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Aims and Scope

Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture brings together the best critical work on the analysis of all types of spaces. Interiors play a crucial role in the construction of identity and they represent power and control through the contestation or transgression of boundaries. Homes, offices, shopping malls, schools and hospitals, churches and restaurants are all embedded with meaning and evince particular, multi-sensory and psychological responses. This journal will investigate the complexities of the interior environment's orchestration and composition and its impact on the inhabitant from a trans-disciplinary perspective.

The interior is the journal's central focus and contributions from interior design practitioners and theorists are welcome. It will embrace perspectives from a range of disciplines including anthropology, architecture, art and design history, cultural studies and visual culture, and it will place no limits in terms of either geography or chronology. The journal sets out to challenge divisions between theory and practice and aims to provide an essential forum for all those with an interest in the design, history and meaning of interiors.

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Exhibition Review

The Museum of the Twentieth Century, Milan: *Experience without Bombast*

Competition and Project – Group Rota:
Italo Rota (project leader), Emmanuele
Auxilia, Fabio Fornasari, Paolo Montanari;
Consultant Interior Design: Alessandro
Pedretti; Art Direction: Italo Rota and Fabio
Fornasari; Interior Manager and Lighting:
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Reviewed by Pierluigi Salvadeo

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The museum's traditional role – as a place for looking at things – is now in crisis, challenged by the newer museums as active venues, forever under development, constantly being transformed. Today's museums are no longer closed-in spaces, but engage wholeheartedly with the city's dynamism and the transformations wrought by new communication systems. Vague boundaries and open-plan spatial arrangements are fundamental – along with the curators' strategic choices. Following that logic, we could argue that a museum is not so much a building as a theme; that its function should be to make room for an understanding of history as well as displaying the contemporary world.

The new Museum of the Twentieth Century, designed by Italo Rota, occupies what had been the Palazzo

dell'Arengario (designed in the 1930s by Griffini, Magistretti, Muzio, and Portaluppi). The museum's interior design contrasts sharply with its arrogant exterior monumental style and Fascist rhetoric. The Palazzo dell'Arengario was built to replace the so-called "long block" of the Royal Palace, which had been demolished in 1936 with a view to a definitive reorganization of the area around Milan's cathedral, the Duomo. Designed as a backdrop, opposite the arcade leading to La Scala, the palazzo's architecture features round arches faced in Candoglia marble on a base pierced by rectangular portals bearing panels with an interwoven plant motif by the sculptor Arturo Martini.

The Fascist Arengario is an established presence, a *fait accompli* of a building that inescapably imposes a certain order on its urban surroundings; the work of Italo Rota, on the other hand, is designed more as an open arrangement that rejects typecasting, with more nuanced boundaries between inside and out. They have devised something capable of establishing a different order, superimposing itself on what was there before and offering Milan different connections of meaning and a new, outward-moving energy. The very notion of "the museum" is transformed, embracing a new vision that evolves through a disjointed series of spatial devices, each conceived as a site rich in cultural, emotional, and sensory qualities, where "looking at" gives way to "engaging with."

The experience begins as we move upwards along a spiral ramp that clings to a composite construction leading from the level of the Metro all the way up to the panoramic terrace overlooking the Piazza del Duomo (Figure 1). Just a few steps in from the entrance, along this ramp, we suddenly find ourselves faced with that emblematic image of the twentieth century, Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's



Figure 1

The entrance construction and spiral ramp.

Fourth Estate looming like a giant screen at the start of the whole museum.

A few steps further on and the long vista of the Sala delle Colonne opens up before us, with works by Boccioni and the Futurists. Even the ordered perspective of this great hall, with its strict rhythm of tall marble pillars, crumbles in the broken complexity of the design. New, softer spatial structures (light and shadow, color, furnishings) appear to take over the preexisting historic framework with a relaxed expansiveness. The walls on which the paintings hang, for instance, are cloth-covered – soft not only to feel but also to look at, an engagement both tactile and visual. The sense of immersion in the space of the artwork is also heightened by constant interruptions to our line of sight, with intervening display partitions breaking up the space and inviting us to pause or change direction. The linear sequence of ceiling lights illuminates the barrel vaulting to give a remarkable sense of separation between vertical and horizontal. Some of the furniture – the small display tables, for instance – also interrupts the line of sight, suggesting a domestic scene (Figure 2). As we continue, all parts of the museum are designed as “theatres of



Figure 2
The Hall of Pillars – Sala delle Colonne.

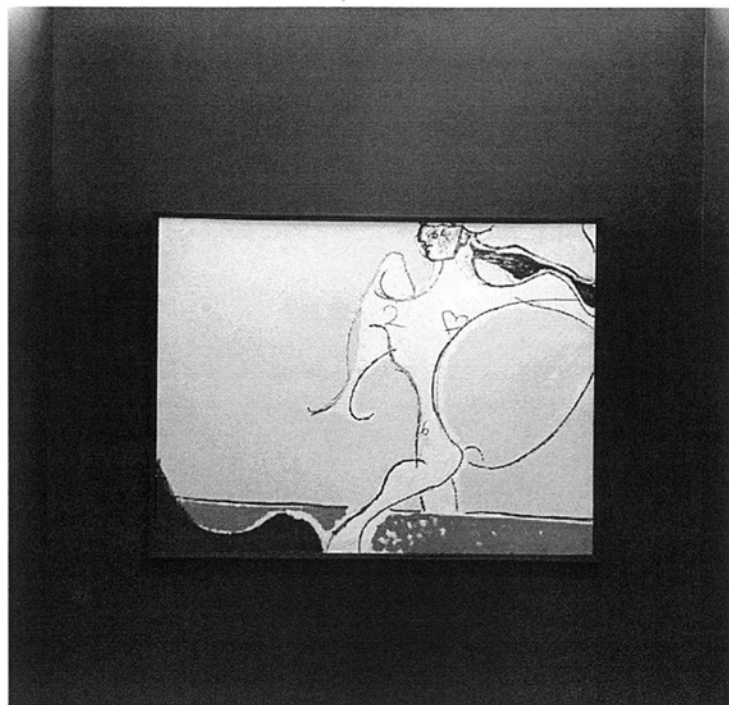
remembrance," each offering a possible experience of fact or feeling. No work is enshrined; on the contrary, we can observe these paintings, sculptures, and *objets d'art* as if perambulating the bourgeois salons of early-twentieth-century Milan.

Culturally, the museum has carefully chosen to champion originals against reproductions, real experience against virtual – a curiosity in an age that consumes images speedily and uses simulated interactive worlds to twist reality by suggesting other ways of inhabiting space. This demand for reality brings the city in to join the museum's performance: windowed resting-places alternate with display areas and frame the design of Piero Portaluppi's 1928 paving of the Piazzetta Reale, or details of the Palazzo Reale facade nearby (Figure 3). Even some of the artworks get the same treatment. For example, Osvaldo Licini's 1950–2 work *Rebel Angel on a Yellow Background* is placed in a wall recess like a sepulchral side-chapel lit by daylight. "I wanted to take some blue from the sky," wrote Carlo Scarpa of the light brought into his gallery for Canova's figures, and it seems Italo Rota, mindful of the wisdom of that Italian master of museum design, felt the same (Figure 4).



Figure 3

The paving of the Piazzetta Reale (Piero Portaluppi, 1928), seen from the niche window of the long block, second floor.

**Figure 4**

Rebel Angel on a Yellow Background by Osvaldo Licini (1950–2).

Our visit culminates in a balcony area from where we can see, through a smoked-glass window giving a curious sense of depth, Lucio Fontana's airborne neon structure against the backdrop of the far side of the Piazza del Duomo, seen against the light: a moment not to be missed, as the sight of our own building, mirrored from outside, completes the tour. Here we witness – especially at night – what Robert Venturi would have called a combination of emblems and buildings, architecture and symbolism, form and meaning (Figures 5 and 6).

This review of thoughts and references should also have a word of praise for the escalators that serve the museum's various levels (Figure 7). At first sight they may seem to clash with the museum's sympathetic design and careful positioning of artworks, but further reflection reminds us that the escalator, invented at the end of the nineteenth century, has every right to join the rich chorus of references that make this museum a true theater of the twentieth century.



Figure 5
Lucio Fontana's airborne neon structure (1951) against the backdrop of the far side of the Piazza del Duomo.



Figure 6
View of the Museum of the Twentieth Century from the Piazza del Duomo – the airborne neon structure by Lucio Fontana can be seen against the light.



Figure 7
The escalators to the balcony level.

INTERIORS

Design, Architecture, Culture

Notes for Contributors

Principal articles should be of a length between 5,000 and 7,000 words, including notes and references, with 4–8 images. Each article should include a three-sentence biography of the author(s), an abstract of up to 250 words and 5–8 keywords. Exhibition and book reviews are normally between 750 and 1,000 words in length unless the author is engaging a comparison/discussion of multiple titles. The Publishers will require an electronic as well as a hard copy of any contributions (please indicate clearly what word-processing program has been used). Berg accepts most programs with the exception of Clarisworks. *Interiors* invites persons wishing to organize a special issue devoted to a single topic to submit a proposal comprising a 100-word description of the topic, together with a list of potential contributors and paper subjects. Proposals are accepted only after review by the journal editors and in-house editorial staff at Berg. If accepted, the individual may be approached to act as guest editor for the special issue.

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