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Architectonics of the National Library of Kosovo



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Архитектурная Бионика, in which Mutnjaković's vision of the city follows the chapter with the Soleri's "arcology".

This meeting is about the second act of the drama.

But this is just literature.

To get in touch with the hero of the story, Rilind invited me in the autumn of 2021 to give a lecture in Pristina on one of our educational works in progress at the Politecnico di Milano on the theme of the completion of the unfinished Campus of the University of Pristina by Baskim Femi, Bogdan Bogdanovic and Andrija Mutnjaković, which in our imagination was linked to the Campus Martius project by Giovan Battista Piranesi.

On that occasion, I finally could perceive with my senses the enveloping emotions that the spatial story of the Library can arouse in its entirety.

At that moment, the sense of drama was revealed: partly from the discourses heard at Pristina University, and partly from Andrija's account during our first meeting in his Studio Museum about the criticism directed at the Library project because of its "Ottomanizing" domes – although Andrija told me it was more of a reference to a prototype out of time like those of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. During that journey in Pristina, I also visited the Ottoman old towns of Pristina and Prizren and the "megastructural" centre of Yugoslavian Pristina.

The Library resulted to my eyes as the catalyst for many identities, which the author intelligently wanted to evoke and represent in his work.

The "facture" of the building and its spatial-planimetric matrix are expressions of the neo-avant-garde (the optical mesh of the brise soleil and the proto-computational layout of the plan).

Its appearance, however, is ambiguously vernacular as the domes are repeated metrically and rhythmically with a parametric logic that translates an articulated spatial and functional program.

Its interiors are those of a Diocletian's Palace, in the form of a City. But the Library could also be the Temple – of the ideal city of Croatian architects who worked in Italy during the Renaissance, on which Andrija worked so much in several of his books.

In its entirety, the Library building is the witness of an idea of a bio-urban city that is yet to come and that is there, waiting to be built – hopefully – by future generations, and that this book by Rilind Cocaj seems to hope for.

Foreword

Luca Monica

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Mutnjaković's Yugoslav architecture

This study by Rilind Cocaj on Andrija Mutnjaković is part of an ongoing series of research within the PhD program in Architectural Composition at IUAV University of Venice. Supervised primarily by Luciano Semerani, this research focuses on the architecture of some of the most significant figures in Yugoslavian architecture. The interest in this area is driven by a figurative and cultural affinity with the roots of the School of Venice, reflected in three fundamental characteristics.

The first characteristic is rooted in a geopolitical proximity to a post-war context that sought a unique interpretation of modernity and social commitment, bridging architecture and democracy, in some respects similar to a vision sometimes sought in different forms also in Italy.

The second characteristic is an architectural research that retains its original, even ancestral, qualities, characteristics between figuration and typology, in a reference to the tradition placed in visual signs and even very distant memories that are striking in their immediacy.

Third, for a persistence of formal research influenced between the folds of a Viennese Secession that transcends into the European avant-garde and contemporary times.

These architects have in fact built a genealogical arc of original coherence: Jože Plečnik (1872-1957, edited by Federica Zanco); Edvard Ravnikar (1907-1993, edited by Filippo Bricolo); Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010, edited by Elena Re Dionigi). In fact, this architect and this architecture of the National Library of Kosovo in Pristina (1971-1982), conceived within the Yugoslav Federation, was missing to continue the investigation towards different generations.

Architecture and geopolitics

As is known, the independence of the Yugoslav Federation dates back to 1945, with a clear socialist orientation originating from the partisan liberation war, with interesting characteristics unique in Europe. This period lasted until 1991, ending in a war that divided the federation into several states, leading to deep and cruel ethnic divisions, in a so-called "balkanization" process that only stabilized in 1999.

A key text for understanding this beginning is Alberto Mambriani's book *L'architettura moderna nei paesi balcanici*, (Modern Architecture in the Balkan Countries), published in 1969. It was part of an intriguing series on contemporary architecture curated by Leonardo Benevolo, aimed at exploring marginal and distant contexts, integrating the most current architectural trends and figures with the historical and traditional backdrop of the region. This approach prevents notable architectural achievements from being isolated within contemporary magazines. This text by Mambriani predates the National Library and the work of Mutnjaković. It emerged from the crucible of IUAV in Venice under Samonà and the enduring connections of that school with the neighboring Balkan region. The book seeks to uncover a tradition that is both noble and rural, almost provisional, and perhaps even nomadic, seeking a courtly, with a new political and democratic conception, devoted to a European, popular, shared, but also necessarily modern dimension, included in the figurative experiences of the post-war post-avant-garde.

All this seems to configure the right premise for Mutnjaković's work and the architecture of the Library. Overall, the Yugoslav context described by Mambriani appears as a continuous exploration of constructional-structural

experimentation. It involves the discovery of the expressive and serial capabilities of prefabrication, redirecting what typically passes as reduction and simplification within the field of industrialized building production into a consistently new effort and challenge. In this sense, I believe, the very intriguing "structuralist" phase of artistic figuration during those years has served the young Yugoslavia, facing European aesthetic research, translated internally into a material, constructive, serial, multiple, modular revision of a different concept of prefabrication.

But this principle also extends outwards, in a design method established on the urban scale, which in fact Mambriani rightly describes with the research on Vjenceslav Richter's Sinturbanizam, from 1964, with its serial pyramid configurations, oriented towards a typically multi-scalar figure of architecture, based on the geometry and constructive strength of the "line", according to a conceptual reduction that increasingly leads to the intersection of architectural research with artistic research.

The experience in this sense of the Zagreb group, Exat 51 — Eksperimentalni ateljer, active from 1950 to 1956 and of which Richter was part. Similarly noteworthy is the Contemporary Yugoslav Architecture exhibition held in Ljubljana in 1959. Overall, there was a pursuit of a distinct international identity, shaped by the unique context of Yugoslavia.

This context brought together diverse ethnic groups into a common cultural circuit, highlighted differences among architectural schools in major centers such as Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Belgrade, and included multiple generations of architects often returning from European experiences.

In this context, this study by Rilind Cocaj explains well the subsequent development by Mutnjaković with his conception of Biourbanism. Like Richter, Mutnjaković aligned with the socialist organization of the city and society, but introduced a different and perhaps even more original figurative impetus. His approach displayed a greater physiological

tension towards the nature of urban relationships, emphasizing a cinematic sense of movement over time, as well as a foundational and new aesthetic tension. This is particularly evident in his projects for Tel Aviv (1963), the Youth Center (1966), Osijek (1968), and Zagreb (1971).

This melting pot would then continue over the years, even if outside the global mainstream. However, the National Library of Pristina appears in 2008 - the first time it appeared to me - on the pages of the magazine "Domus" (n. 920), with large pages, illustrated as an absolutely contemporary work also due to the beautiful dematerialized design of the grid of facade. A work here no longer necessarily referring to the cultural context of the former Yugoslavia, but already within a now mature transition and redemption phase in the new structure of the Balkan states and their possible architecture. The work was noticed and taken from the contemporary exhibition *Balkanology: New Architecture and Urban Phenomena in South Eastern Europe*, held in Basel in 2008, in a situation of that region of institutional collapse, with the emergence of a deregulation, of the so-called Turbo Urbanism, according to new types of urban growth, with new mixtures of spatiality, visual aspects communicated by the media, migratory movements, new economy, all themes that still threaten the global world.

In contrast, the important exhibition "Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980," held at MoMA in New York in 2018, focused on exploring Yugoslavia's "interrupted modernity". It sought to redeem this golden period of Yugoslav culture and democracy, taking place a few decades after the Balkan crisis and amid evolving European geopolitical dynamics.

Original characters and modernity

Even looking at the architecture itself of the Mutnjaković Library, nomadic architecture, in its iridescent cloak, in its domes, in its incredible internal decorative apparatus, appears

as a constant search for original and archaic characteristics of architecture.

In Mutnjaković's projects the theme of storytelling, of writing even, is present, as if each project invents a new story with visions in which a world of architectural memories is found.

After all, the Vienna School of art history itself had undertaken a rereading starting from the depths of the life of forms, from their transmigrations and nomadisms, from Alois Riegl and above all from Josef Strzygowsky, with his thesis of the migration of the form of origin, before and different from Rome, to be found in an anti-classical circuit, between India, Iran, Syria, Armenia, the Scandinavian countries.

As in the Italian architectural culture of the post-World War II period, in Yugoslavia as well, the relationship with history, heritage, and tradition remains fundamental. Alberto Mambriani's book necessarily retraces its ancient features, and Mutnjaković, in the finest academic tradition, bases his research studies and writings on the architecture of the most classical Central Italian Renaissance.

Architecture as kinetic and programmed art

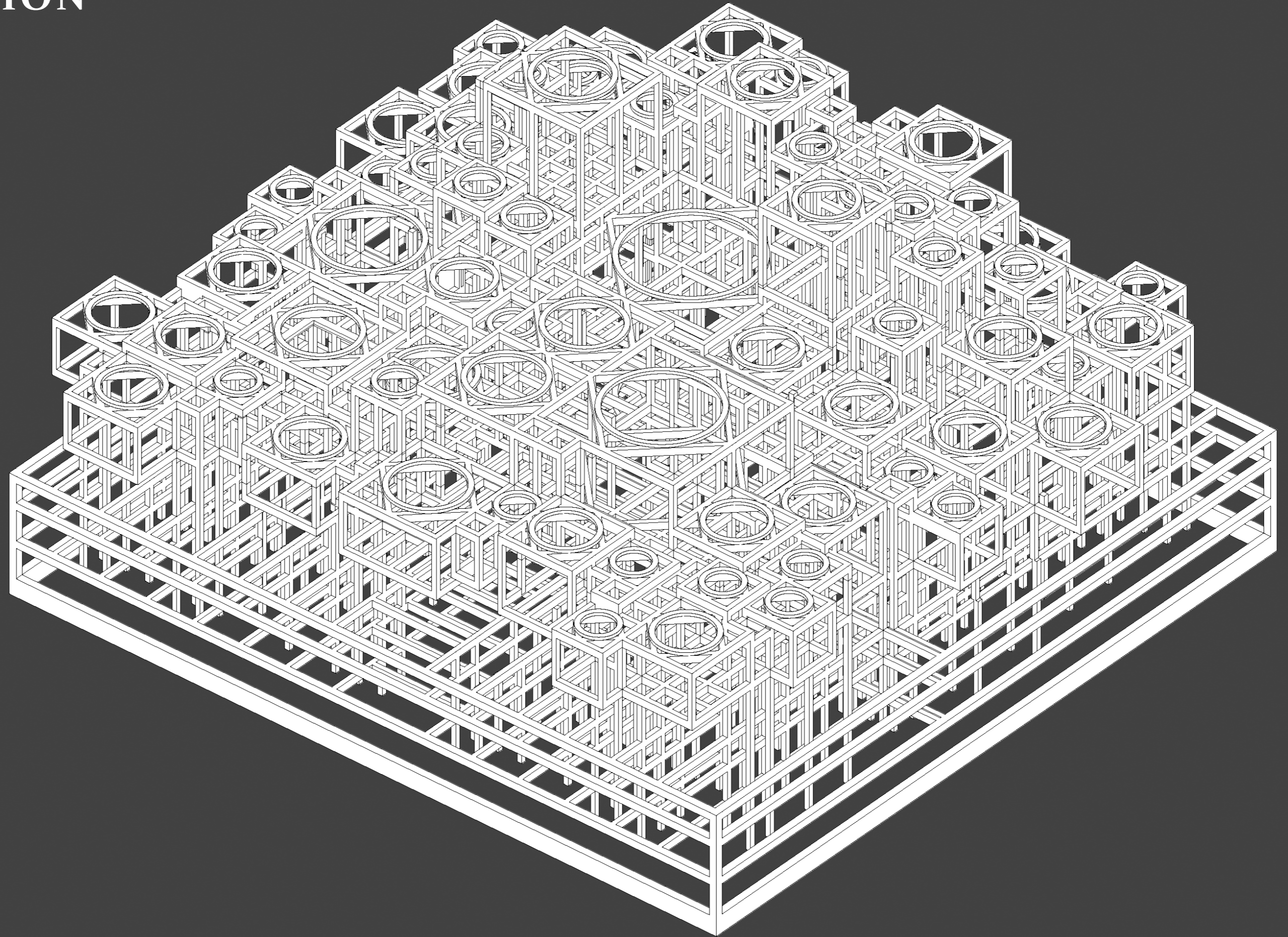
The figurative and visual laws of Biourbanism, rooted in an organic geometry, appear to draw inspiration from the Viennese Secession, full of symbolism, and in this sense they align with a very understandable figurative structure found in the architectural practice of the School of Venice. It is no coincidence that Rilind Cocaj focuses his research on investigating and reconstructing the surprising connections between Mutnjaković's architecture and the circle of Yugoslav avant-garde artists of that era. As a continuation of the Exat 51 group, the New Tendencies group, active in Zagreb from 1961 to 1973, served as a crucible for these connections. Through a series of conferences and exhibitions, it acted as a catalyst for an international circuit, exploring common experiences in optical, kinetic, and programmed art. During this time, there was

a deep cultural reflection on the role of art within production and consumption systems, as well as on the essential reasons for applied arts, design, and architecture as ethical and aesthetic necessities. Enzo Mari, from Italy, with his work as an artist and designer, participated in these New Tendencies meetings. In a catalog essay for the group's fourth edition in 1969, he emphasized the social role and commitment to a more coherent relationship between aesthetics, production, needs, values, and the social meaning of the work, encapsulated in the "artisan" approach to industrial design. In this sense, an important link was opened between Yugoslavia and Italy. Certainly, the common origins lay in the experiences of the European avant-garde, starting with Theo Van Doesburg's 1930 manifesto of Concrete Art. This movement was continued by Max Bill in the post-war period, bridging the figurative relationship between abstract and concrete art, and perhaps from there extending into architecture through Ernesto Nathan Rogers. Rogers' essay, *Situazione dell'arte concreta*, (1951), illustrates how the connection between "abstract" and "concrete" art tends to represent a constructive action in painting, sculpture, and architecture within their artisanal design crafts. A principle of modernity excludes any representational elements other than the "work" itself through signs in material, lines, cuts, folds, the optical material of color, and transparency as the substance of space, all instruments of a new post-war democratic spatial construction, in its industry, in an avowedly "socialist" sense.

Along this line a vast and dense horizon of literature opens up, on which however the connections towards architecture should be taken up again. An art that this investigation into Mutnjaković forcefully demands.

FIGURE 1 (PAGES 14–15)
Structural Conception
Digital reconstruction by Rilind
Cocaj, based on the design
submitted for the National
Library of Kosovo by Andrija
Mutnjaković, 1971–1982

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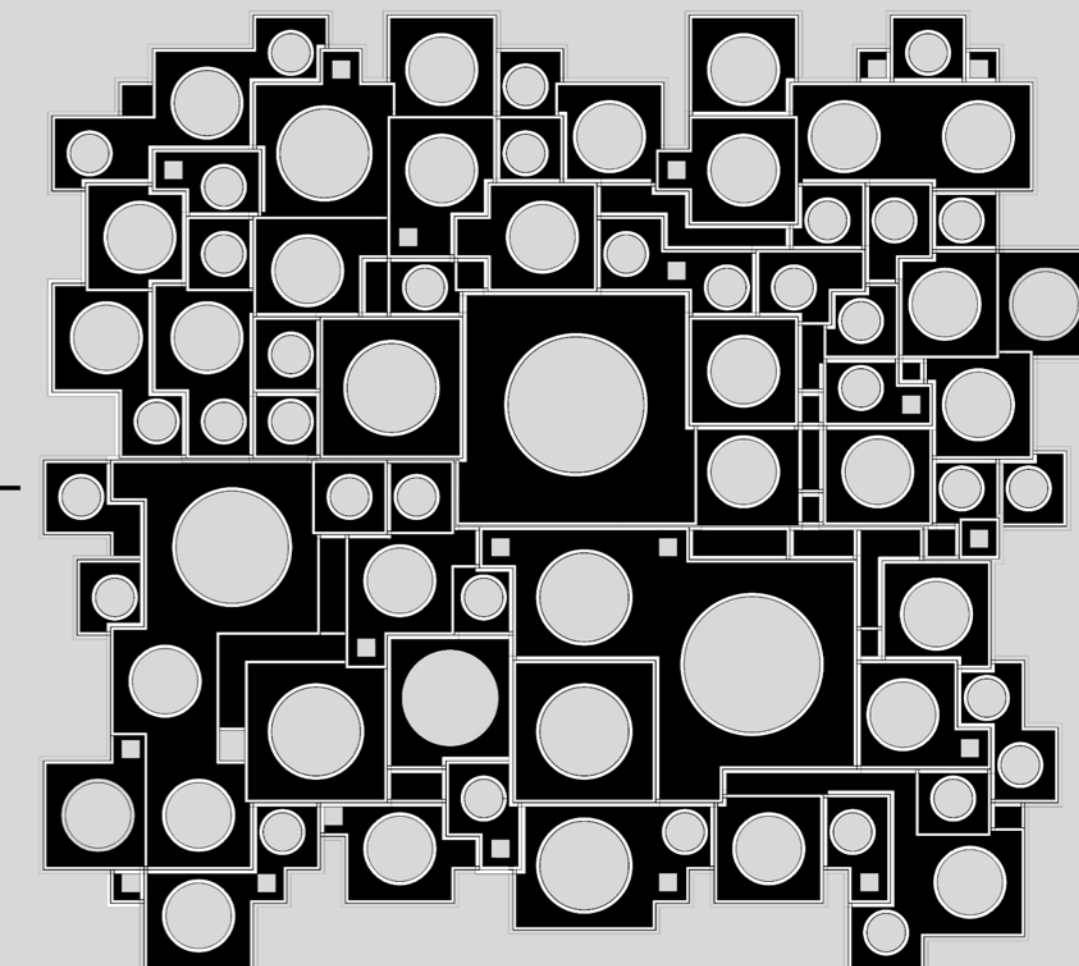
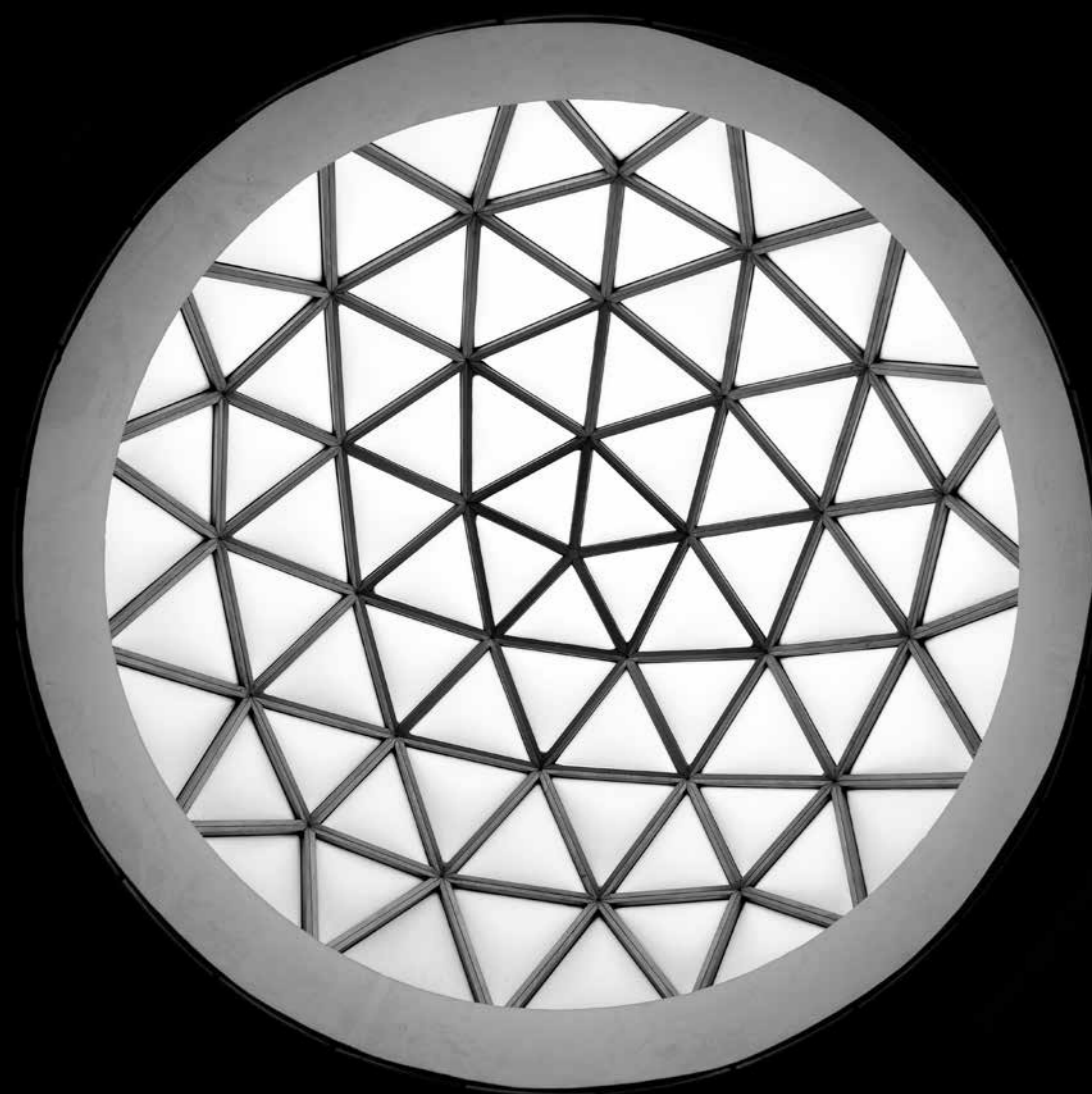
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In 2022, Andrija Mutnjaković donated to the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts his studio located at 38 Milka Trnina Street in Zagreb. The donation includes his entire personal estate and all the valuable materials, including sketches and scale models of architectural projects, extensive archival documentation, a large professional library, and numerous artistic and designer objects. Combined with the interior decorated in a highly distinct fashion, the studio and all its belongings synthesize all arts. The studio and all the materials belonging to it have thus become a separate unit of the museum holdings, bearing the name The Andrija Mutnjaković Collection of the Croatian Museum of Architecture of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.



Architectonics of the
National Library of Kosovo

Architectonics of the National Library of Kosovo

Rilind Cocaj

Andrija Mutnjaković creates the library in such a fashion that the building and the exterior belonging to it melt into one. As in any other palace, here urbanistic and architectural excellence interweave as well; this ought to preserve the building's universality and ability to last and endure, independently of the time of building. For Mutnjaković, every building is a palace, and the palace is the city – beauty, and sincerity both to the location and to architecture lie in this synergy. Construction, materialization, and spatiality imply constant exploring of the interrelations between the content and the ambiance values.

Borka Bobovec