>

The Idea of Conservation and its Relationship  
with Hypogean and Underground Spaces 074  
*Barbara Coppetti*

Memory à Rebours 084  
*Elvio Manganaro, Ruzanna Meliksetyan*

Contemporary Archives. 102  
How to Preserve Memories, Documents and  
Projects  
*Giulia Setti*

### 03. PROJECT SITES 112

*Raffaella Cavallaro, Annalucia, D'Erchia, Pedro Escoriza  
Torrallbo, Houssam Mahi, Francesco Martinazzo, Ruzanna  
Meliksetyan, Michele Porcelluzzi*

1 | Palazzo Morando

2 | Triennale di Milano

3 | MI.MA Milano Metropolitan Archive

4 | Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo

5 | Corriere della Sera

### 04. WORKSHOPS

WS.A | Paolo Cascone 146

WS.B | Antje Freiesleben 174

WS.C | Eduardo Pesquera González 202

WS.D | Helder Casal Ribeiro 230

WS.E | Filipe Magalhaes 258

## 05. STAKEHOLDERS

MI.MA Milano Metropolitan Archive 286

*Francesco Martelli*

Palazzo Morando 292

*Ilaria De Palma*

Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo 296

*Elisa Mantia*

Corriere della Sera 300

*Francesca Tramma*

## 06. AUTHORS PROFILES 304

# Contemporary archives. How to preserve memories, documents and projects

*Giulia Setti*

DAStU Department, Politecnico di Milano

The transformation of the contemporary archive is an increasingly topical issue in the practice of architectural design; in today's society, more and more assets are immaterial, digital or virtual, which is why we need to rethink the archive as a place capable of accommodating, preserving and sometimes displaying not only physical but also intangible assets (Arrhenius et al. 2014; Borgherini and Mengoni 2016; Colomina 1994). In other cases, the archive represents a place to store precious materials for the future of humankind, as in the case of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault on Spitsbergen Island, Svalbard archipelago, which is an original and valuable artefact where over 40,000 seeds are stored for ensuring and preserving, in the case of a calamity or extreme event, the diversity of the world's crops and species. It is an underground vault about 120 metres below ground level and embedded in the slopes of a sandstone mountain; the extreme climatic conditions, characterised by usually frozen ground, allow the seeds to be stored as if inside a cold storage cell.

Externally, the building looks like a wedge set into the ground. It is a contemporary, automated archive, made entirely of concrete to withstand any nuclear war or aircraft crash, and was designed to protect species, catalogue them and preserve them. The seed bank is just one - extreme - example of the need to actualise and reason about the forms in which the contemporary archive can be translated.

What does it mean to design a space for the cataloguing and display of assets, works of art or materials intended to be kept for a long time, and what will we have to store and preserve in it in the near future? A different but equally fascinating example is the archive built by Cesare Leonardi and Franca Stagi

around the 1980s: a 'drawn archive' containing 374 drawings of 211 species, plus drawings of particulates, leaves and fruits, and descriptions of each individual species. Each card describes the territory of origin, the adaptation to the urban environment and the different climatic conditions that each species can withstand.

This archive designed by Leonardi and Stagi was later collected in a book *L'architettura degli Alberi* (*The Architecture of Trees*), which describes the marvellous forms of nature and over the decades has become an indispensable tool for designing greenery and learning about tree species (Leonardi, Stagi 2019).

The archive can, therefore, take very different forms and its design is today a central theme in architecture as it means understanding how to adapt an established typology to the innovations and changes of contemporary society.

### **Musealisation of archives**

The theme of the 2023 edition of the MIAW workshop - *Archives of Memory* - tried, therefore, to reason about the newness of this theme through five possible sites, linked to as many archival forms: the archives of Triennale, those of the Municipality of Milan, the museum of Corriere della Sera, the museum of Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo and, finally, the costume museum at Palazzo Morando.

In past years, the MIAW workshop used to focus on topical issues for the future of the city of Milan, observing the changes and projects underway and interacting with local administrations and actors<sup>1</sup>; this year, the idea of working on the relation between the contemporary museum and the archive allows us to develop a reflection on the relation between past and present and on ways of preserving memories and materials. The sites chosen for this edition reflect on the forms of preserving memory by building museums and devices capable of narrating and showing, fostering a deeper knowledge of the city and its culture.

The musealisation of archives is a subject rich in design suggestions and emblematic examples that have marked different periods and ways of displaying

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<sup>1</sup> Reference is made in particular to MIAW 2021, with the theme *2026 Olympic Games and the City*. The challenge urban regeneration of Milano Porta Romana Railyard, and MIAW 2022 - *Inventing Schools*, which worked on the theme of updating and redefining the school building heritage.



preserved materials. The design of *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, realised by Dominique Perrault from 1988 to 1998, is one of the largest libraries in the world and defines a new type of space for study and research, as desired by the initiator of the international competition, the President of the French Republic François Mitterrand.

The library houses the historical and literary archives of the entire nation and has become, over the decades, a true monument and institution devoted to study and research.

Perrault's design overturns the conception of space by realising a large luxuriant garden which is hypogeal and hidden from external view and is overlooked by the spaces for researchers and the public. The garden was conceived as a secret and protected space, located below the ground floor and practically inaccessible, while the spaces for the archives and the collection of volumes consist of four angular towers, each with 24 storeys and an L-shaped plan, which open towards the central public space, reminiscent of an open book.

The towers delimit the large central square, which is about 400 metres in length and sits below the level of the Seine. Perrault's work is fascinating because it picks up on the typical layout of monastery cloisters, silent and intimate spaces where one can devote oneself to study and prayer (Perrault 2015).

The idea is to define a natural space, a forest, that protects researchers and creates an almost timeless, suspended atmosphere emphasising the monumentality and sacredness of learning and research, the ancient books and the spaces intended for their preservation and use, and protecting from the hectic life of Paris.

However, the opportunity to rethink ways of designing an archive, displaying collections of artefacts or paintings or parts and architectures comes ever more frequently in the form of exhibitions.

From this point of view, the theme chosen for Biennale Architettura 2014 by Rem Koolhaas was emblematic. The title "*Fundamentals*" emphasises a return to the origins of architecture and the study of the foundational and constituent elements of architecture and building construction. Koolhaas' intention was to reflect critically on the elements of architecture through a sort of working archive that was revealed in the Central Pavilion, entitled "*Elements of Architecture*". Here, the curator maniacally analysed the fundamental elements of our buildings, used in different ways in the different eras and places. It was a story tracing the global

history of every single element that makes up a building, through a substantial catalogue made up of 15 volumes that describe: balcony, ceiling, corridor, door, elevator, escalator, facade, fireplace, floor, ramp, roof, stair, toilet, wall, window (Koolhaas 2014). It was the construction of a veritable archive that led us to reflect on the influences, variations and similarities of the compositional elements that make up the architecture of our cities; elements that span time and, changing in language and style, construct every place in which we live. In the Biennale exhibition, Koolhaas created a specific room for each architectural element, comparing ancient, past, present and future examples, thus defining an archive that could be said to be finished but to be in continuous, and rapid, expansion.

The second revolution proposed by Koolhaas as the curator of Biennale 2014 was the invitation to the participants of national pavilions to work on a single theme, which transformed the Biennale into a single, great research laboratory. The theme '*Absorbing Modernity: 1914–2014*' asked each pavilion to recount the last 100 years of its country's history with reference to the idea of modern and contemporary architecture. Koolhaas built a true challenge. He had the strength and the vision to turn Biennale into an archive, a selection of parts, pieces, architectural elements with no more divisions between nations and styles and united by the idea of outlining the evolution of architecture.

### **The experience of Archives at Politecnico di Milano: Archivio Piero Bottoni and Fondazione Renzo Piano**

Many collections gathered and preserved in archives around the world are not usually available for consultation and are only displayed in exhibitions or special events. The idea of musealising an archive, which is the theme of this MIAW, is interesting precisely because it imagines 'opening' the archive space to the public by transforming it into a permanent exhibition space.

Politecnico di Milano hosts Archivio Piero Bottoni and Fondazione Renzo Piano, which are two archives of great value and with two very different stories. The projects of building these archives and the choices made on the way their contents can be displayed and used are particularly significant and delicate.

Archivio Piero Bottoni has a long history linked to the Bovisa Campus of Politecnico di Milano and is considered one of the most important collections

held at Politecnico, with over 90,000 documentary units<sup>2</sup>. It was established in 1983 by Giancarlo Consonni, Lodovico Meneghetti and Graziella Tonon. In 1999 their heirs confirmed the donation of the entire archive to Politecnico di Milano, which entrusted it to the Department of Architecture and Design (DiAP) and then, in 2012, to the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies.

The Archive documents and collects the entire activity of Piero Bottoni, with architectural designs and urban planning projects realised in the 20th century and also including drawings and original documents by other well-known authors such as Le Corbusier and Terragni. The Archive preserves various materials such as drawings, photographs and more than 30,000 written documents, as well as books, magazines and journals, rare brochures and a rich press collection of about 10,000 items. Finally, the Archive collects films, tape recordings, panels, posters, models, furniture and objects.

This is a heritage of great value and interest and in 2019 was declared to be of 'particularly important historical interest' by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities (Mibac) and the Archival and Bibliographic Superintendence of Lombardy. The Archive includes reading rooms and several showcases with models of Piero Bottoni's works.

Fondazione Renzo Piano is much more recent and since 25 November 2022 it is housed on the the first floor of Building 14 'Nave', designed by Gio Ponti. The Fondazione houses 'Archivio Renzo Piano Architetto 1964-1977' and a library. The new Foundation and the Archive donated by Renzo Piano are part of a larger transformation project that redesigned the open spaces between the Trifoglio and Nave buildings and with the planting of several trees and the construction of two new buildings by Renzo Piano (Setti, 2022).

Fondazione Renzo Piano has a long history and tradition. It was established in 2004 when Renzo Piano decided to create a non-profit institution for collecting the drawings and design materials of RPBW firm and to promoting architects'

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**2** For more information see <https://www.dastu.polimi.it/archivio-piero-bottoni/> and the website: <https://www.archiviobottoni.polimi.it/> which is, however, being updated as of the date this essay is published. Archivio Piero Bottoni is located at Bovisa Campus, via Durando 38/a; contact professors are Giancarlo Consonni, Renzo Riboldazzi and Graziella Tonon.

education<sup>3</sup>. The Foundation was established in Vesima, Genoa, at the foot of the Renzo Piano Building Workshop; it preserves archive materials, trains young generations and disseminates architecture as a technique and art of building. The construction of the archive began between 1990 and 2000, out of necessity for exhibitions and dissemination activities, after which the Foundation started to build a more structured programme for the preservation of archive material. The Foundation is the memory of the RPBW firm as it collects sketches, drawings and models from the early designs of the 1960s onwards, which is why the archived materials do not only tell the story of the RPBW's projects but also tells its working method. It is an enormous amount of material, which, to date, amounts to more than 5,000 models, about 100,000 hand-made sketches and drawings, more than 1,500 linear metres of documentation and more than 12 terabytes of digital documentation. There is also a photographic collection of 500,000 traditional media (slides, plates, prints and exposure films) that are related to designs developed between 1960 and 1999<sup>4</sup>. One can well understand the great resource that the archive represents in preserving information, and above all drawings, models and materials that can tell the stories of different projects over time (Ciccarelli 2017).

The Foundation is also a living space with visits and educational workshops for students. For university students and teachers, the Foundation offers visits that allow them to get to know and discover RPBW's working method and the history of its most significant projects. The visits are often guided by RPBW architects who share their experience or describe certain designs in more detail according to the requests of students and professors.

### **Archival Aptitude in Architecture Exhibitions**

An archival attitude can also be seen in some particular exhibitions that try to display daring objects or use archival strategies as a design tool (Gigliotti 2015; Nelson 1953; Pelkonen, Chan and David Andrew 2015). I am referring to two recent exhibitions held at Fondazione Prada in Milan. The first is *'Cere Anatomiche*.

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3 For more details and information see: <https://www.fondazionerenzopiano.org/it/>

4 Reference to the Method section of Fondazione Renzo Piano's website: <https://www.fondazionerenzopiano.org/it/page/il-metodo/>

*La Specola di Firenze di David Cronenberg*' (Anatomical Wax Sculptures. La Specola di Firenze according to David Cronenberg), which collected a selection of the anatomical wax sculptures preserved at La Specola, one of Europe's oldest science museums. Specola is a kind of archive of anatomical wax sculptures (around 1,400) made between the 18th and 19th centuries, which constituted a true scientific treatise, illustrating the anatomy of the human body with no direct observation of corpses. The archive is put on display in the Foundation's spaces with a selection of thirteen wax sculptures and a series of copies of anatomical drawings collected in a series of showcases, showing the most intimate aspects of the human body and, at the same time, their scientific roots. No less significant in terms of the relation between archive, display and selection is the exhibition currently running at Fondazione Prada entitled *Paraventi. Folding screens from the 17th to the 21st Century*'. Here, in contrast to the previous case, it is the exhibition itself that builds an archive, collecting a fine selection of screens, curated by Nicholas Cullinan, which traces the contaminations between East and West in the design of these artefacts. The exhibition layout designed by SANAA traces the history and the artists who, over the centuries, have imagined the evolution of screens, designing models and prototypes. The display alternates between a series of curved plexiglas elements housing a contemporary selection of screens and a chronological sequence on the upper floor, which brings together fine examples designed by artists and architects. The exhibition thus becomes a sort of open archive that can be visited and is capable of showing the evolution of a precious object. As is the case in many exhibitions, the selection actually allows an archive to be built around an element or theme and defines the way to observe and learn.

The journey into archives and their projects is often a journey into the life of each architect or the institution that decided to preserve the materials; the archive is also a place that allows us to get to know a work or the activity of an institution and, therefore, has a value in terms of dissemination and transmission of knowledge. Designing an archive today means considering very different aspects: the need for protection and care of the materials as well as the possibility of creating flexible spaces that can open up to the public.

In this MIAW2023 edition, therefore, the choice was made to imagine and design the future of archives, starting with some of the central institutions for

the city of Milan, which increasingly need to collect, preserve and organise a large quantity of documents and materials. The title of this edition highlights that the archive means preserving memory. It is also important to recognise that contemporary archives have a certain aptitude for transformation and increasingly opening their doors to become places of exchange and research.

This reflection on the different forms and themes of the archive, which is not only a collection of drawings or designs as in the case of Triennale, has been made possible by five sites and sponsors: Municipality of Milan, Corriere della Sera, Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Museo del costume di Palazzo Morando. This series of projects describes different ways of interpreting the theme of the contemporary archive and provides a new perspective on the approach to an urgent and interesting design issue.

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MIAW 2023 Workshop students visiting the Corriere della Sera Archives



MIAW 2023 Workshop students visiting the Corriere della Sera Archives



# 06. AUTHORS PROFILES

**Francesca Belloni** is an architect with a PhD in Architectural Composition (2007). Currently, she is researcher in Architectural and Urban Design at the ABC Department, Politecnico di Milano. She is the author of several articles and essays and of some books. Beside her research activities, she is a designer of several architectural proposals and has taken part in numerous competitions.

**Tommaso Brighenti** (Parma, 1985), architect, PhD, Researcher in Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering (DABC) of the Politecnico di Milano.

**Helder Casal Ribeiro** is a Portuguese architect graduated from FAUP in 1992 where obtained also his Ph.D. (2013). Since 1999 he lectures in Design Studio of FAUP and is currently an auxiliary professor and head professor of 1st year Design Studio in Master Course. He is also a visiting professor at Politecnico di Milano in Mantova campus and in ABC Ph.D programme of Leonardo Campus. He develops professional activity since 1992. Has received National Award IHRU 2008\_Construction for Social Housing Project in Porto.

**Paolo Cascone** is an AA-trained architect with a Ph.D. at the intersection of environmental engineering and sustainable architecture. He is the founding director of CODESIGNLAB and Senior Lecturer in Architecture and Environmental Design at the University of Westminster in London, where he is also leading research on eco-digital construction and off-grid housing solutions. His work has been exhibited and published widely. He is the scientific director of the African Fabbers project

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**Antje Freiesleben** born in Sulzbach-Rosenberg, studied architecture at Hochschule der Künste of Berlin from 1985 to 1993. In 1994 with Johannes Modersohn she founded the Modersohn & Freiesleben studio. Since 1995 she has been a member of the Chamber of Architects of Berlin and from 1998 to 2004 collaborated with the Department of Urban Planning and Design of UDK. She has been an invited professor in various prominent institutions such as the Bauhaus University in Weimar and University of Siegen.

**Filipe Magalhães** (Porto, 1987) graduated in architecture at Faculdade de Arquitectura do Porto. He collaborated with Harry Guggler in Basel and Sanaa in Tokyo. Filipe co-founded Fala in 2013 and is currently a phd researcher at FAUP. Besides his current teaching positions in Lisbon and Milan, Filipe is regularly invited as a teacher, guest critic and lecturer to various international schools and institutions. Fala's work has been exhibited and published widely in biennials, single and collective exhibitions and printed media.

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**Francesco Martelli** Director of the Citadel of Archives of the Municipality of Milan

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**Ruzanna Meliksetyan** (1999), is an architect, holds a Master's degree in Architecture and Urban Design from Politecnico di Milano. Previously studied in National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia. Since 2022, has been actively collaborating with ABC Department as a teaching assistant and for other research activities.

**Eduardo Pesquera González** born in Santander in 1964, architect, graduate of E.T.S Madrid (Madrid University) in 1989 with honours. Grant holder of the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome in 1994/95. Since 1991, partner and co-founder of « dMPU arquitectos » with Jesús Ulargui and Sergio de Miguel until 1999 when he founds « up arquitectos ». Associate Professor of the Department of Architectonic Projects of the Madrid E.T.S since 1995.

**Michele Porcelluzzi** is an architect and PhD candidate in Architectural, Urban and Interior Design at Politecnico di Milano. His research activity is focused on the concept of collectiveness in architectural and urban design. He is a member of ILA&UD – International Laboratory for Architecture & Urban Design – and a founding member of the research project Assume There's a Landscape.

**Giulia Setti** is an architect, PhD, Assistant Professor of Architectural and Urban Design at DASTU Department, Politecnico di Milano. Her research focuses on design strategies to reuse industrial or productive architectures, and to the contemporary public spaces, with particular interest in the design transformations underway in Milan.

**Claudia Tinazzi** (Verona 1981) architect, Ph.D. in Architectural Composition, is a researcher in Architectural and Urban Design at the ABC Department of the Politecnico di Milano. Her research activity concerned the figure of Aldo Rossi, since 2015 she has been dealing with the topic of the architecture of schools.

**Francesca Tramma** Head of the Historical Archive of the Corriere della Sera Foundation

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