

The Bookseries *Architectural Design and History* intends to explore the relationships between architectural design and the contemporary city, with a particular focus on the contexts where urban transformations relate to the preservation and promotion of historical heritage. By intersecting various theories, techniques and practices, the contributions aim at unfolding the complex identity of the architectural culture, fostering connections and exchanges among different disciplines, and enhancing a strategical and evolutionary conception of architectural heritage.

The Bookseries is promoted by the Polo Territoriale di Mantova of Politecnico di Milano, which is the seat of the UNESCO Chair in Architectural Preservation and Planning in World Heritage Cities.

All the published volumes undergo a blind peer-review process, which the Scientific Committee manages through the cooperation of qualified external referees.

**Scientific Committee**

Federico Bucci (Politecnico di Milano, Italy)

Jean-Philippe Garric (Université Paris-1, France)

Marcela Hurtado (Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Chile)

Guillermo Aranda Mena (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia)

Yael Moria (Shenkar College, Israel)

Eduardo Souto de Moura (Politecnico di Milano, Italy)

Elisa Valero Ramos (Universidad de Granada, Spain)

Jian Long Zhang (Tongji University, China)

Architectural Design and History

# Spaces of Memory. Commentaries on 21st Century Buildings

edited by  
Luigi Spinelli

**FrancoAngeli**

**Spaces of Memory. Commentaries  
on 21st Century Buildings**  
edited by Luigi Spinelli

Editorial coordination  
Elena Montanari

Graphic design  
Tassinari/Vetta

Copyright © 2020 by FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, Italy.

| Ristampa            | Anno                                    |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 | 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025-2026-2027 |

L'opera, comprese tutte le sue parti, è tutelata dalla legge sui diritti d'autore. Sono vietate e sanzionate (se non espressamente autorizzate) la riproduzione in ogni modo e forma (comprese le fotocopie, la scansione, la memorizzazione elettronica) e la comunicazione (ivi inclusi a titolo esemplificativo ma non esaustivo: la distribuzione, l'adattamento, la traduzione e la rielaborazione, anche a mezzo di canali digitali interattivi e con qualsiasi modalità attualmente nota od in futuro sviluppata).

Le fotocopie per uso personale del lettore possono essere effettuate nei limiti del 15% di ciascun volume dietro pagamento alla SIAE del compenso previsto dall'art. 68, commi 4 e 5, della legge 22 aprile 1941 n. 633. Le fotocopie effettuate per finalità di carattere professionale, economico o commerciale o comunque per uso diverso da quello personale, possono essere effettuate a seguito di specifica autorizzazione rilasciata da CLEARedi, Centro Licenze e Autorizzazioni per le Riproduzioni Editoriali ([www.clearedi.org](http://www.clearedi.org); e-mail [autorizzazioni@clearedi.org](mailto:autorizzazioni@clearedi.org)).

Stampa: Logo srl, sede legale: Via Marco Polo 8, 35010 Borgoricco (Pd).

|     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 6   | <b>Memory Exercises</b><br>Luigi Spinelli   | III. Memory and Architecture  |
|     | I. Memory and Design  |   |
| 20  | <b>Andrew Berman.</b><br><b>Memory and Discretion</b><br>Luca Cardani   | 210 <b>Elisa Valero Ramos.</b><br><b>Two or Three Things</b><br><b>I Know About Her Work</b><br>Luigi Spinelli  |
| 38  | <b>Renzo Piano.</b><br><b>Two American Art</b><br><b>Museums</b><br>Federico Bucci  | 232 <b>João Luís Carrilho da Graça.</b><br><b>Experimenting</b><br><b>with Permanence and</b><br><b>Transformation</b><br>Barbara Bogoni                  |
| 68  | <b>José Ignacio Linazasoro.</b><br><b>Matter and Memory</b><br><b>of the Built Environment</b><br>Renata Cristina Mazzantini    | 254 <b>Quintus Miller and</b><br><b>Paola Maranta.</b><br><b>Morphology of the Care</b><br>Vittorio Longheu   |
| 96  | <b>Paolo Zermani.</b><br><b>The Conscious Thriftiness</b><br>Massimo Ferrari  | 270 <b>Ricardo Bak Gordon.</b><br><b>Architecture as Inhabited</b><br><b>Space Between Past</b><br><b>and Future</b><br>Christian Campanella              |
| 112 | <b>Alberto Campo Baeza.</b><br><b>Construction as</b><br><b>a Manifesto of</b><br><b>Architectural Theory</b><br>Emilio Faroldi | IV. Memory and Interpretation   |
|     | II. Memory and Narration  |   |
| 136 | <b>Guido Canali.</b><br><b>The Semantic</b><br><b>Interpretation</b><br><b>of Displaying</b><br>Marco Borsotti                  | 294 <b>Fernando Tabuenca</b><br><b>and Jesús Leache.</b><br><b>Palimpsestic Architecture</b><br>Elena Montanari   |
| 164 | <b>Pierre-Louis Faloci.</b><br><b>Camera Obscurae</b><br><b>to Display</b><br><b>«Difficult Memories»</b><br>Federico Bucci     | 320 <b>Tony Fretton.</b><br><b>Calculated Ambiguity</b><br>Angelo Lorenzi   |
| 182 | <b>Philippe Prost.</b><br><b>«L'Espace du Vivant»</b><br><b>Between Memory</b><br><b>and Innovation</b><br>Elisa Boeri          | 342 <b>Renato Rizzi.</b><br><b>«To Be an Architect You</b><br><b>Must Be in the Grip of an</b><br><b>Obsession»</b><br>Claudia Tinazzi                    |
|     |   | 364 <b>Álvaro Siza Vieira and</b><br><b>Eduardo Souto de Moura:</b><br><b>A Dialogue on Architecture</b><br><b>and Memory</b><br>edited by Barbara Bogoni |
|     |   | 376 <b>Authors</b>  |

**Table of Contents**

# Memory Exercises

Luigi Spinelli

A book like this — an anthology of commentaries focused on the work of a selection of contemporary architects, belonging to the same generation, but educated in different geographic and cultural contexts — represents an opportunity to raise some questions about the relationship with the past.

How many variations can memory account for? And consequently, which interpretations of memory does contemporaneity offer?

Through the words of the following essays, at least four possible and practiced approaches emerge.

One possible answer is based on the use of memory in the construction of specific professional modalities, as if it was one of the many components that participate in the design process. This approach can be implemented with different attitudes. The discretion of Andrew Berman, the critical distance of Renzo Piano, the typological method of José Ignacio Linazasoro, the patient reflection of Paolo Zermani, the constructive idea of Alberto Campo Baeza, all seem to belong to this category.

Luca Cardani identifies two types of memory that can be detected in the work of Andrew Berman: the collective one, belonging to culture and to the understanding of places, and the personal one, pertaining to some architectural facts that guide the compositional work of the New York based architect, and intervening more or less unconsciously in this delicate process. In this intervention Cardani identifies an attitude of discretion, interpreted here as the capability of thought to judge with moderation and sense of measure. This attitude shows itself in simple architectural forms, characterized by calibrated relationships, which load spaces and places with meaning. In these terms, Berman's work outstands for the ability in giving a new character to the buildings, by modifying their interior spatiality through minor, controlled actions — spanning from partial additions or subtractions, to the transformation of single parts — that change the identity of the spaces.

Federico Bucci recounts two American stories, where the contexts of Renzo Piano's architecture are rooted in the memory of the protagonists. These episodes reveal the ability of the architect to maintain a critical distance in the design process, and thus to assign

memory with a role that is similar to the one played by design tools, and is particularly useful in measuring the value of the past without losing the capability to remain an observer of the present. The pragmatic work he develops, proceeding «piece by piece» — which is a codified aspect of his compositional attitude — is observed here in the expansion of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, an intelligent and fascinating interpretation of contemporary architectural domesticity, which has to be measured against the accumulation of European culture by American collectors. In parallel, in the expansion of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, technical and material solutions unanimously contribute to shape the spatiality of the exhibition machine, that displays history within the collection itself. The relationship with a philanthropic and passionate client such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, or the comparison with a master such as Louis Kahn, are directly connected to Piano's professional attitude. He perceives of and interprets the modularity of the proportions of the American architect through a refined play of references; rather than focusing on the legacy of his personal sign, Piano aims to answer these complex questions, through the international quality and reliability that distinguish his work, and that have conquered American patrons.

Conversely, the distance that connotes the attitude of José Ignacio Linazasoro places him in-between two antithetical approaches, the one focused on conservation and the other on compositional innovation. Linazasoro never backs up of engaging with the risks encompassed in the relationship with memory. As described by Renata Cristina Mazzantini, his rare attitude grounds on an equidistant position from classicism and the avant-garde and thus overcomes any distinction through the capability of weaving different values together. This ability builds on the method of the typological study, which is a solid basis for every design interpretation. Linazasoro's training, his bond with Aldo Rossi's analytical studies on urban fabrics, his understanding of ordinary construction, his passion and knowledge of the history of architecture, ground in the study of the typological process, where memory becomes a prerequisite for the design invention. The outcome of this attitude is a cultured method, that is particularly useful in the interventions on pre-existing architectures, and that is common to those who act drawing on the awareness of the distinct degrees of inter-

vention, i.e. of the distinctions between maintenance and exceptional transformations.

As critically analyzed by Massimo Ferrari, Paolo Zermani's projects show us a reflection on absolute values, interpreted with the patience of the observation practice and the related slowdown of time, that is a fundamental element in the study of history. The outcomes of this attitude can be observed starting from the first realized works, which he carried out through the collaboration with many masters (that characterize Zermani's path). These works show his profound bond with the fantastic landscape of his homeland, i.e. the Emilian agricultural countryside, in which he re-writes the liturgy of those architectures that establish the solid relationships with the place in a slower time; they highlight a rational coherence and a critical thinking skill, that coalesce in a firm approach to practice, resulting into a controlled lexicon made of solid, proportionate stereometric forms, sturdy volumes in baked clay and pedestals anchored by gravity, that seem to emerge from the earth, programmatically excluding lightness.

The reading of Alberto Campo Baeza's approach proposed by Emilio Faroldi is grounded on the understanding that, for the Spanish architect, architecture is a built idea. The thought and work of Campo Baeza both reside in the concept of tectonic «construction», interpreted as the foundational center of gravity and the final aspiration to which architecture must always address. This is a cohering point between the compositional moment and the constructive sphere — i.e. between intellectual and practical action — which in the architect's vision excludes a superficial idealistic approach or the entrusting to formal solutions provided by technique. Beside being an architect, Alberto Campo Baeza is a professional architect: the realization of his architectures allows him to develop a compositional theory. In line with the approach of the Madrid school, that focuses on the relationship between design theory and practice, as well as with the contemporary commitment on the fronts of professional experience, criticism and teaching, he appoints his architectures as a programmatic manifesto of architectural theory. He therefore fits the profile of a humanist architect, i.e. a cultured man who establishes a profound bond with the classical values and the memory of the archi-



tectural discipline and, at the same time, adopts a free interpretation of contemporary technical knowledge.

A second possible answer to the questions explored in this volume is provided by those contemporary architects who have studied and invented special narrative modalities, spanning from the more traditional ones to others that are particularly innovative, taking advantage from the enhancement of communication technologies and the interplay with different disciplines. I am referring here to Guido Canali's «staging», Pierre-Louis Faloci's narrative, and Philippe Prost's use of historical research.

As interpreted by Marco Borsotti, Guido Canali's method is rooted in the exhibition design tradition founded by the Italian masters during the 20th century. In particular it results from the intertwine between this inherited mastery, a functional efficiency and the formal elegance of its outcomes. In the rooms of the north wing of the *Palazzo della Pilotta* in Parma, in the *Museo del Duomo* in Milan, in the reuse project for the ancient hospital of *Santa Maria della Scala* in Siena and in the *Museo delle Statue Stele Lunigianesi* in Pontremoli, with his great sensitivity Guido Canali grasps the material essence of the historical places and animates them with a seemingly silent and essential language — although actually highly significant and characterized by aesthetic strictness. Fostered by the personal belief that «museums must be pleasant places where people might have fun», Canali pursues his own interpretation of what can be called a «staging of the exhibition». In this approach, each act enhances the unexpressed potential of the historical context by developing exhibit design solutions which enable the collections to interpret their context, hence manipulating the evocative power of what the architect himself defines as «semantic interpretation of exhibiting».

This is an alternative narrative method to the one developed by Pierre-Louis Faloci, whose practice can be recognized as part of a specific research line in which the memory of war events is inscribed into the public space through the valorization of the related disturbing legacies and material traces scattered throughout the European territory. This task results in the realization of new monuments and museums, based on local situations, which contribute to enhance both memory

and knowledge on the global sphere. Federico Bucci reminds us of how this contemporary chapter of museum design, which concerns precisely the display of «difficult memories», focuses on two fundamental aspects. On the one hand, this process entails a significant revision of traditional exhibition methods and tools; on the other, it draws on a renewal of their relationships with the places where these events took place, which are responsible for the conservation and the staging of the narration. In the research carried out by Faloci within this framework, a prominent role is played by the ability to build specific proposals aimed at enhancing peculiar places, and to develop a coherent disciplinary approach on the design of site-based museums.

Elisa Boeri examines some of the works by *Atelier d'Architecture Philippe Prost*, that has been frequently committed in the renovation of architectural pre-existences, especially those pertaining to the 18th and 19th centuries French industrial heritage, such as the *Hôtel de la Monnaie* — involving the hybridization of different functions in a still operative manufacture, where the workspace of 150 employees has been merged with new cultural, commercial and business activities — and on the *Cité des Électriciens* — a small settlement housing the miners' families in Bruay-la-Buissière, that was redeveloped through the addition of two museum spaces including the new *Centre d'interprétation*, and seven residential buildings. Together with the commemorative project of the «Ring of Memory» — the *Mémorial International Notre-Dame-de-Lorette* in Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, which is the latest episode strengthening the relationship Prost's work develops with the historic memory of the places —, these projects experiment with the theme of redevelopment with a coherent and profound sensitivity towards the memory of these specific sites and their inhabitants, based on a cultured and measured attitude, promoted by those who read history as one of the materials of the project. Drawing on a consistent historical research, the transformation of pre-existing sites is anticipated by a process of study and research on the specific site and on the local traditional building techniques.

A third approach to the contemporary interpretation of memory can be detected in the development of design practices based on the identification of specific themes related to a deeper understanding

of places; such themes are focused on the enhancement and characterization of a special attention towards the values they bear, which is turned into a work tool. The precision of Elisa Valero Ramos, the intuitive ability of João Luís Carrilho da Graça, Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta's forms of care, the attention to the habitability carried out by Ricardo Bak Gordon, all seem to refer to this category.

The writer's reading of Elisa Valero Ramos's work builds on her ability to redeem the constraints inevitably present in the events that lead to the realization of a project, by integrating in her solutions a logical appropriateness and an always essential sign, which is so precise as to become definitive. This attitude demonstrates self-confidence, a great capability in the management of the distribution layout of architectural spaces, and an ethical attention to the architect's role at the service of society. Valero Ramos operates on the quality of space with a remarkable precision, fostered by her particular sensitivity towards people's living areas, the main action field of which is the use of natural light, exercised through the ability to guide it technically by means of sophisticated control devices, and to expressly orient it in the relationship with surfaces and materials. In Elisa Valero Ramos' work, the theme of memory, expressed in the thorough understanding of the relationship between natural light and time, ensues from the coalescence of different experiences, including the sensitivity towards color, the recall of childhood spaces, and the daily contact with the city of Granada.

By adopting an empirical method, which in each context produces different outcomes, João Luís Carrilho da Graça selects the possible interpretations of the memory of the place according to the historical elements that it is important to conserve and exhibit in the contemporaneity. The inherent coherence of this method relies on the intuitive ability of the architect to sensitively recognize the past and present traces and to enhance them with a poetical vision. Barbara Bogoni analyzes the intuitive categories that orient this delicate design process. In the museumization of the ruins of the *Antiga Catedral de São Paulo* in Macau, they refer to the ability to enhance memory through a new interaction between the archaeological site and the visitor, based on the commemoration theme. The transformation of the *Mosteiro de Santa Maria de Flor da Rosa* in Crato is approached through the

juxtaposition theme, which enables the dialogue between history and contemporaneity. In the recovery and expansion of the *Convento de Jesús* in Setúbal, Carrilho adopts the comparative categories referred to imitation and grafting, which allow for the conversion of the whole monastic complex into an art museum. In the museumization of the archaeological site *Praça Nova do Castelo de São Jorge* in Lisbon, the reinterpretation of the past and the reconstruction of its memory are carried out through the formal intuition referred to delimitation and stratification.

Describing the architectures of Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta, Vittorio Longheu tells us about simple and useful forms, which time has sedimented in their work through continuous use and care, in response to the need to provide concrete answers to actual problems. This assiduous work, aware of the value of time and memory, tunes the architectural forms like a musical instrument to enhance their harmony with the surrounding environment. Miller and Maranta's conception of building is based on two fundamental questions. The first is a strong rooting of architecture to the place, and in particular to the Alpine geography and landscape, in which many of their works are inserted. The second is the recurrent use of the *repertoire* of history, from which they select typical formal elements with a general and eternal character, and implement them in the construction of an architecture representing the collective memory of a community. Their attitude makes the question concerning the search for modernity or stylistic originality superfluous; rather, their work exhibits a research on the analogy, applied to the interpretation of the context and the spirit of the place.

The design approach consistently adopted by Ricardo Bak Gordon results in the development of a work program addressed to the comfort of the users, and based on the measured proportioning of the inhabited spaces and the enhancement of their environmental quality. As explained by Christian Campanella, this attention to the capability of architectural spaces to house their users finds special applications when the architect intervenes in historical contexts, by applying the most appropriate representation tools. In the Dom Dinis Secondary School in Chelas he adds a new volume for complementary activities at the center of the pre-existing school complex:

it develops specific relationships with the surrounding buildings by adopting their alignments and colors, without renouncing its identity. In the *Piave Futura* competition project promoted by the University of Padua, the connection theme is enhanced through the experimentation with the urban arcades figure, adding further quality to the new construction and the related open spaces. Finally, in the project for the enhancement of the introverted space of the Roman Theater in Lisbon, the relationship between the monument and the surrounding city is improved with a simple change of role.

A further answer to the above-mentioned research questions can be found into innovative contemporary ways of interpreting memory, which build on the adoption of time and place as variables. The rewriting exercises by Tabuenca and Leache, the transfigurative opening of Tony Fretton and the obsessive questioning of Renato Rizzi, seem to belong to this category.

The adoption of the theme of the architectural palimpsest is present in many critical treatises on interventions in historical contexts; this practice focuses on the enhancement of the markedly physical or more sensibly intangible signs and materials of the past, which often remain more or less hidden in architectures and landscapes; although they overlap over time and apparently cover the previous phases, they remain buried but only rarely are definitively erased. Elena Montanari highlights the potential of this approach by analyzing the work of Fernando Tabuenca e Jesús Leache. By writing a new page in the life of the site, and ensuring the recognizability of the various stratifications, the multiple previous traces are made visible, allowing what had seemingly disappeared to reappear and coexist in space and time, and thus revealing the transformative process of the building. The rewriting interventions carried out by Tabuenca and Leache open up interesting and complex sides of the architectural practice as a continuous and incessant makeover, promoting a progressive vision in which past and present can coexist simultaneously, in the story of memory through the passage of time.

As interpreted by Angelo Lorenzi, Tony Fretton's work always shows surprising and unexpected aspects. His work on the conventional forms of architecture and on their communication is enriched

with slight sweeping and distortions that transfigure their characteristics, hence unfolding a variety of interpretations. In this sort of «magical realism», the elements of the compositional tradition (such as façades or windows) and of the domestic custom are connoted with special dimensions, and thus build a new and unexpected relationship between the interior and the exterior spaces of the house. Like several protagonists of contemporary English architecture, Tony Fretton looks at tradition and reinvents it starting from the materials of the history of architecture and art, with a particular affection for the tradition of Modern Movement, for the Smithsons' and James Stirling's work, so as for Louis Kahn and Álvaro Siza Vieira. The results of this research, which proceeds by abstraction and refinement of the compositional characters, are enigmatic and suspended architectures, that tackle our awareness about their familiarity and their reference to the urban landscape.

Claudia Tinazzi highlights how Renato Rizzi feels the urgency to restore the central role of architecture and its teaching within culture, and how he pursues this task by applying a rigorous method to the study of architectural discipline's reasons. This is a way of reading the history of places and questioning the shape of architecture through the projects, radiographing them through preparatory models based on vertical or horizontal sections, which help to clarify the sense and motivations of a certain architecture by simplifying and abstracting it. The places of Rizzi's interventions include the city where he was born, Rovereto, that almost unconsciously marked his thought and experience, the sites of his training, Venice and then New York, further expanded by the wide geography of his works. This query focused on the challenging pertaining to architectural disciplines is implemented not only «aloud» through architectural design, but also by writing and teaching activities, with a necessary obsession for this work and a coherence of thought.

The final «Socratic» dialogue between Álvaro Siza Vieira and Eduardo Souto de Moura — which took place in Porto on February 23, 2020 — tackles many of the topics unfolded in the previous essays, providing a prominent contribution to the debate on the methods and meanings of contemporary architectural exercises in historical contexts.

According to Siza, it is not possible to operate on the project site without the traces of the past: «there are measures», and there may be difficulties, but more often they are of help. And if there are not, they are invented. The architect's habit of consistently visiting the project site is mainly aimed at capturing its atmosphere, even if the work can start before the visit, based on an impression or a «mythical» vision of the place, as it happened with the idea of Pompeii in the project he carried out in Evora.

According to Souto de Moura, Siza's approach in the reconstruction of the Chiado district in Lisbon opens up the theme of *integration*, applied in urban morphology, in the construction systems, in the architectural elements, «which are not ancient, but which are the image of the ancient translated into a modern design». To the alternative proposed by Souto de Moura — between an attitude addressing Ruskin's vision, interpreting the ruin as an untouchable presence, and the other addressing Viollet-le-Duc's approach, which encompasses a *modus vivendi* and a modification of the building — Siza marries the position of Ruskin, although not in its total form: in the Chiado experience, the insertion of the modern underground infrastructure raised the question of tuning the static nature of history and the dynamism of an inhabited area. There is never a danger of imitation, because the transformation field includes unsolved problems to which a solution must be given. To conclude, as agreed by both architects, architecture is not a defined concept but a search for a goal, a sequence of experiences along a path that gradually unfolds them. Or rather, in the project, it is the meeting between the two.

The occasions unfolded by this book ensue from a «blended family» effort. The authors pertain to the scientific community running the international master course in Architectural Design and History at the Mantova Campus of Politecnico di Milano, of which the book is a further research product. The selected works investigated by the authors refer to the many and etherogeneous protagonists of contemporary architecture who have lectured within the *MANTOVARCHITETTURA* programme, which are organized in the most significant architectural spaces of this «Renaissance capital», activating them as memory incubators.



**I** An event promoted within the 2018 edition of *MANTOVARCHITETTURA*, at Teatro Bibiena, ph. Giuseppe Gradella.

**I.**

# **Memory and Design**



# Andrew Berman. Memory and Discretion

Luca Cardani

The work of New York architect Andrew Berman includes a number of interventions on pre-existing buildings of different scale, genre and character. Such reuse projects have sometimes acted on the interior spatiality of the buildings, other times on the addition of new parts. Nevertheless, when observed together, these interventions highlight a recurrent design attitude focused on the definition of a new spatiality obtained through the implementation of few precise actions.

For example, the renovation of the *Center for Architecture* (2003) — one of Berman's first works, based on the transformation of the ground floor and basements of a former industrial building into one large exhibition space for the community — builds on the application of a diagonal cut obtained by removing some of the slabs. Such operation gives a new character to this part of the building, ensuing from the spatial interpenetration between the different places that compose the architecture center. This permeation is clearly visible from the large opening onto the street — a transparent glass wall that, like a screen or a frame, offers the citizens a glimpse into the space of architecture and its complexity.

As highlighted during the speech Berman delivered within the framework of *MANTOVARCHITETTURA*<sup>1</sup>, most of his works gravitate around his office in Manhattan and are located in different neighbourhoods of New York. Thanks to these accomplishments and a continuous relationship with the city, its places and its history, he discovered that the strength of such a complex context lies in the nameless buildings — i.e. those that are «without an author», that were built by teams of carpenters to meet the most authentic needs of society, and thus acquire a sort of collective authorship that shapes the character of the city over time.

In the extension of the *Sculpture Center*, completed in 2014, this vision took shape through the relationship with an historical building in the Long Island district. The intervention focused on a 1907 industrial structure built in masonry and iron, dedicated to the repair of subway coaches, and designed according to the typical layout of New York city blocks, with a closed masonry facing opening only onto the street. This pre-existing building can be referred to the typology of the hall: a space free from any obstruction, whose form can be measured

through the juxtaposition of two squares in plan (about 15x30 meters) and one in its height (about 15 meters), defined in its introversion by a brick enclosure and a roof characterized by a continuous longitudinal skylight, which sheds a filtered light on the interior space. The roof is supported by a juxtaposed iron structure contained inside the walls, consisting of a regular scanning of high and large iron pillars supporting low trusses made of lattice girders.

According to the traditional construction of the urban block, the borders of the lot facing the street are defined by a façade, which hides the structure behind it, mediates the dialogue of the building with the street, announces its meaning and provides access to the interior spaces.

The presence of a void of equal size located next to the building allows Berman to start a reflection on the relationship between the street and the collective building (which had been converted into an exhibition space by Maya Lin in 2001), hence offering the opportunity to question the typological value of the hall, without reducing and rather enhancing the representativeness of the pre-existing structure.

The design theme related to the new access to the gallery is in fact interpreted through a sequence of places ordered on the side of the building, by moving the entrance from the longitudinal axis to the side, and obliging to reach it through a path that runs along the side wall. Here, along this high rough wall, whose bricks bear the traces of their attachment to the adjacent building (that was demolished), Berman organizes three areas, that are distinct but spatially interconnected: a small squared patio shaped by walls, giving access from the street, a larger patio, closed and uncovered, located at the back, and a covered glass atrium, which connects the two spaces exterior to the gallery's main hall on one side and a small volume (housing various facilities, including the ticket office) on the other.

By positioning the entrance on the long side of the building, the layout of the distribution as well as the scenography of the large undivided space of the exhibition hall change, giving a new sense to the relationship with the exterior space of the street: this alteration of the traditional morphology of the blocks enhances the role of the resulting spaces in-between the buildings, turning them into an access path that slows down the admission to the exhibition space.

The façade left to its pure representative value, deprived of its function and aged by the passage of time, serves as an evidence of the industrial history of the district, now evidently transformed by the realization of new commercial complexes that are substituting the old factories. The three gateways — the two reduced ones and the larger one dedicated to the access of the wagons — are in fact closed by iron portals, which can be opened (if required, for example by the movement of large sculptures) to prevent direct access and orient the visitors towards the side entrance. It is no coincidence that the lettering referred to the new name of the venue, *Sculpture Center*, has been vertically arranged on the edge of the façade, not only to conserve the original sign on the front, tainted by time, but rather to point out the way to the new entrance — and thus also to highlight the change in the function of the building, which corresponds to a major alteration in its meaning.

The main hall, that used to be opened onto the street for functional reasons, was turned into a closed fence with the aim to protect the works of art, which can be only reached after an itinerary that starts from the street, passes through the small open-air patio, leads to the lowered glass atrium and finally, after a right turn and the passage of a threshold carved into the brick wall, enters the space of the large exhibition hall; this space is three times higher than the atrium, and thus enhances the sense of discovery.

The new conception of the building, drawing on the realization of a sequence of different spaces, is thus developed by taking only three, little, precise and significant transformative actions: the construction of the wall closing the entrance, the addition of the small atrium that defines two patios, and the opening cut in the side wall of the hall.

In this work, based on the transformation and re-signification of the pre-existing structure, the compositional aspect of the construction assumes greater importance, both in the choice of the building material and in the definition of the dimensions, proportions and details of the constructive systems.

Through the development of a measured approach, Berman realizes these three compositional operations, enhancing the character of the architectural elements and reinforcing the spatial relations between the old and the new parts.



The patio of the new entrance is bordered by a corten steel wall that defines a part of the front facing the street, the height of which is established in proportion to the lower part of the portals of the façade. Instead, the vertical articulation of the joints between the panels from the ground to the sky takes up the full/empty module of the upper part of the windows, reconstructing the rhythm of the façade with a geometric abstraction; the last two modules next to the wall form a large door which allows access to the patio. The doors/panels closing the previous entrance are made of the same material — corten steel, although the one used here shows a different degree of oxidation, hence it maintains the reference to the grey colour of the steel visible, and thus relates also with the iron of the internal structure. These elements are set back from the edge of the façade, like the opening door on the corten wall; when they are completely closed, they highlight the continuity of the fence to protect the interior space and strengthen the unity between the two parts that constitute the front of the building.

It is precisely by looking at the façade in its entirety that one can appreciate how the antithesis between the «full» and the «empty» parts of the lot is recomposed into a consistent figure thanks to this metal surface: its geometries, rhythm and colour take on the tones of the old workshop, hence producing an unified, coherent image and emphasizing that relationship between presence and omission that characterizes the upper band.

Surpassing the threshold on the street, visitors come to cross a patio and then an atrium — a small volume built by exploiting the perimetrical wall of the lot, and two steel and glass façades, conceived to connect the two patios. The glass panels are characterized by a very simple organization, which repeats the module of the corten façade, in which a double door occupies the two modules adjacent to the wall corresponding to the main entrance door. These two façades are divided into two levels: the upper one, made of an opaline glass, filters the light and makes it softer; the lower one is completely transparent in order to allow visitors to overlook while crossing the sequence of patios through the atrium.

Observing the plan, it is possible to notice how these three places are built according to precise rules and measurements, using a

module that defines the proportions — and therefore the relationships of meaning — between different spaces: a general division into two corresponding parts between the back patio and the part of the entrance, which is subdivided by the longitudinal axis in one part dedicated to services and in the other to the distribution, further divided into a small squared patio and the succession of two and a half squares for the closed and covered atrium. Likewise, it is possible to find a well-defined hierarchy between the new volumes, the exhibition hall and its internal subdivision.

It is thus evident that Berman's design method is characterized by a noteworthy use of geometry, intended as a tool to give order to the composition, to define the measures, hierarchies and meanings of each component, and to construct precise spatial relationships, often through the use of a grid, which is not employed here as a bridging element but rather as a background, which in such cases as in the Sculpture Center is meant to set up the dialogue between the building and the context. The floors also confirm the different identity of the three places, covering the first patio in its entirety as a place for awaiting, then the atrium as a place for circulation, and finally the access path from the second patio, with a band that is only two modules wide, leaving to the silence of this «void» — an internal garden entirely covered with gravel — the narration of the quality of the crossed space.

Finally, one last removal action should be noted, establishing a new fundamental spatial transformation distinguishing the old and the new. In the side wall of the old building, in correspondence of the atrium, there is a cut in the wall, that was operated in axis with the overall span but with a width larger than the structural pitch of the pillars. Through a wide frame, this cut allows for the connection between the space of the atrium and the main hall, also revealing the nature of the different construction systems and the distinctive characteristics of the new and the old structures.

Inside the historic building, the unitary character of the space is conserved and the value of its structural elements is enhanced: the exposed brick walls and steel trilithons are complemented by some abstract panels, completely painted white and with no particular connotation, which support the artworks and compose spatial variations in the empty room.

One of these walls is equivalent to the cut operated in the masonry, which is juxtaposed to it, to «simulate» a displacement, creating a back wall that filters the direct entrance to the exhibition space, while the other white wall acts as a backdrop to the hall, hiding the staircase and the services.

This cut builds a threshold that may be considered as one of the most important places in the building, because it marks the transition from the new and the old structure and, at the same time, it strengthens the spatial continuity between the different construction features, mediating the contrast between the black steel beamed roof suspended on the white, glazed walls of the atrium, and the dialogue between the pure form of the brick wall enclosure and the powerful technical forms of the roof's studded steel structures. This dialogue produces an effect that was well described by Georg Windeck in his article on *Casabella*: «Old and new materials celebrate each other. Seen from the context of the new spaces, the historic surface textures unfold into a poetic presence. Likewise, the clean, new elements that are displaced into the old part of the building unfold into an artful silence within the industrial environs»<sup>2</sup>.

This point exhibits the greatest dialectical tension involved in the project, where history is called into question; but this dialectics is managed without dramatic contrasts, with simple and pure forms.

This solution ensues from the confident search for clear relationships among the different elements, and from a tension towards *abstraction* as a search for the essential and a renunciation of contingent issues: «the elements lose importance in themselves, but it is the relationships that impose themselves as protagonists: the ultimate meaning of the piece resides in the form of these relationships, beyond the specific value of the individual elements»<sup>3</sup>.

This search for abstraction gives meaning to the materials of history and shows their topicality, which highlights Berman's affiliation to a family of architectural thought — for which he does not hide a strong admiration — that finds in such architects as Carlo Scarpa, Franco Albini and Ignazio Gardella the references of a modern attitude towards history.

If we briefly compare the Sculpture Center with the *Villa Borletti* designed by Ignazio Gardella (1933-36), it is possible to detect various

similarities: the evident juxtaposition of old and new materials, modulated by strategical architectural details; the addition of a new single part to the historical building, that changes the sense of space; the desire to show the value of the elements as neutral presences, capable of shaping a unitary and fluid space, crossed by abstract walls that animate it by supporting the works of art<sup>4</sup>.

Berman believes in architecture, and uses the history of architecture with an analogical perspective that, beyond any theory or pre-conceived method, makes the use of the best design references possible, as an operative memory of practical and theoretical solutions facilitating the management of the architectural problems, which continue to repeat themselves.

- I have learned throughout my practice how important and difficult it is to train oneself to observe and to reflect. If one knows how to properly look at the surroundings, and at the buildings, one acquires the most essential tools of design<sup>5</sup>.

In this perspective, if we analyze the way Berman uses references, it is possible to observe they are usually visible but never literally employed; what interests him the most is not the specificity of the details, but rather the architectural thought that led to the definition of the form.

With the intervention at the Sculpture Center, Berman demonstrates how even an apparently merely functional design theme, based on the addition of one small entrance volume and the implementation of a few measured architectural transformations, can become an opportunity to enhance the value of an old building as well as of a part of the city, returning it to the collective memory of the urban space.

It is possible to detect two types of memory in his work: a collective one that belongs to the places — which is sought by the architect to understand their cultural meaning, through a particular *sensitivity* in the way of thinking that becomes *tactility* in the way of building — and a personal memory, pertaining to some architectural facts that participate in the compositional process to orient and direct the architect's choices, thanks to a non-a priori vision of reality.

This use of memory is guided by an education of thought to *discretion*<sup>6</sup>, that refers to the ability to judge architectural choices with moderation and a sense of measure, in order to turn them into design actions.

Discretion accompanies the tension towards an architectural form that is not special nor particular, but rather specific — which concerns the search for the individual character of every architecture, that is never expressed in a spectacular way but exhibited through the modesty of essential forms, thanks to the ability to abstract and join together the different aspects of the project without making anyone prevail on the others.

This poetics of discretion, based on a prudent but far from ambiguous attitude, allows Berman to fulfill his idea of architecture, through the design of forms that are simple but rich in spatial meaning:

- I think of architecture as a thought, not as a gesture. A building is not created as a reflection of the architect, but rather it is something essential, pure and quiet<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Berman participated in the 2018 edition of *MANTOVARCHITETTURA* (*Tempio di San Sebastiano*, May 22).

<sup>2</sup> G. Windeck, «Intentional indeterminance. The work of Andrew Berman», *Casabella*, 869, January 2017, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> C. M. Arís, *Silencios elocuentes*, UPC, Barcelona 1999, trans. *Silenzi eloquenti*. *Borges, Mies van der Rohe, Ozu, Rothko, Oteiza*, Christian Marinotti Edizioni, Milan 2002, p. 131 (author's translation).

<sup>4</sup> «... uno spazio unitario in una villa di tipo tradizionale fatta di ambienti separati. Ho lasciato solo i muri portanti, ho allargato lo spazio interno sostituendo una facciata con una grande vetrata e in questo spazio ho inserito dei setti murari che lo dividevano e ospitavano la

collezione di oggetti d'arte dei Borletti». A. Monestiroli, *L'architettura secondo Gardella*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1997, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from Andrew Berman's speech during the 2019 edition of *MANTOVARCHITETTURA* (*Casa del Mantegna*, May 27).

<sup>6</sup> The *Collins Dictionary* defines «discretion» as «the freedom or authority to make judgments and to act as one sees fit» (British English), «the freedom or authority to make decisions and choices; power to judge or act», or «the quality of being discreet, or careful about what one does and says» (American English).

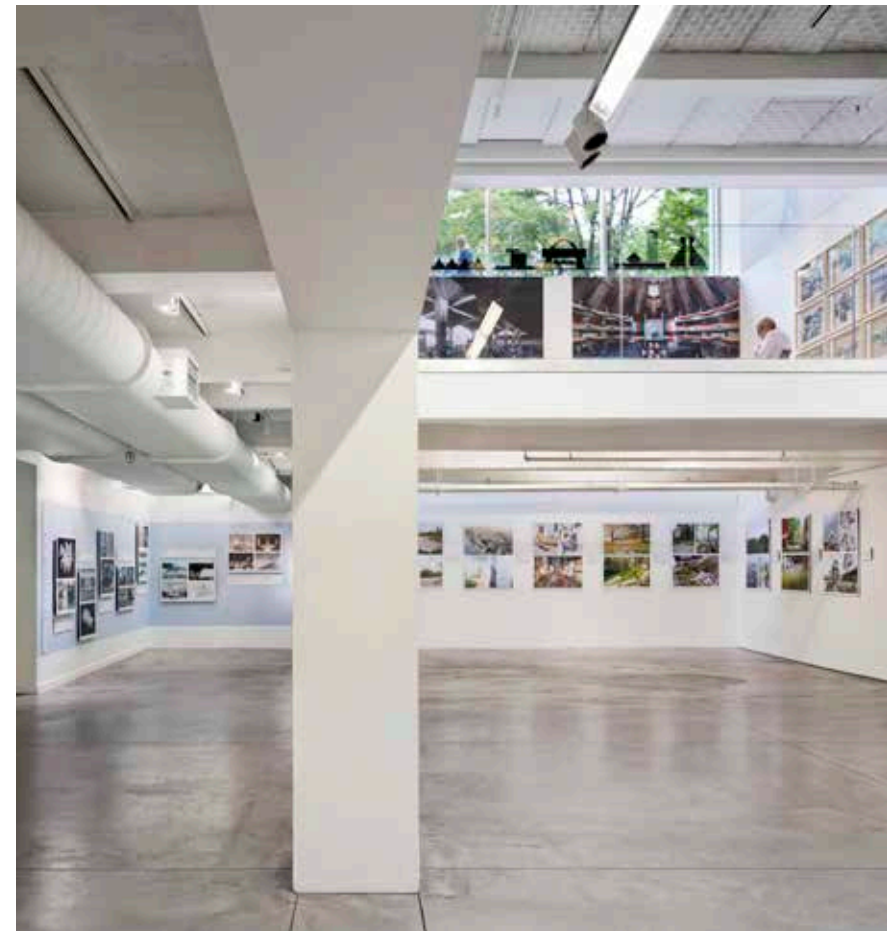
<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from Andrew Berman's lecture delivered at the School of Architecture and Planning of the University of Buffalo (March 13, 2019).



Andrew Berman Architect,  
Center for Architecture  
(New York, USA 2003).

2 3 4

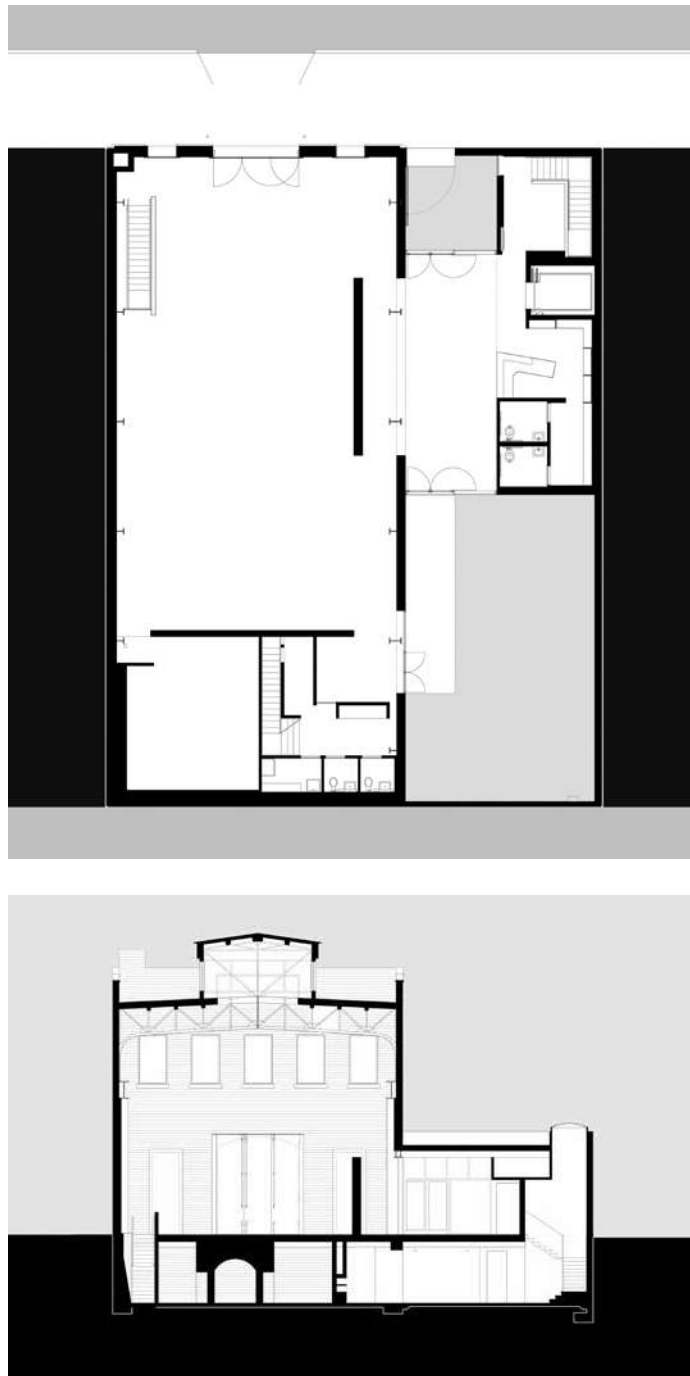
The spaces facing the street  
© Andrew Berman Architect.



5

The exhibition space at the  
underground level  
© Andrew Berman Architect.



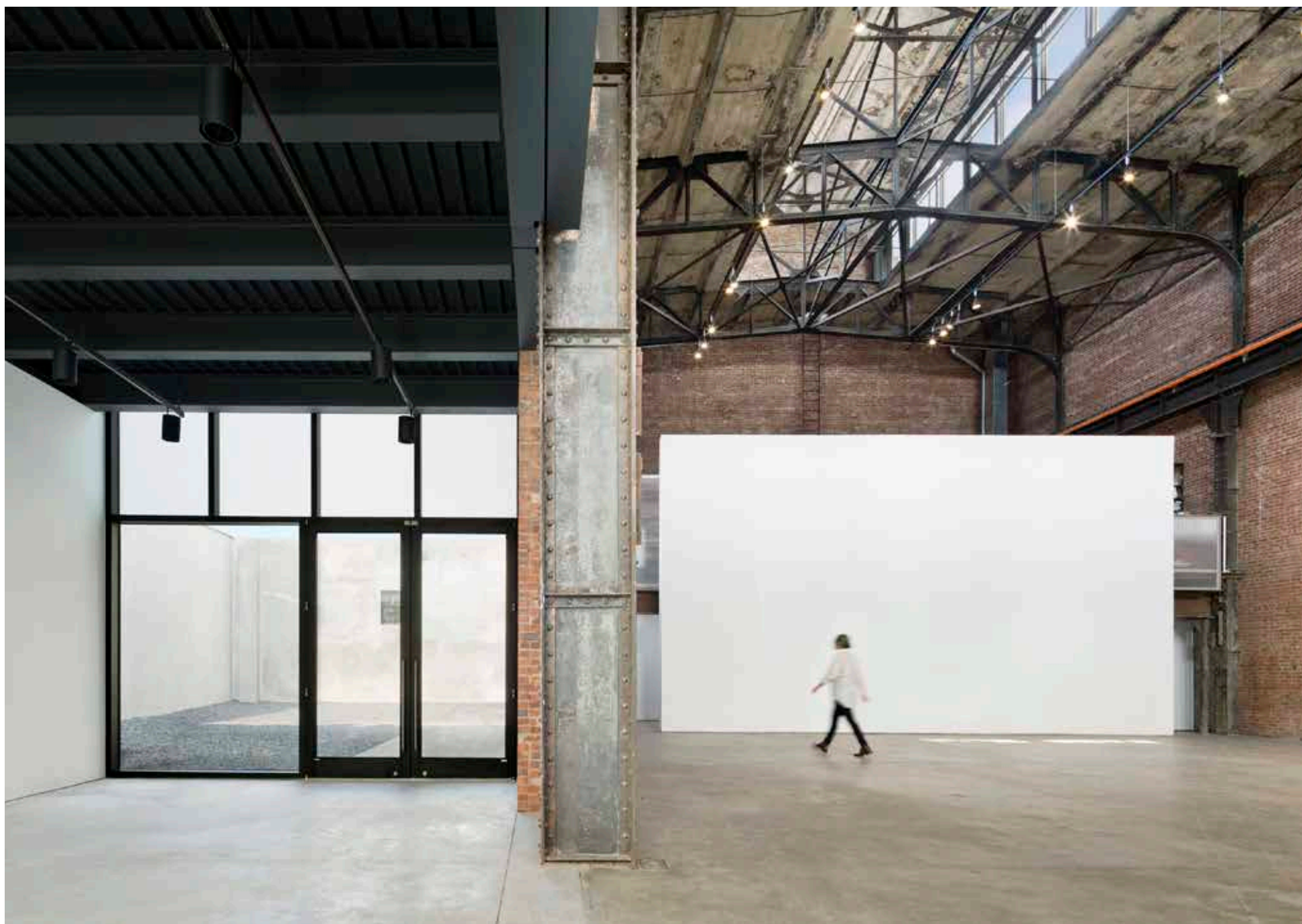


Andrew Berman Architect,  
Sculpture Center (Long Island,  
New York, USA 2014).

**6**  
Plan and section © Andrew  
Berman Architect.

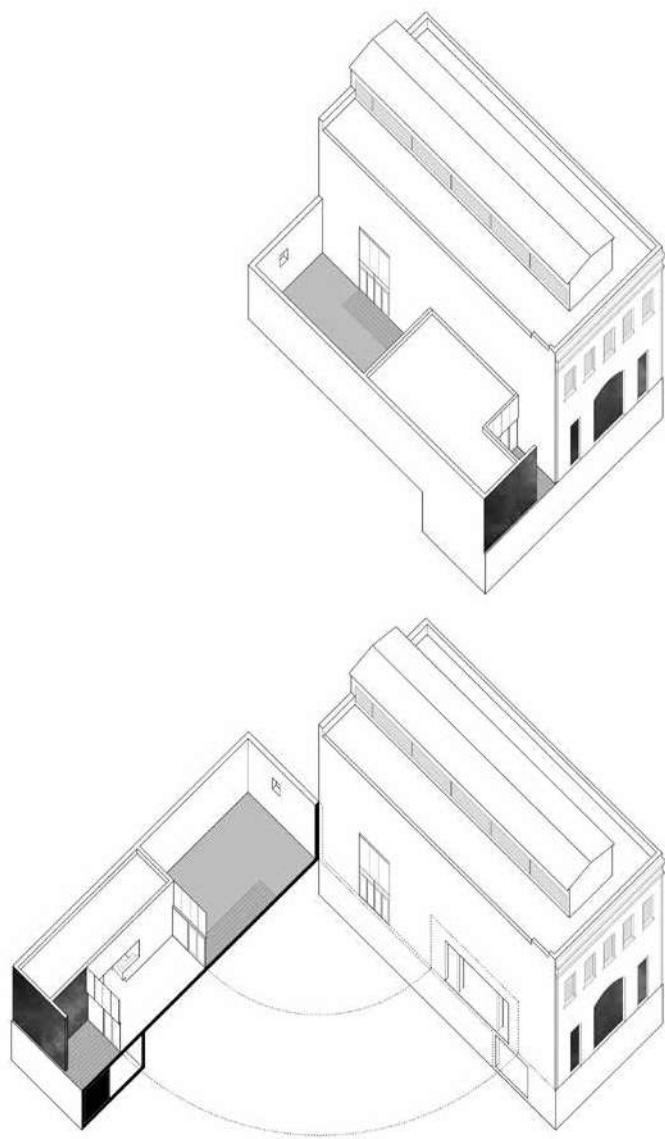


**7 8 9**  
Main front and interior spaces  
© Andrew Berman Architect.



**10**  
The connection point between  
the new and the old spaces  
© Andrew Berman Architect.





**11**  
Axonometric views  
© Andrew Berman Architect.



**12**  
The center's entrance  
© Andrew Berman Architect.



# Renzo Piano. Two American Art Museums

Federico Bucci

Museums are complex «time machines»: by preserving the most precious heritages and making them available to several generations, they shape connections between past and present.

Drawing on the complexity of their mission, from time to time they need to go through an upgrade of their programmes, tools and spaces. The following texts explore the proposals developed by the *Renzo Piano Building Workshop* for the expansion of two pivotal art museums in America, writing another chapter in the history of these important cultural sites.

## *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Expansion, Boston*

The story I am about to tell starts in the second half of the 19th century and takes place in Boston, one of the oldest and most important cultural centers in the United States. Nevertheless, as you will see, there is also a lot of Italy in the tale, to influence its most remarkable episodes. The protagonists, scattered between yesterday and today, are: an eccentric American noblewoman in love with Italian and European art; her husband, a millionaire who consented to her whims; a Lithuanian art connoisseur who managed the couple's collection, with great freedom, from Florence; and, finally — but this is the second part of the story — a Genoan architect who has literally conquered the United States with his philosophy and his works.

Now that I have introduced the places and the actors, if you have the patience to follow me I will lead you through the labyrinths of time.

The name of the lady is Isabella Stewart, born in New York on April 14, 1840, known as *Belle* or, as the local chronicles indicate, *Donna Isabella*, Isabella of Boston, but also more mischievously as *Mrs. Jack*, from the name of her husband<sup>1</sup>. She comes from a wealthy Scottish family of noble origin, even boasting proximity to the royal house of the same name. Belle grows up in America but, in keeping with the custom of the day, finishes her studies in Paris. From that city, in 1856–58, the young woman leaves for many trips to the cities of the Old Continent — for example to Milan, where she visits the house-museum set up during those years by the collector Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli, which makes a big impression.

Once back home, thanks to a friend from her Parisian years, she makes the acquaintance of John Lowell Gardner II (1837-98), Jack for his friends. The Gardners live in Boston: they too are of Anglo-Saxon origin, in Massachusetts since the 17th century, and they have made an enormous fortune in trade and shipping.

On 10 April 1860, in New York, Belle and Jack are married: she is not yet twenty, has a strong, independent character, and a lively intelligence open to the world of culture; he is a few years older and does not stand out in any field other than that of the family business.

The next twenty years indelibly mark the couple's life, which in the meantime has moved to Boston: in 1863 John III, known as Jackie, is born, but he dies less than two years later. Belle sinks into deep depression and her husband decides to cure her by offering a series of long voyages in Europe (from North Cape to Athens, from Paris to Moscow, as well as to her beloved Italy) and Asia (in Japan, China and India). When she returns she feels better, with renewed desire to live, expressed in an interest in art. By now the Gardner home in Boston, at 152 Beacon Street, is full of paintings, sculptures and crafts objects gathered all over the world.

For Bostonians, a cultured and refined *milieu*, it is an elegant intellectual salon that gathers the most brilliant minds of Cambridge and Harvard. Among others, Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), a true reference point for his commitment in society and teaching, the poet Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910), a leading American «suffragette», the philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952), the writer Francis Marion Crawford (1854-1909) and, above all, the art historian Bernard Berenson, born Bernhard Valvrojenski in Butrimonys, Lithuania, in 1865, who passed away in Florence in 1959. He is the third protagonist of our story<sup>2</sup>.

Reading the biographies of these bohemians, very open amongst themselves to a wide range of lifestyles and customs (and even «gay & lesbian friendly»), we can see that the love for the places and culture of our peninsula was a significant common denominator, enlivened by the founding of the Dante Society in 1882.

Speaking of the Grand Tour of Italy, in 1897 the Gardners returned to Venice, staying again at *Palazzo Barbaro* on the *Canal Grande*, owned by Daniel Curtis, one of Jack's relatives. Belle experienced the

city with passion, photographing every cranny and taking a few pieces of the place home with her. In fact, with the help of Camillo Boito, who was working on the restoration of *Palazzo Franchetti* at the time, the American collector acquired some of the original balconies of the building, and according to other sources she also bought those of the *Ca' d'Oro*, transformed in that same period by the Baron Giorgio Franchetti to contain his own residence-museum.

But for purchases of paintings *Donna Isabella* turned to Bernard Berenson. She had met him in 1884, as a brilliant student of Norton at Harvard, and had offered him quite a few dollars to help her with her studies of art history in Italy. The relationship, in spite of age difference, was troubled by poorly concealed romantic aspects on the part of the mature gentlewoman and, as can be seen in their fervid correspondence, perhaps also for this reason took on a tyrannical tone dictated by the younger scholar who oriented the artistic choices of the collector, taking advantage of her weaknesses and her unlimited economic means, and presenting her with «deals» that were often more advantageous to his professional ascent than to her interests.

In any case, at the end of the century the home of the Gardners in Boston contained pieces of clear value hung on the walls, from Europe — such as the self-portrait of Rembrandt from 1629, or the *Storie di Lucrezia* by Sandro Botticelli (1498 ca.), a painting purchased in London in 1894, suggested by Berenson, for 3.400 pounds, a very high price at the time.

At this point the Gardners decided to build a new house-museum in Boston, on the Fenway — the avenue that runs along the Back Bay Fens, the park designed by Frederick Law Olmsted<sup>3</sup>. The project was underway when another dramatic event took place: on 10 December 1898 Jack Gardner died of a stroke. Isabella worked through her mourning by plunging into the new project. For the design of the building she encharged the architect Willard Thomas Sears (1837-1920), but she constantly supervised the worksite: her desires focused on a Venetian palace, like the ones she had visited, with structure and finishings in the antique manner, a courtyard with plants and a fountain and, skillfully inserted like fragments, many original works gathered in her travels. Inside, in an arrangement based on the house-museum of Poldi Pezzoli she had visited in her youth, each room would have a theme:

the Titian Room, the Veronese Room, the Gothic Room, the Raphael Room, the Early Italian Room, the Dutch Room, etc.

Fenway Court, as the building was called, opened to the public on the evening of 1 January 1903, with a concert by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. «The aesthetic perfection of everything... had a particular effect on us», wrote the psychologist and philosopher William James, a professor at Harvard and brother of Henry. Yes, precisely, just that Henry James who had written *The Bostonians* and, among other successful novels, *The Wings of the Dove*, whose protagonist was inspired by the life of Isabella<sup>4</sup>.

In short, also due to her non-conformist stance, Isabella was a celebrity at this point, as well as a very rich art collector engaged in many philanthropic initiatives, a book lover of wide ranging interests, and an avid fan of the local baseball team, the Red Sox.

Her house on the Fenway continued to fill up with masterpieces that Berenson, as well as other advisors, purchased for her all over Europe. Berenson's acquisitions for Gardner and, more in general, the trade in artworks from Europe to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century, would deserve a long separate study. Not just to find out how these works ended up on the art market, taking advantage of hungry and unwitting heirs, but also to better understand the work of the experts who certified authenticity and therefore prices. Finally, such a study would serve to get oriented in the labyrinth of the laws of the era, by which, for example, while the Italian state was letting its artistic heritage be swept away under its nose thanks to incredible regulatory gaps and oversights, the American government was applying outrageous taxes for the importing of artistic assets and luxury goods.

Although this may not be the place for it, let me cite the case of two famous works that came into the Gardner collection thanks to the efforts of Berenson. One is the *Hercules*, an extraordinary fresco by Piero della Francesca dated 1470 ca., ceded by Cavalier Giambattista Collacchioni of *Borgo Sansepolcro*, a descendent of the artist, to finance his activity as an opera impresario.

Then there is the true mystery of the canvas attributed to Johannes Vermeer, dated 1664-67 and entitled *The Concert*, purchased in 1892 and stolen in 1990, together with 12 other works, for an estimated

value of 500 million dollars: anyone who has any information about this should contact the FBI, perhaps to get a remarkable reward.

Finally, to close this chapter, I should add that Berenson had another part to play in the completion of the Fenway Court. It was he who suggested copying the entrance of a building in the medieval village of Altamura (which in the fantasies of the art historian became a utopian community of intellectuals), to construct the so-called Garage House, built in 1907 to close the border of the property: a very singular place for automobiles that featured an arch like those of Apulia, as well as a high trellis for climbing plants, later removed, which would have given it that «green wall» look that is so popular today in contemporary architecture. We can hypothesize that *Donna Isabella* wanted to thus isolate herself in her gilded «Venetian» refuge, faced by Olmsted's park on one side, and by a screen of greenery on the other, to conceal any possible view of the American city.

How can we sum up what has been said so far about the Italian passions cultivated in Boston Bohemia? A thought of Berenson's, included in the essay *Aesthetics, Ethics and History in the Arts of Visual Representation* (1947), offers a very eloquent answer to this question: «One of the surprising facts of history — the art historian wrote from his Florentine abode — undeniable and not easy to explain, is the irresistible attraction exerted by a superior culture. Its very conquerors end up submitting to it, just as the Romans submitted to the Greeks, the Arabs and the Turks to the Byzantines and Persians, the Tartars and the Manchurians to the Chinese, and thousands of years earlier the Semites and Guti to those Sumerians who provided art, and perhaps religion, to the westernmost and northern regions of Asia»<sup>5</sup>.

Now that the time of our flight has been spent in narrating the adventures of Isabella Stewart Gardner, we can land in Boston to visit the addition to the prestigious museum she created. The designer is Renzo Piano; his intervention relies on years of experience with which he has interpreted the *baukunst* in the Italian tradition, which seems to have a particular appeal for those in the USA who want to build or renovate a museum (or something else).

Browsing through the list of these works, it comes to mind to say that the Genoan architect has conquered the USA with that «superior culture» the Americans love so much and to which they are so

willing to «subject themselves», as Berenson explained. The stroke of genius lies in having exported to the USA the original characteristics of the architecture of Renzo Piano, combining great reliability in the organization of design work in terms of timing and costs with, in the final results, an «artistic rationalism» formed by the intertwining of the memory of the place, the relationship with the environment and questions of energy savings, a luminous and never overwhelming sense of space and, last but not least, the choice of a constructive solution that — linked to the material — determines the form of architecture. All this with a good dose of irony and communicative ability that can be seen at first glance when you observe the architect interacting with the public and with his clients (you can see such videos on YouTube).

Fenway Court is still there, but from the outside it still conveys little. What is gone, instead, is the Garage House, demolished amidst controversy raised by those who defended the value of a 20th-century remake, which had also been modified over time, of a medieval work of architecture from Apulia: like having to deal with some heritage authorities in our country. The main entrance to the museum is no longer on the Fenway, but shifted in front of the Evans Way Park beside the garden. From here, where young aspiring quarterbacks test their arms, it is easy to perfectly see the various parts of the project by Renzo Piano, formed by a low, transparent entrance volume from which, at the back, a higher volume emerges, clad in corrugated copper panels, while to the side, along the street, there is a linear brick volume on which a glass and metal wall leans, with a clear protrusion, conveying the impression of a greenhouse.

This latter space contains the residences for artists on the upper level and the ground floor, under sloping glass, a series of education workshops, but also many plants.

The heart of the museum is the building faced in copper. Its exterior is divided by a corridor into two non-symmetric parts, and offers the phrasing of two aerial metal structures: one supports the emergency stairs, whose lightness conveys the intention of an architectural motif; the other supports the banners of the temporary exhibitions. In this support structure, also repeated at the back, viewers can note the pronounced interlock of the vertical posts, as well as the refined design of the horizontal walkways.

This building contains the bookstore, restaurant and living room on the ground floor, while the upper levels include an exhibition gallery (a very tall space, lit by a large glazing facing toward Fenway Court), a concert hall and a series of offices.

Just as the organization of the functions is made clear from the outside, on the inside each space is surprising for the variety of atmospheres. The living room is almost like a «home», a real parlor full of people chatting and reading, taking advantage of the walls with books available to the public, positioned in the spaces of passage. The ascent to the upper level is organized by a very elegant staircase that seems to float in the void. The stair leads on the one hand to the impalpable expressive minimalism of the gallery for temporary exhibitions, whose backdrop is the back of Fenway Court, with an antique stucco finish and «Venetian mullions»; on the other, we enter a music room based on an Elizabethan theater, topped by three balcony levels equipped with a single row of red seats. Because the atmosphere of a space can accelerate memory, projected toward the future, as soon as I entered this room, wreathed in magical silence, I recalled two unforgettable moments as a spectator, both from the mid-1980s: the *Mahabharata* of Peter Brook at the *Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord* in Paris, and the *Prometeo. Tragedia dell'ascolto* composed by Luigi Nono with sets by Renzo Piano in Venice and later in Milan.

But another surprising recollected image awaited me once I had completed my visit to the new addition of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum designed by Renzo Piano. Back on ground level, I entered the glazed passage that leads to Fenway Court. Here, just touching the walls of the old building, everything has remained almost as *Donna Isabella* left it, after her death in 1924. I walked across the «wall of time» and found myself in a cloister that surrounds a garden courtyard faced by balconies (real ones, as we know) of an otherwise fake «Venetian palazzo». Inside, on three levels, works of inestimable value fill the rooms, whose furnishings are inspired by them.

Here there is a Romanesque portal detached from a house in Bordeaux; there I see a Manet and a Matisse and then, on the upper levels, a selection of Italian works, from a drawing by Filippino Lippi to the obligatory Venetian *veduta* by Francesco Guardi, together with the extraordinary portrait of a «doctor en leyes» by Francisco de Zurbaran,

as well as the already mentioned Piero and Rembrandt and other marvels, not just of painting.

In this approach to the old rooms, I seem to grasp the reasoning behind this work by Renzo Piano: the image of the American conquerors who «surrender» to the superior European culture, gathering its relics in spaces that are capable, in a few hundred square meters, of holding together and «staging» in a different way a millennium of history (which, after all, is the sense of any museum), is overturned at this point, even teased a bit by a work of architecture that asserts its contemporary character not just with the construction solutions but also with fascinating, surprising atmospheres, not without a domestic aura, with which to «democratically» welcome all visitors.

Thus the Italian architect, called upon to update the museum of *Donna Isabella*, proposes — to the citizens of the *Mondo Novo*<sup>6</sup>, including us — the observation of our time in a different light, taking a knowing critical distance to measure the value of the past, without sacrificing the passion with which we experience the present and look to the future.

#### *Kimbell Art Museum Expansion, Fort Worth*

It's a gray winter morning in Cowtown and the radio remarks on the 40th anniversary of *Tres Hombres*, the legendary album by long-bearded ZZ Top. Here in Fort Worth, and all over Texas, Old West atmosphere and rock music have been combined in a happy marriage, like BBQ and beer, ranches and oil wells. Downtown, on Commerce Street, there is almost no traffic: cars are swallowed up by multilevel parking garages, in the shadow of office towers, and pedestrians are rare figures who gaze in amazement at my smoldering Toscano cigar («don't worry man, it's not illegal!»). Waking up here after a few days in Mexico, a serious question arises: which is the true «sad face of America»?

So while my walk to work off a heavy American breakfast quickly dwindles in the void around the hotel, the taxi pulls up and after ten minutes of driving through an urban desert — with an improbable bicycle path across it (penance for the sins of Lance Armstrong, perhaps, the performance-enhanced Texan bicycle racer) — I find myself at the entrance to the Kimbell Art Museum.

I remember! It was a September afternoon, twenty years ago. The sun made the Travertine walls gleam, while the concrete formed the rhythmic pattern of the vaults, slightly pressed at the top, and the verdigris roof played with the intense blue of the sky.

The earth sounded under foot: first the soft beat of the lawn, then the higher notes of the gravel and, finally, under a portico facing a pool of water, the light rumble of a more compact slab of stone. At the end of the path stood a small wood, the trees lined up like soldiers, and then behind a glass wall the interior of a space could be glimpsed, flooded with spectacular silvery light. «Texas pride», Julia repeated. «We have oil, cowboys and the best art museum of the world».

Yes, the Kimbell Museum is one of the great masterpieces of contemporary architecture, designed by the American master Louis I. Kahn in the 1960s and opened on 4 August 1972<sup>7</sup>. It's a shame that the sound of footsteps is so little heeded in these parts, with their devotion to massive use of pickup trucks. It took Renzo Piano to update the experience of the procession in the landscape Kahn desired as an approach to his museum, the result of the fertile collaboration with George Patton, the landscape architect of the Kimbell.

To the left of the old parking lot, at the corner of Van Cliburn Way and West Lancaster Avenue, the work of the Genoese master begins, setting out to listen to the historic masterpiece like a visitor to the museum in front of the great artworks of this small but extraordinary collection launched by Kay Kimbell and Velma Fuller in 1935 and then entrusted to Richard Fargo Brown, the director who in 1966 commissioned Kahn to design the new facility.

Through the ramp, I go down to a very luminous underground garage whose velvety concrete walls — the excellent result of Italian technique applied by Mexican workers — seem to glisten in the light of the lamps, a harbinger of one of the leitmotifs of the expansion of the museum, immediately christened the *Piano Pavilion* by the American clients.

I go up towards the exit and stop at the first of one of the many viewing points offered by the new project. I am next to the entrance to the *Piano Pavilion* but the eyes are almost obliged to look towards the front of Kahn's building, which today has unfortunately completely lost the color of its roof: I can clearly see the three naves, with the



two lateral *portici* (as we read on the drawings in the archive, in Italian) and the central one, set back and hidden by a row of trees. Then comes the sizing comparison: 300 feet (about 91.4 meters) is the total length of the front of Kahn's building, split perfectly into three parts; this is also the length of the new addition, divided into three symmetrical parts that ideally extend the original module, but are aptly separated by a strip of greenery. The height of both buildings is 21 feet (6.4 meters). In short, as August E. Komendant (Kahn's engineer) advised: «this is the space you have, not a square inch more»<sup>8</sup>.

Having clarified the questions of an addition that chooses to detach itself from the historic building, complying with its measurements — Piano confesses that he immediately grasped the «trap» of the extension of the module, which Kahn himself had suggested —, I am ready to enter the new museum spaces.

The lobby is a great void that prepares us for the visit: behind us, the glass wall faces Kahn's building, while the one in front leads to the underground part; to the left and right, beyond the concrete walls, we find the two main galleries, walking on a wooden floor that «breathes» (the air conditioning system is underneath it) and gazing, above, at the «exhibited» construction system of the roof, with seven rows of double wooden beams that clutch the lines of the artificial lighting in the middle and support the semitransparent small vaults of the roof.

Here even the least expert eye cannot help but perceive the refined game of references to the example of Kahn, which I can underline in the detail of the double beam, reflected with «servant space» functions on the walls and the floor — a constructed figure that with refined eloquence is dematerialized in the galleries thanks to the use of canvases stretched between the pairs of beams, along the lower row, to create a flat ceiling that filters the light onto the artworks.

So now we are in the heart of the exhibition space. The orientation given by Brown to the original collection has been taken forward, intact, until now, in keeping with an acquisition policy focused on procuring just a few extraordinary works.

The latest coup was the purchase, in 2009, of the small painting titled *Tormento di Sant'Antonio*, attributed to the young Michelangelo. The purchase caused some controversy, since fortunately there is no longer a Bernard Berenson to act as a guarantee for American museums.

I prefer to avoid this field still dense with pitfalls today, and instead to stand at a truly magical point of the South East Gallery, from which to enjoy the view of a spectacular face-off between the hidden cards of the very nimble «cardsharps», in the exceptional interpretations of two short-tempered geniuses of modern European painting: that of the Frenchman Georges de La Tour, dated 1630-34, hung on a pale panel, and that of our Caravaggio, from 1595, hung on a concrete wall.

I have hardly had a chance to recover from the thrill of the conniving glances of the dishonest players, and to recognize the differences between the version of the painting by Georges de La Tour hanging in the Louvre (consisting not only in the suit of the ace held by the «tricheur», probably a self-portrait), when on the opposite wall I catch sight of the Virgilian allegories painted by Francois Boucher at the end of the 18th century, a chromatic composition whose luminous sensuality is enhanced by the concrete wall that hosts the four large canvases.

I could go on and on, but given the available space it would be best to make haste to visit the basement wing of the *Piano Pavilion* which contains a room with a suspended ceiling for works of the Mesoamerican civilization, with artificial lighting and a channel for natural light aimed towards the modernist tower of the Will Rogers Memorial Center of Fort Worth (1936), and finally arrive at the two-level space of the auditorium, featuring red seats, wooden acoustic panels and a window facing an inclined wall in concrete, which in its «triangular» arrangement replicates the space in which the two symmetrical access staircases are positioned.

The constructive detail, as we know, plays an important role in every project developed by the «Building Workshop» of Renzo Piano. Here at the Kimbell it seems possible to say that the poetic of the single piece that constructs the work gives way to a chorus of technical elements (from the treatment of the ceiling, the walls and floors, to the handrail of the staircase) in which the material play their respective parts inside a sounding box where the work of art is the protagonist.

Given the fact that among the new artworks conserved at the Kimbell Museum, besides those already mentioned, there are paintings by Carracci, El Greco, Rubens, Tiepolo and Tintoretto, a sculpture by Bernini and a work of architecture by Louis Kahn that, in turn,

contains canvases by Cézanne, Monet and Picasso, the work of Piano, in continuity with the great tradition of Italian museum design, organizes a brilliant exhibition machine devoted to the history of the collection itself.

The proof lies in the finale of the walking tour I have tried to describe in this article: I return outside the entrance, walk along the portico facing the «portico» of Kahn, turn on the short side and after a separating corridor walk up on the soft grassy mantle that covers the auditorium. Here I have a fine view of the roof of the *Piano Pavilion*, but above all, as I descend on the opposite side, down a slight slope along the concrete parapet, Kahn's building appears again, in the splendor of its lateral façade.

I look at the sequence of cycloidal vaults and seem to hear the words of the great American master: «The building is felt, and it is good to feel like this, as if I had nothing to do with it, as if someone else's hand had made it. Because that is what is first constructed».

I aim my gaze at the paired beams of the new pavilion and I remember an apt phrase uttered by Piano: «I believe our work is always an unfinished object: because the architect sets something in motion, but the future naturally escapes him».

Today, this is the secret poetics of the architects of the Kimbell Museum: separated by forty years, they have constructed two buildings to make the best of lost time, without any presumption of leaving a personal sign in the future. In the meantime, a timid ray of sunlight appears, to warm the sky over Cowtown.

<sup>1</sup> D. Shand-Tucci, *The Art of Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner*, Harper Collins, New York 1997.

<sup>2</sup> J. Connors, L. A. Waldman, *Bernard Berenson: Formation and Heritage*, Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Sheridan Books, Chelsea 2014.

<sup>3</sup> C. Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge & London 1982.

<sup>4</sup> H. James, *The Wings of the Dove*, Scribner's Son, New York 1902.

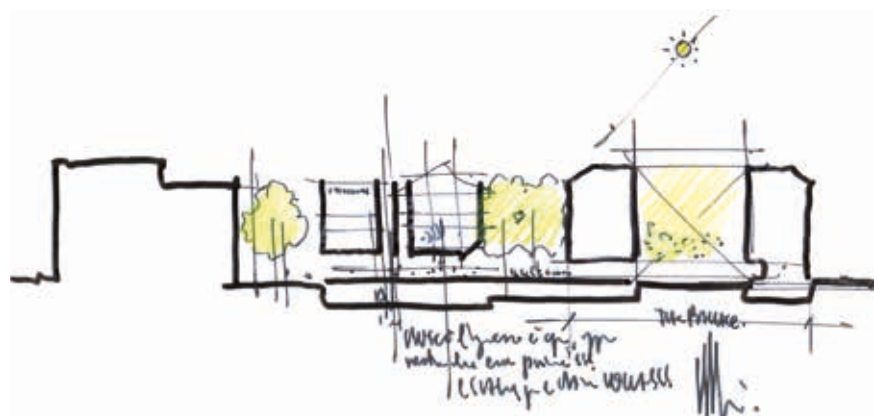
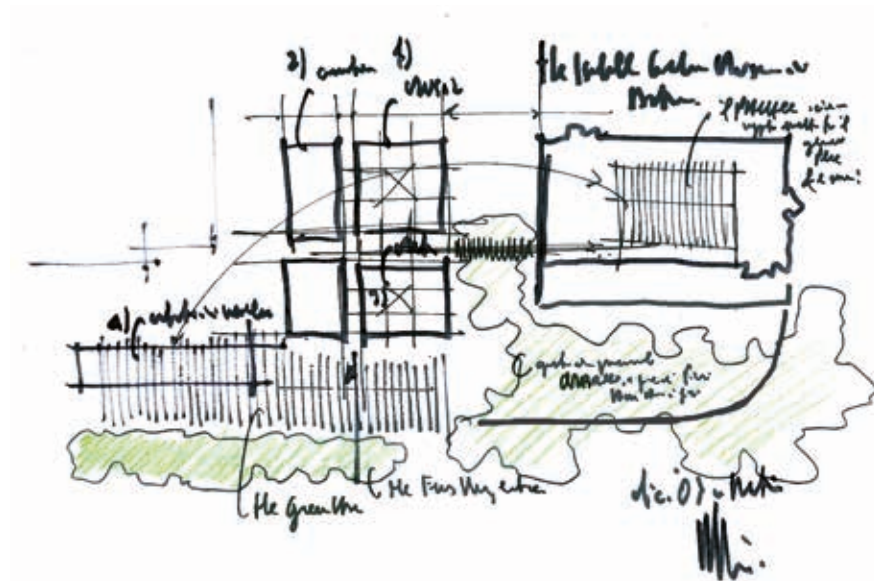
<sup>5</sup> B. Berenson, *Aesthetics, Ethics and History in the Arts of Visual Representation*, Pantheon, New York 1948.

<sup>6</sup> I refer to the fresco by Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Il Mondo Novo*, now conserved at *Ca' Rezzonico* in Venice.

<sup>7</sup> P. Cummings Loud, *The Art Museums of Louis I. Kahn*, Duke University Press, Durham & London 1989, pp. 101-170.

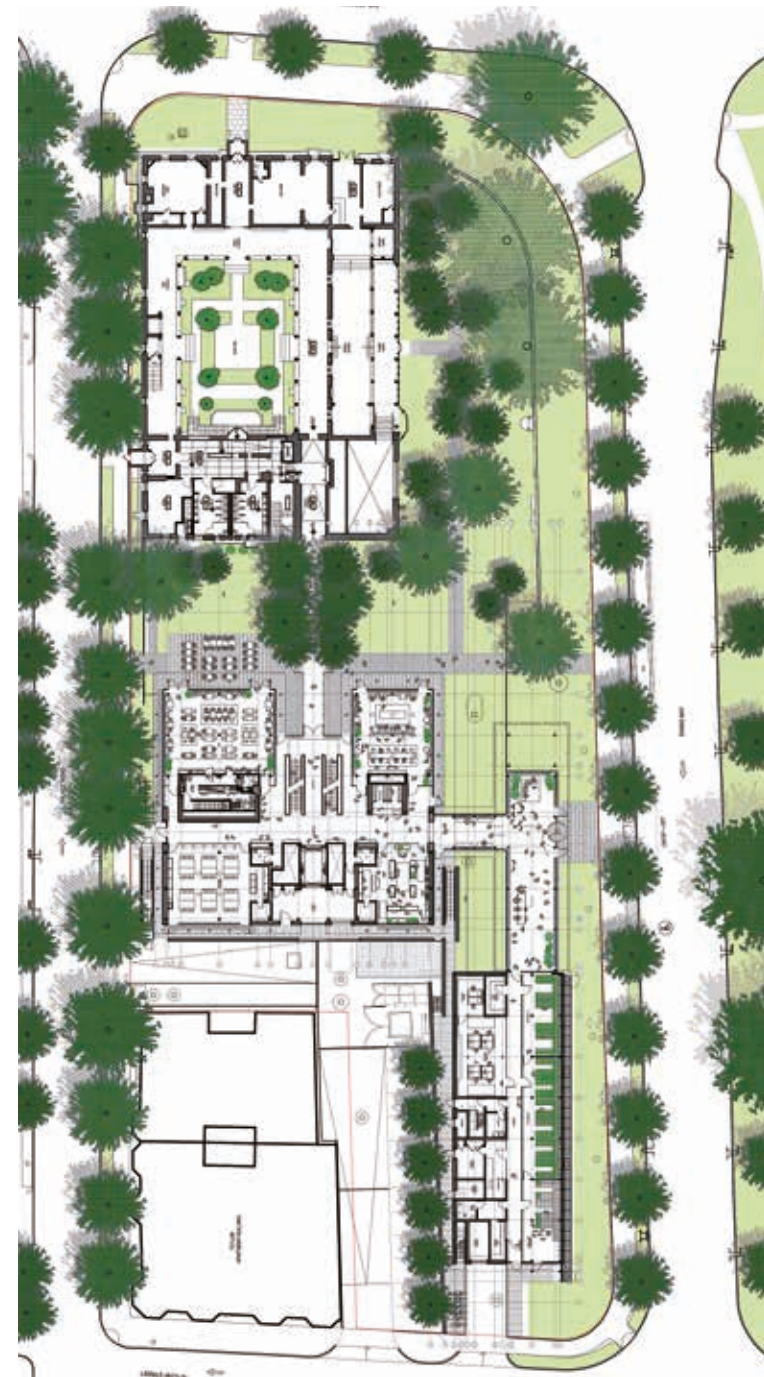
<sup>8</sup> A. E. Komendant, *18 Years with Architect Louis I. Kahn*, Aloray, Englewood 1975, p. 124.



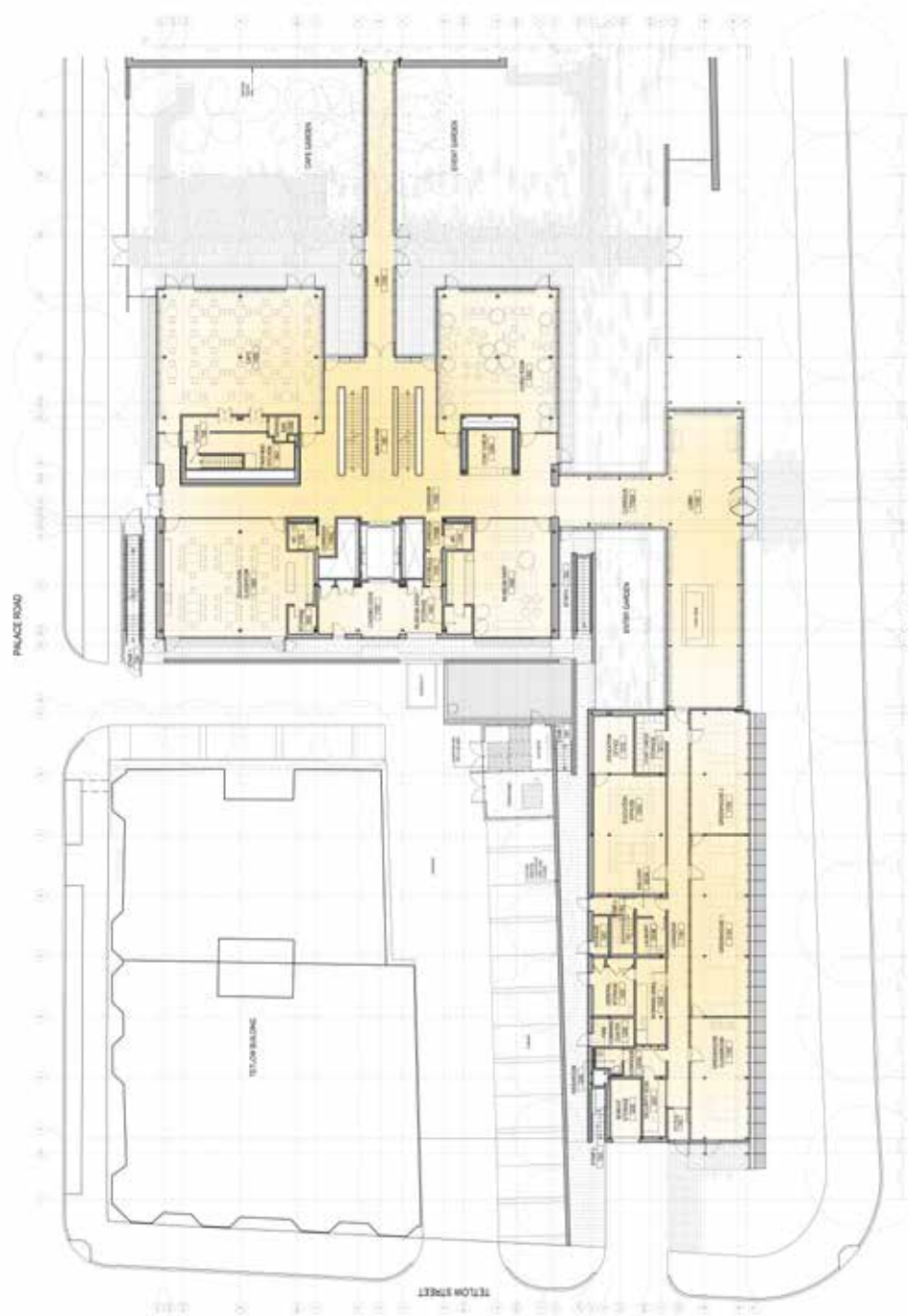


Renzo Piano Building  
Workshop, Expansion of the  
Isabella Stewart Gardner  
Museum (Boston, USA  
2005-12).

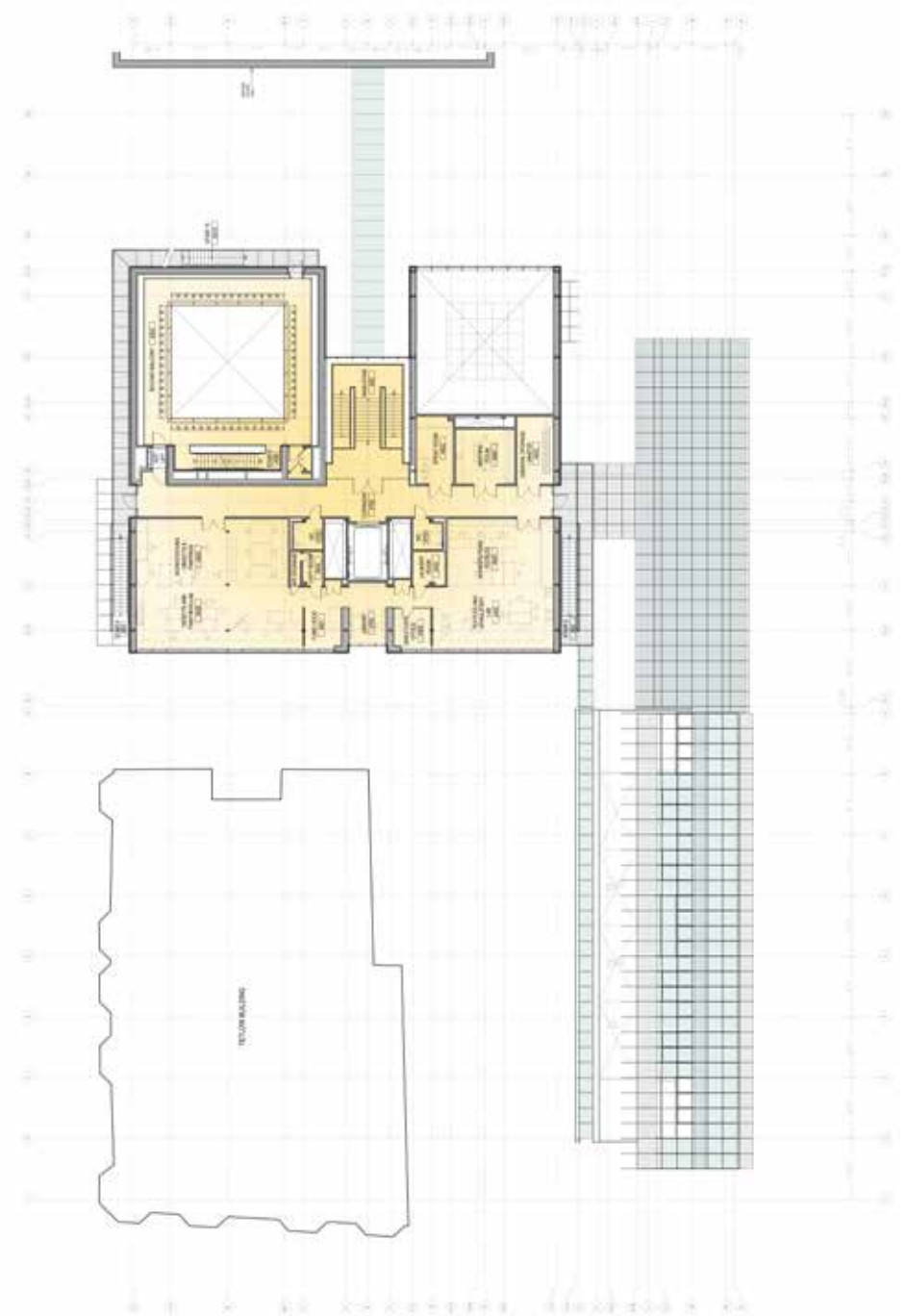
13  
Renzo Piano's sketches  
© RPBW.



14  
Site plan © RPBW.

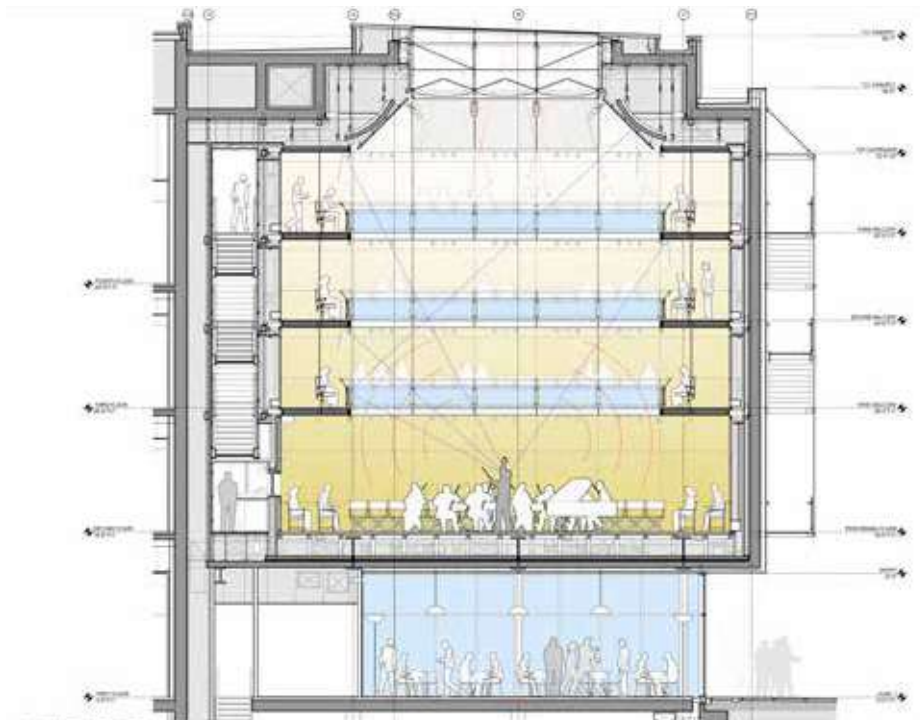


15  
First floor plan © RPBW.

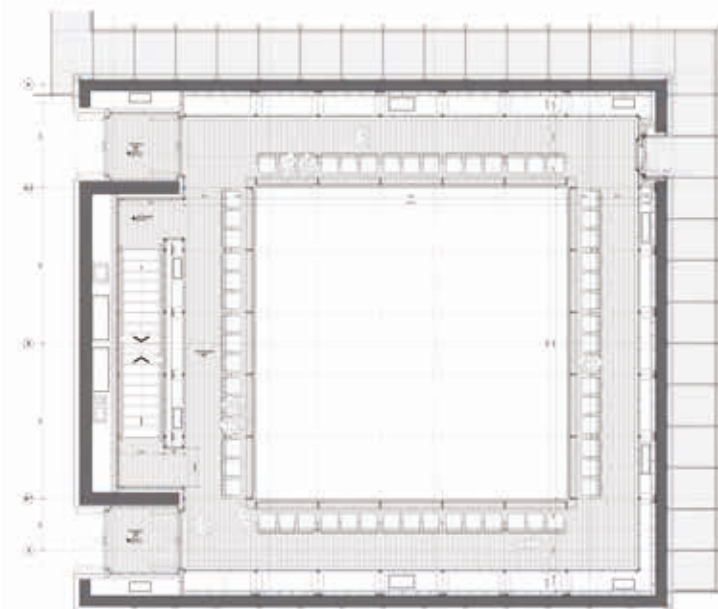
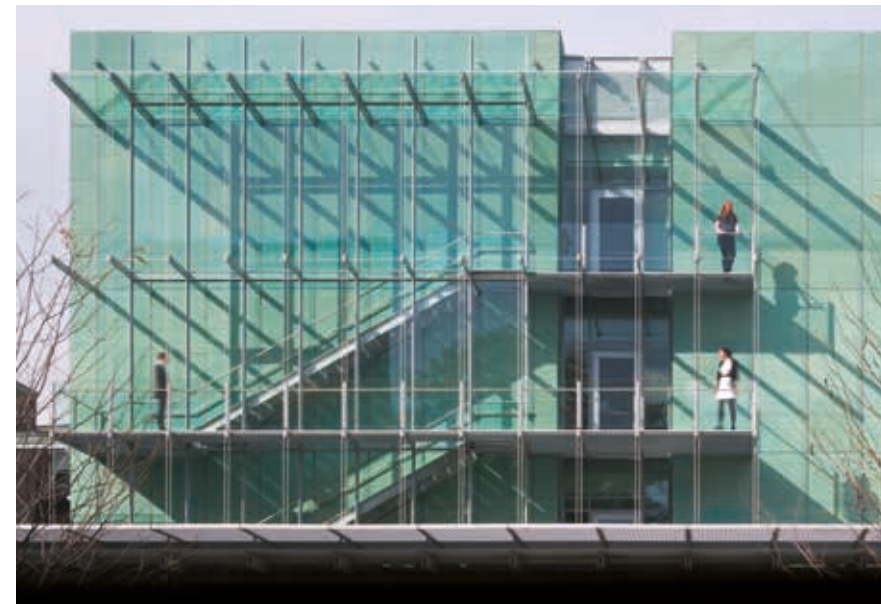


16  
Fourth floor plan © RPBW.

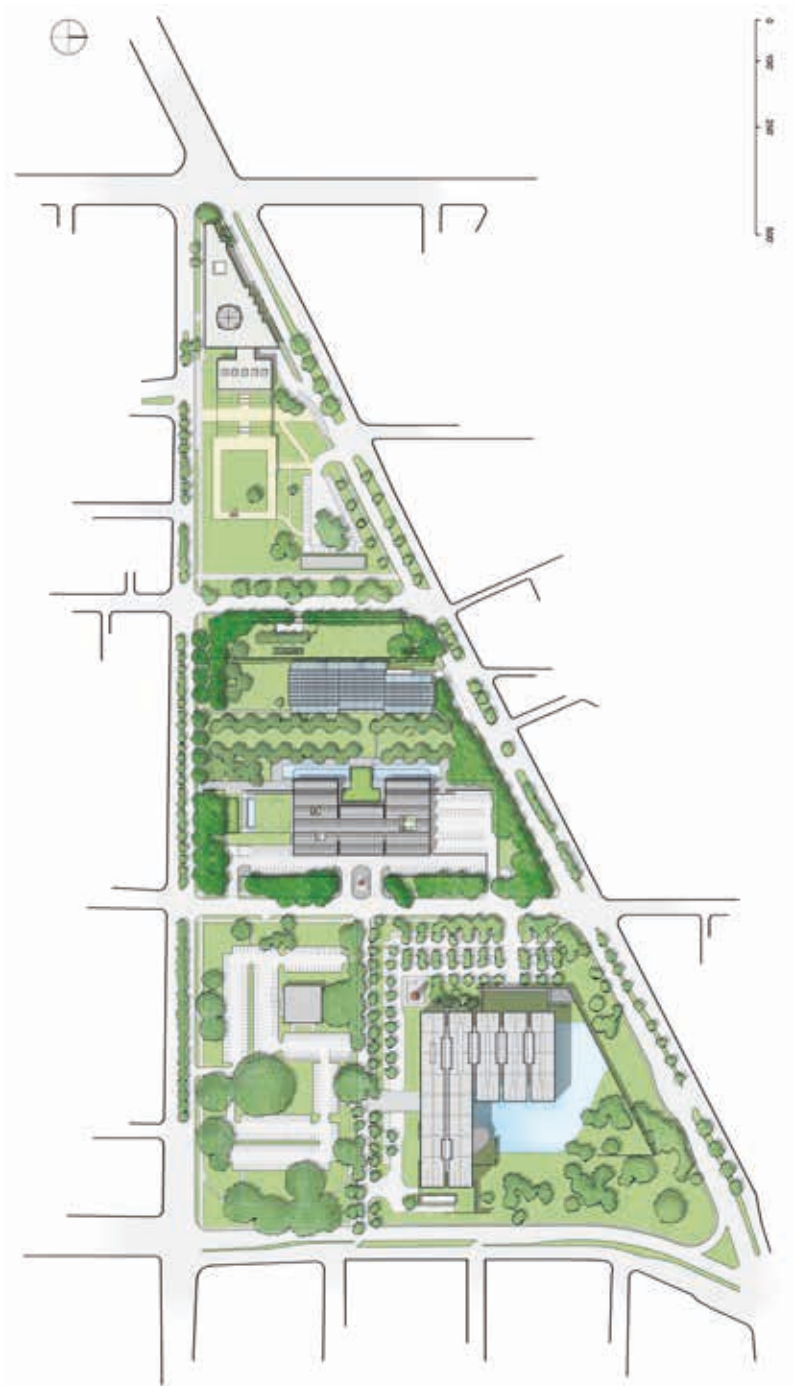




**17**  
Music Hall: performing floor plan, East-West section, and first balcony level plan  
© RPBW.

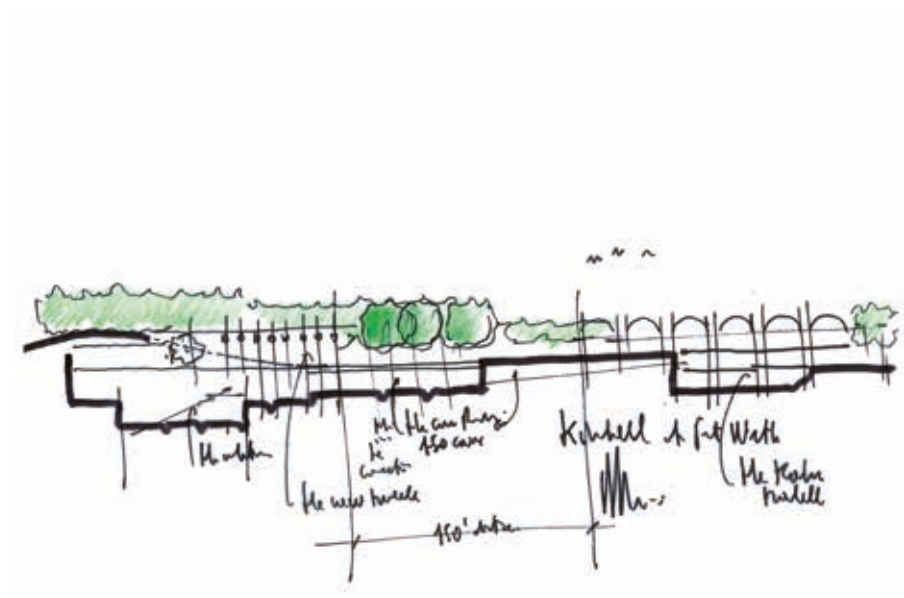


**18**  
View of the new Special Exhibition Gallery (Hostetter Gallery) © RPBW.



Renzo Piano Building Workshop, Expansion of the Kimbell Art Museum (Fort Worth, USA 2007-13).

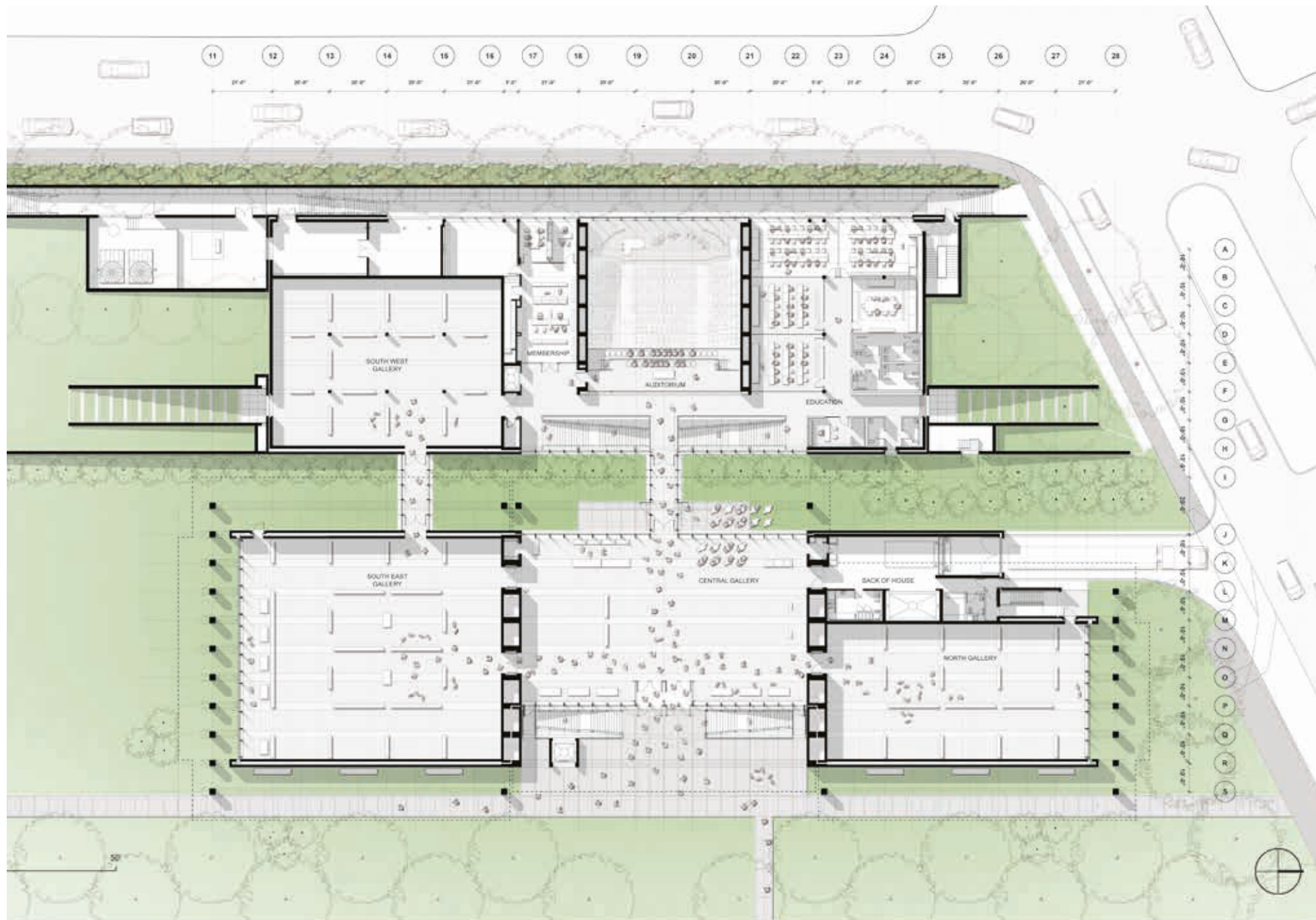
**19** Plan of the area: (1) Kimbell Art Museum Expansion by RPBW, (2) Kimbell Art Museum by Louis I. Kahn, (3) Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth by Tadao Ando © RPBW.



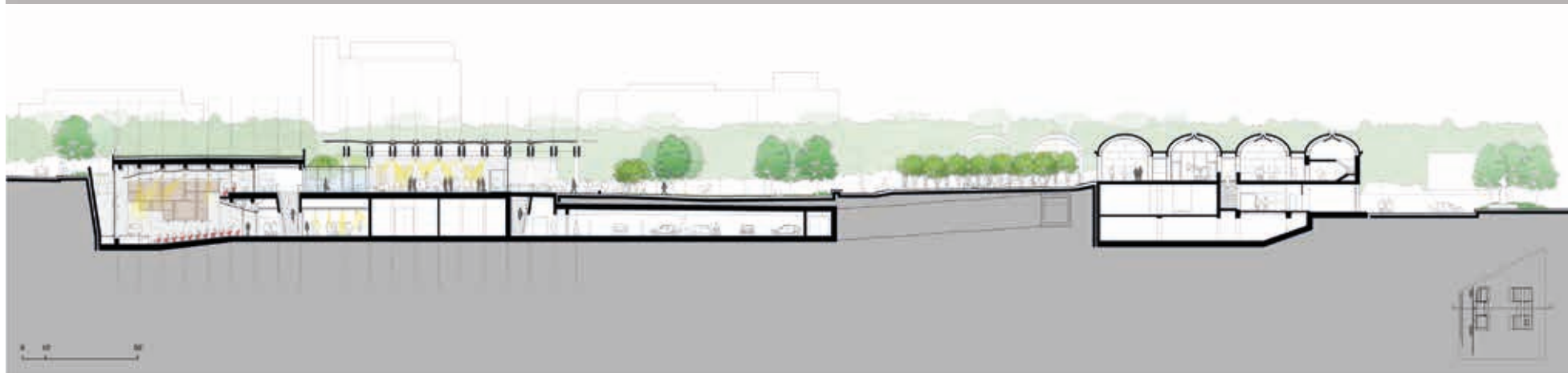
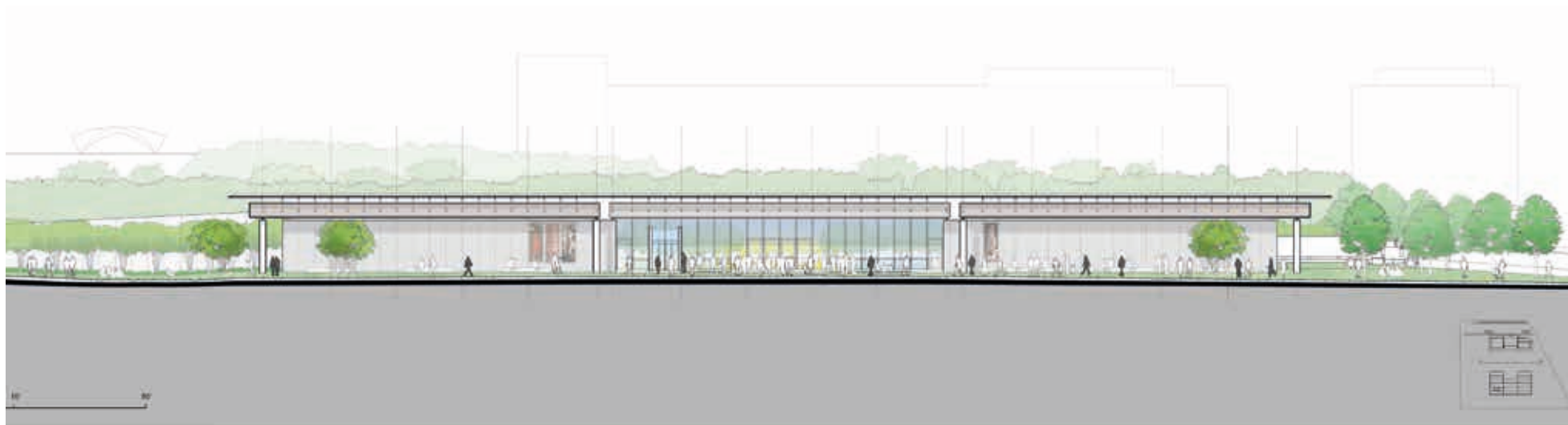
**20** Renzo Piano's sketch © RPBW.

**21** Aerial view © RPBW.

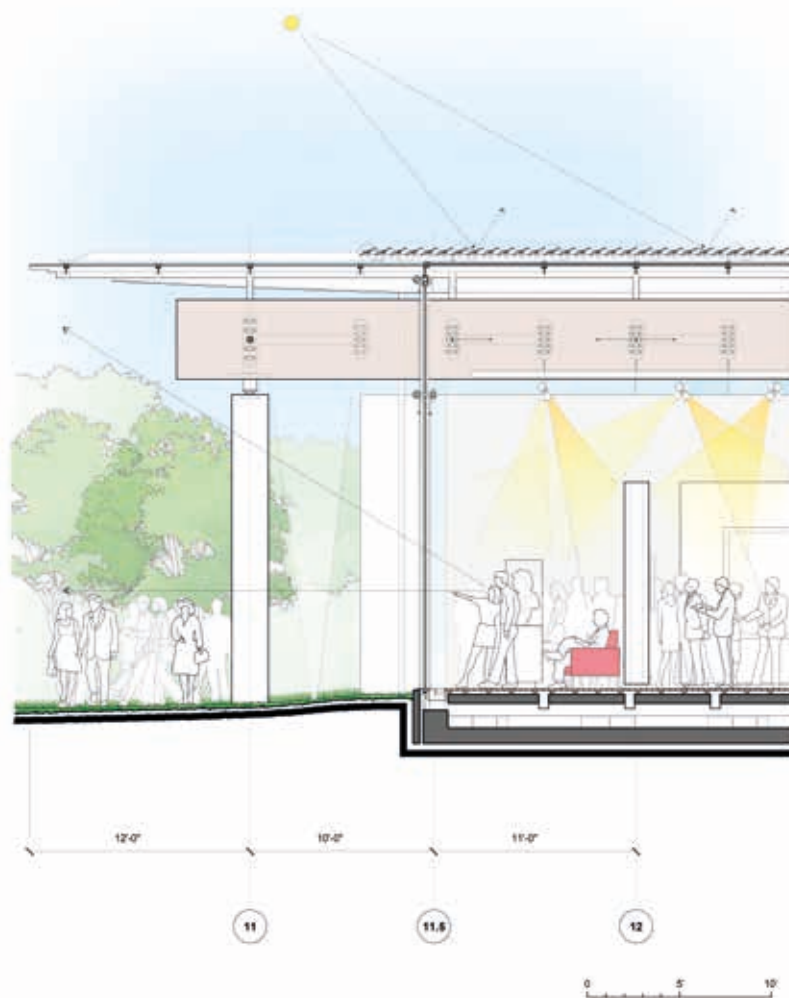




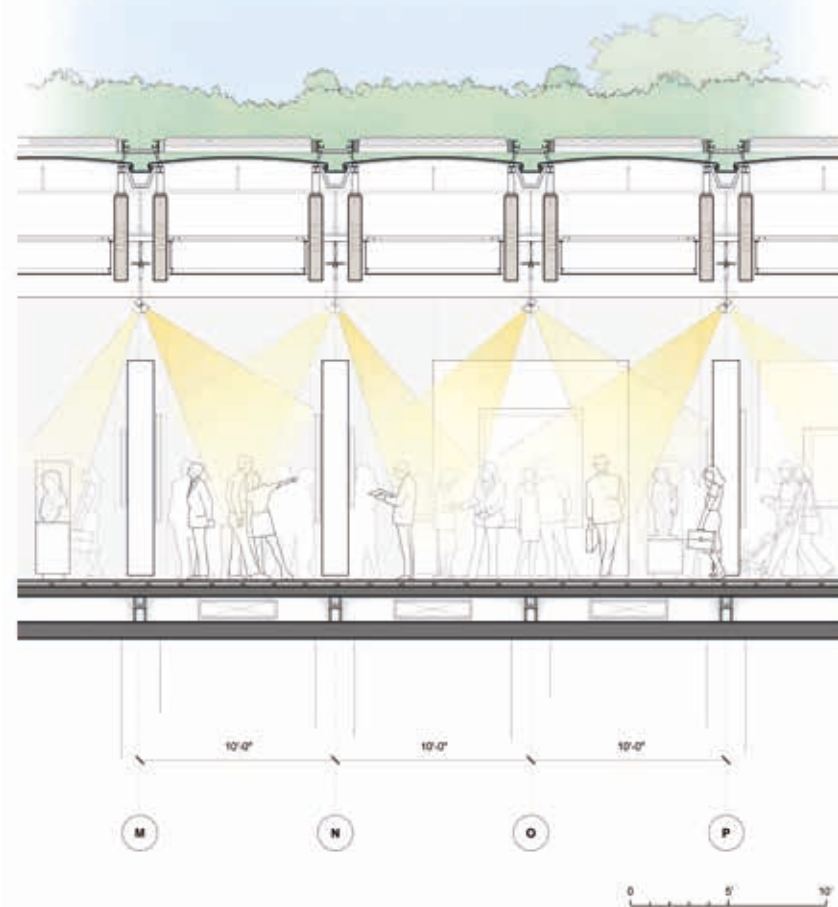
22  
Plan of the first level © RPBW.



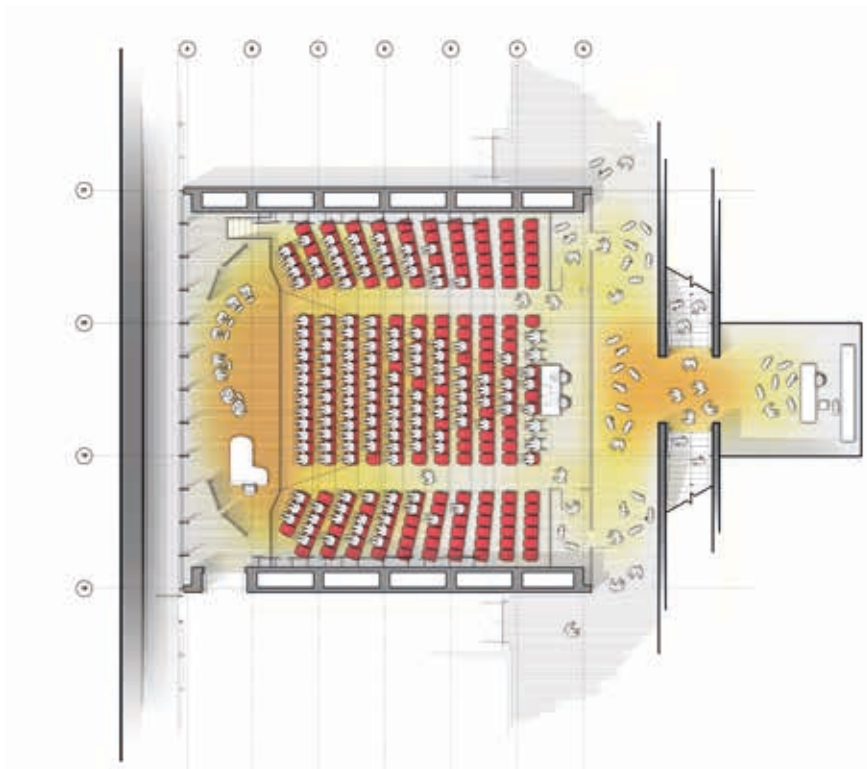
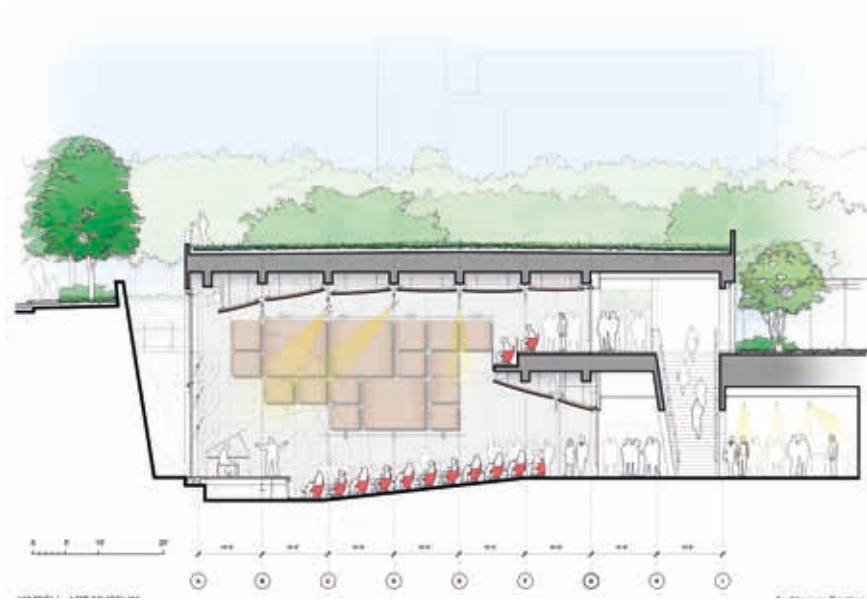
**23**  
East elevation, South elevation,  
and West-East section  
© RPBW.



**24** South Gallery sections and elevations © RPBW.







**25** Section and plan (level B1) of the Auditorium © RPBW.



**26 27** Exterior and interior views of the South Gallery © fb.

# José Ignacio Linazasoro. Matter and Memory of the Built Environment

Renata Cristina Mazzantini

During the postwar period, architecture was developed under the *diktat* of innovation, driven by the technological evolution of the construction industry, displaying indifference or at times disdain for its own past. The architectural patrimony of many countries, including Italy, was often strangled by property speculation, so that today many historical centres seem to be floating in «urban mayhem»<sup>1</sup>, like extremely delicate bubbles whose charm might burst at any moment.

As a result of the harm inflicted on the territory, in Italy conservation policies have been tightened, to the extent of attributing *tout court* a value to the past constraining it<sup>2</sup>. This value, acknowledged throughout most of Europe, has become discriminating and has acted as a watershed, dividing the majority of architects into two categories. The «conservatives», increasingly confined within the disciplinary niche of restoration, and the «compositionals», too often dragged by their own ego into the vortex of a future that rejects any connection with memory.

In this context, José Ignacio Linazasoro is one of the rare architects who goes against the grain, duly maintaining a position equidistant from both classicism and the avantgarde. His long career has witnessed various phases, preserving this stance with remarkable coherence. Like a tight-rope walker, he infuses new life into ruins and regenerates neighbourhoods maintaining the balance between preservation and architectural design. Indeed, while not being a pure conservationist, Linazasoro focuses his research on pre-existent buildings and historical contexts, well aware that restoration extends from maintenance to the reconstructive intervention, and that it is therefore a fundamental practice for working on the built environment and overseeing its transformations. With this awareness, he replaces the verb «transform» with «adapt», and adopts a *modus operandi* that stands out from that of many of his contemporaries for its erudition.

Linazasoro's curriculum and publications show that he is a cultured man, with a great knowledge and love of architecture's history. During his training the study of the typological process played a fundamental role, exploiting memory as a creative art and providing a solid cultural base for the development of every project. The research of Aldo Rossi, analysing the urban fabric in its entirety and conferring an intrinsic value also on rudimentary construction, or «background

architecture»<sup>3</sup>, aroused in him a true passion for history and ruins, which according to Ruskin was typically Italian<sup>4</sup>.

Thus Linazasoro developed a passion for history and made numerous trips in the spirit of the *Grand Tour* in order to observe architecture directly, to understand its spatial organization and to reveal its structural rules. His descriptions of late classical, Byzantine and Medieval buildings display a marked sensibility in capturing the original atmosphere of places, and convey strong emotions: interests and enthusiasms similar to those experienced by Brunelleschi in Rome, romanticized by Vasari in his *Lives*<sup>5</sup>.

The same passion also made of him «an ancient», in the Pasolinian sense of the term. «I am an ancient, who has read the classics», wrote Pier Paolo Pasolini<sup>6</sup>, «who then inhabited small towns whose magnificent form was imprinted by the artisanal eras, in which even a cottage or a simple wall were works of art, and a stream or hill sufficed to separate two styles and to create two worlds».

A man who is an ancient and in many respects classical, without detracting in any way from his capacity for invention. Recalling that the meaning of «classical is changeable and flexible», Salvatore Settis writes: «Even in our own time it is possible to choose between two opposing uses of the classical: that which iconises it as a rigid system of values and that which seeks in it the variety and complexity of historical experience»<sup>7</sup>.

Linazasoro obviously adopts the latter use of the classical, as he himself explains in a book<sup>8</sup> devoted to the formulation of a meta-linguistic theory of classicism.

He likes to explore architectural tradition and the complexity of historical experience, and for this reason his interventions on buildings are particularly interesting. In these projects, conservation and innovation represent two sides of one coin: the occurrences of architecture overlap and are interwoven, creating each time scenarios that are mixed, compact and full of history.

Among many examples, this essay will examine the four projects that seem to be of particular significance in describing Linazasoro's relationship with history, namely the reconstruction of a church in Valladolid, the extension of a church in Valdemaqueda, a cultural center in Madrid and a congress centre in Troyes.

The first of these projects, the *Iglesia de Santa Cruz* in Medina del Rioseco, near Valladolid (1985-91), is as stated by Linazasoro himself «the result of a profound typological reflection»<sup>9</sup> — an intelligent reflection, in which familiar historical images and references to the landscape intertwine, and which initiates a journey back in time in the meticulous search for the origin of the forms. Essential architectural forms, archaic in taste, which the project remodels to the point of overturning the archetype.

Linazasoro indeed looks to the past and for the design chooses to tread once more an already familiar path. In order to make evident the reconstruction of the lateral façade of the nave, and the relative buttresses, he turns to the example of the Colosseum, where the collapse of the spur was reintegrated by Giuseppe Valadier<sup>10</sup> with the partial and decreasing resurfacing in brick of the arches of the three superimposed orders<sup>11</sup>. Hence he designed the new wall and the new buttresses in exposed brickwork, with a purely decorative use of the plasterwork, making the structural logic of the cladding explicit also externally, through a careful design that highlights the arches, the downstand beams and the orders, thereby restoring the façade and at the same time ennobling it.

For the reconstruction of the roof, on the other hand, he reconsidered this experience in the light of the new technologies, discovering an original and effective design solution. He thus constructed a new barrel vault, not in brick but in glued laminated timber, creating a traditional roof lacking any trace of nostalgia. A vault that was light, overriding any «grossezza» or thickness<sup>12</sup>, to adapt to the *hic et nunc* of the project. The resulting architecture surprises without being too daring, because it could «belong to any era». It reveals remarkable iconic simplification and palpable restraint that not only preserve, but also increase the aura of the church. «The aura is everything»<sup>13</sup>, and to sense it in a reconstructed church, without lamenting its collapse, is a rare result indeed<sup>14</sup>.

As Vittorio Sgarbi has observed, «True art is an eternal dialogue that annuls the differences between one era and another, between one place and another and which one day or five centuries afterwards, in one part of the world or another, is still able to convey an emotion, enable us to capture a moment of spirituality, evoke a reflection, inspire a value».

It is in this context that Linazasoro speaks of a «sense of continuity». The diachronic interpretation of the church's identity, which acknowledges the various phases of its construction, coincides with the synchronic interpretation of its image, which following the restoration appears uniform and harmonious. At Medina del Rioseco, diachrony is transformed into synchrony, as the identity and image of the monument overlap.

The second project examined concerns a late Gothic church in Madrid, the *Iglesia de San Lorenzo en Valdemaqueda* (1997-2001). The project envisaged the enlargement of the building with the reconstruction of the nave, which collapsed in the 1940s and had been badly rebuilt. The new nave was to be built onto the main chapel, dating from the sixteenth century, which was surmounted by a groin vault and enclosed by a polygonal apse. The original masonry consisted of bare brickwork, of irregular medium and large stone blocks, roughly squared and laid in rows, for the most part horizontal and parallel.

For the new nave, Linazasoro conceived a structure that was essential and compact, considerably lower than the chapel. A squared space, inspired by Arabic and Romanesque architecture, completely enclosed within itself like a sanctuary. The walls of the nave are clad on the outside with a modern design of elongated strips of stone, placed irregularly in horizontal lines, while on the inside the brickwork is barely covered by a coat of mortar.

With the exception of the entrance and a symbolic slit window, the construction entirely lacks any openings: Linazasoro eliminates any connection between the interior and exterior and creates a silent sanctuary, aimed at promoting introspection and contemplation below zenithal lighting that is truly moving.

A spatiality based on isolation and on the concept of inner peace, evoking Gaetano Pesce's visionary project *Church of Solitude*<sup>15</sup>. Particularly striking in this project is the way in which Linazasoro resolves the problem of the juxtaposition between old and new, which consists of placing between the nave and the existing building two space vacuums, as two illuminated diaphragms, creating a sense of surprise. The first detaches the old Renaissance entrance sculpted in granite from the brickwork of the nave, isolating it like a ruin. The second

diaphragm separates the original Gothic chapel from the contemporary space, producing an increase in the height of the ceilings that emphasizes the change of scale just in the passage between the two different buildings. Francesco Venezia has described it effectively as a «luminous fracture»<sup>16</sup>.

The third project concerns the recovery of the remains of the Piarist school of San Fernando in Lavapiés, a neighbourhood of Madrid (1996-2004), built by the Scolopi Fathers between 1763 and 1791 and almost totally destroyed during the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The remains were confined to the lower part of the façade and the drum of the monumental church. They were simply ruins, but ruins that were truly magnificent. Engaged to transform them into the seat of the library of the National Distance Education University, Linazasoro established a cultured connection with the context, based on his study of the use of space in ancient basilicas — although he adopted a somewhat liberal approach. To accommodate the building's new function, less symbolic and representative, he attenuated the architecture's monumentality, subtly remodelling the space and lowering the volumes, creating a sense of their being dilated.

In the design of the façade he sought a formal dialogue with the existing construction, softening the contrasts with the mimetic properties of the materials. As Solà Morales says, praising the multiplicity of the work's references, at Lavapiés Linazasoro probably opted to «take on the conflict as the driving force of the project»<sup>17</sup>.

Firstly, he allowed the church's façade to retain the evocative appearance of a ruin, as a paradigm of the unfinished building, in an archaeological approach that recalls that of Michelangelo in *Santa Maria degli Angeli* in Rome. Michelangelo's approach was praised by Bruno Zevi for the very fact of being a «non intervention». Likewise, he did not intervene on the drum, which retains the charm of its rough-hew silhouette. Secondly, but in a different perspective, Linazasoro reconstructed the side wall of the nave of the church, creating a new façade for the library with a new entrance door. This façade displays a mediievally inspired patterning of the unclad brickwork and incorporates a *lapidarium*, beguiling the imagination and helping to confer a sense of atemporality on the building.



Different yet again is the logic governing the façade of the new building, housing the classrooms, which displays a bold alignment with the main façade of the church, coplanar and seamless. This logic vaguely reminds Asplund's project for the extension of the Town Hall in Gothenburg<sup>18</sup>. Despite the geometric regularity of the window openings and the brick facing, this façade differs substantially from the earlier construction, since here the predominant theme is the plugging of the mono-block windows, in wood and aluminium, set back in varying degrees.

The design of the façades thus displays a variety of «quotations crossing in multiple directions»<sup>19</sup> devoid of hierarchy or connections<sup>20</sup>, finding a miraculous equilibrium in its very complexity. The ruin flanking the building, a form giving rise to form, throws into relief antithetical forces, as in the Piranesian *Campo Marzio*.

The interior of the library, obtained from the spaces in the church, provokes astonishment. The nave is roofed with a lowered wooden barrel vault, light and with grilles, that filters the light leaving the rooms in penumbra. The supple and dynamic effect created by the wooden grille and the resulting seductive play of light and shade dematerialises the roof, creating a magical, almost Byzantine space<sup>21</sup>.

The final project examined here involved the creation of two buildings for the offices of the Department Council, congress centre and auditorium (2008-14) situated in the late Gothic centre of Troyes, in France. This project did not involve the recovery of a single building but the complex restoration of a cultural site.

Linazasoro was deeply aware of the dialectic and not casual relationship between the building style and urban setting and knew that the «secret magic of old cities», of which Gombrich wrote<sup>22</sup>, derived from a slow and organic growth, from a system of «historical self-regulation changing organically in space and in time»<sup>23</sup> which ensured the quality of the whole. In old cities in fact buildings are not casually situated one beside another: their coexistence is governed by aesthetic rules, which take into account proportions and guarantee harmony. Through these disciplinary principles, Linazasoro carried out a reassessment of the urban fabric and opted for a construction principle appropriate to the neighbourhood.

In the design of the façades he avoided abstract formalism, ignored originality of expression and set aside the egocentric assertion of a personal style. But neither did he succumb to the temptation of reducing the project to an illusionistic game of imitation. Instead, he established a concrete relationship with pre-existing surrounding buildings and stitched together the fragments of the cityscape distributed along the streets, valuing a «timeless» beauty. A beauty provided by the complex articulation of fullness and emptiness, but also by overhangs and recesses, by pitched roofs and aerial walkways, which are rearranged harmoniously on the new façades respecting the alignments and proportions of the past. A beauty that surprises in the quantity and quality of the details, from the stained glass designed by the artist Flavie Serrière to the small slivers of wood that cover some of the surfaces like bark. The new façades in reinforced concrete and wood with large windows seem already to be part of the history of the neighbourhood, but they strengthen its character «returning it to a strictly contemporary context»<sup>24</sup>. Thus Linazasoro overcomes the antinomy between contrast and analogy, and his laborious quest for atemporality in Troyes could certainly be said to have been satisfied.

The new buildings, devoid of any retro overtones, contain memories of the past as an active function of the present. They reconstitute admirably different spatial sequences, capable of «affirming a continuity with the architecture of the past»<sup>25</sup>, and of providing fresh harmony to an old section of the city. Those wandering there are perhaps not even aware of what the language of architecture is, but they can sense authentic vibrations of life and wellbeing.

The images of the streets, squares, urban vistas and roofs of Troyes, which unfortunately I have not had the pleasure of visiting, seem to re-echo the Heraclitian aphorism on the passage of time, bring to mind the «happy disposition» of memory of Bergson<sup>26</sup>, and to transmit an ethical-aesthetic view of contemporary architecture.



- 1 L. Borgese, *L'Italia rovinata dagli italiani*, Rizzoli, Milan 2005, p. 299.
- 2 In accordance with the *Codice del Beni Culturali*, Dlgs. 42-20024, and the subsequent ruling *MiBACT* 3-8-2016, only public buildings over 70 years old are restricted.
- 3 The term *edilizia di base* (which can be translated as «background architecture») was adopted by Gianfranco Caniggia in the essay *Lettura dell'edilizia di base*, Alinea, Firenze 2008. In Caniggia's opinion, «background architecture» constitutes the deepest and most pervasive substratum of the Italian architectural heritage and should be considered the primary element of analysis of cultural landscapes.
- 4 John Ruskin wrote: «Italians prefer patching up a ruin instead of building a house». J. Ruskin, *Poetry of Architecture. The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. I, National Library Association, New York 2010, p. 28.
- 5 In his *Life of Filippo Brunelleschi*, Giorgio Vasari wrote that: «He noted and made drawings of all the ancient vaults and was always studying their construction [...] This led to (Donatello and Brunelleschi) becoming known throughout Rome as "treasure-hunters", which was what they were called by the people when they passed carelessly dressed through the streets on their expeditions [...]. He was now alone in Rome, as Donatello had gone back to Florence, and even more intently and energetically than before he carried on studying old ruins». *Giorgio Vasari. The Lives of the Artists*, translated by G. Bull, Penguin Books, London 1965, p. 140.
- 6 P. P. Pasolini, *Quasi un testamento*, in *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, Mondadori, Milan 1999.

- 7 S. Settis, *Il futuro del Classico*, Einaudi, Turin 2004, p. 106.
- 8 J. I. Linazasoro, *El proyecto clásico en arquitectura*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1981.
- 9 S. Presi (ed.), *José Ignacio Linazasoro. Progettare e costruire*, Casa dell'Architettura, Latina 2007, p. 191.
- 10 C. Ceschi, *Teoria e storia del restauro*, Mario Bulzoni editore, Rome 1970, p. 40.
- 11 On the restoration, the use of material other than stone differentiates the parts that are original from those that are reconstructed, adopting a design solution that anticipates present theories of restoration.
- 12 For the definition of «grossezza» see N. Cavalieri San-Bertolo, *Istituzioni di architettura statica e idraulica*, Vol. II, Bologna 1827, p. 159.
- 13 Vittorio Sgarbi wrote this statement in more than one volume of *Tesoro d'Italia*, published by La Nave di Teseo, and repeated it on several other occasions, in television interviews and newspaper articles.
- 14 In 1997 Pier Luigi Cervellati adopted a similar solution in the project for the reconstruction of the roof of the Bologna Auditorium in the *Ex-Oratorio San Filippo Neri*, completed in 1999.
- 15 Between 1974 and 1977, Gaetano Pesce designed *The Church of Solitude*, or rather a *Church of Isolation* in New York; the project was never built, but on account of their significance and originality, the drawings now form part of the permanent collection at MoMA, New York.
- 16 F. Venezia, «Una composizione binaria», *Casabella*, 697, February 2002, pp. 10-11.

- 17 I. De Solà Morales, *Imitazione essenziale. L'architettura di José Ignacio Linazasoro*, in S. Presi (ed.), *José Ignacio Linazasoro. Progettare e costruire*, Casa della Cultura, Latina 2007, p. 247.
- 18 In 1912 Erik Gunnar Asplund won a competition for the extension of the Town Hall in Gothenburg; the addition of the building was completed in 1936 and was listed in 1982, being considered a good example of blending the old and the new architecture.
- 19 T. Carranza, *Ricordi, sogni, ossessioni*, in J. I. Linazasoro (ed.), *Evocando la Ruina. Sombras y Texturas. Centro Cultural en Lavapiés*, s.e., Madrid 2004.
- 20 A. Riondino, *Ludovico Quaroni e la didattica dell'architettura nella Facoltà di Roma tra gli anni '60 e '70*, Gangemi, Rome 2012, p. 386.
- 21 «Labrouste introduces into his work the Byzantine and Gothic concept of the immaterial ceiling». J. I. Linazasoro, *Labrouste e l'architettura eclettica francese*, in *José Ignacio Linazasoro, Progettare e costruire*, op. cit., p. 218.

- 22 Recalling also the thought of Karl Popper, in 1991 Ernst H. Gombrich acknowledged the sign of an «organic growth», «slow and unplanned», the result of nature and culture; essentially a whole consisting of «qualities difficult to imitate with intentional planning», of an urbanistic nature.
- 23 G. Caniggia, G. L. Maffei, *Lettura dell'edilizia di base*, Marsilio, Venice 1987, Alinea, Firenze 2008, p. 122.
- 24 V. Sainz, *Architetture per la città. Progetti urbani di José Ignacio Linazasoro*, in *José Ignacio Linazasoro, Progettare e costruire*, op. cit., p. 253.
- 25 P. Cefaly, *Per una architettura senza tempo*, in *José Ignacio Linazasoro. Progettare e costruire*, op. cit.
- 26 Henri Bergson wrote: «Between these two extremes lies the happy disposition of a memory docile enough to follow with precision all the outlines of the present situation, but energetic enough to resist all other appeal. Good sense, or practical sense, is probably nothing but this». H. Bergson, *The Persistence of the Past*, in *Key writings*, Continuum, London 2002, p. 133.



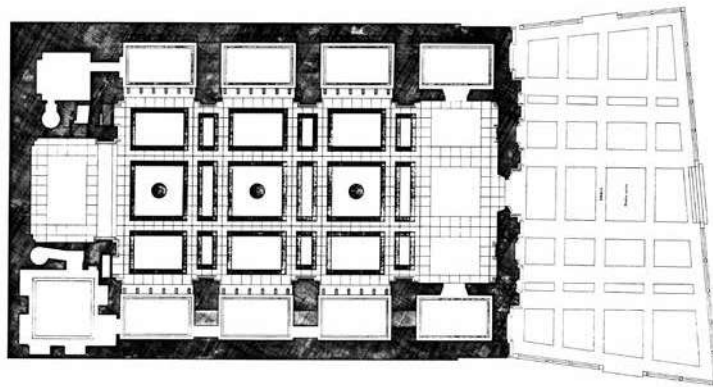
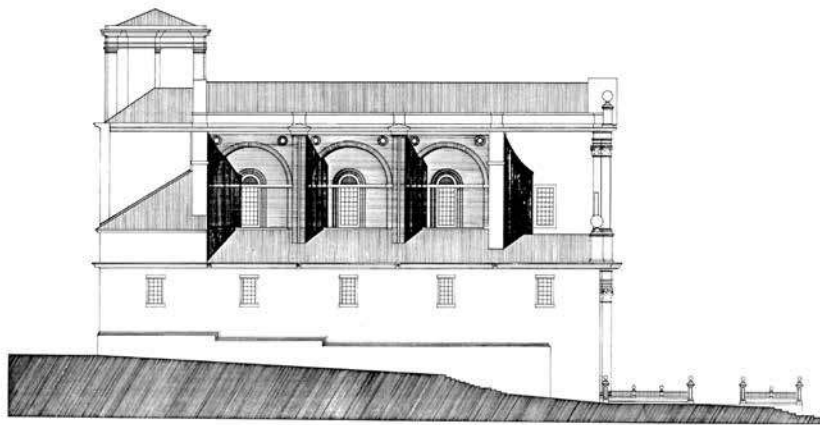
José Ignacio Linazasoro,  
Reconstruction of the *Iglesia  
de Santa Cruz* in Medina de  
Rioseco (Spain 1985-91).

**28 29**  
Found state © Linazasoro &  
Sánchez.

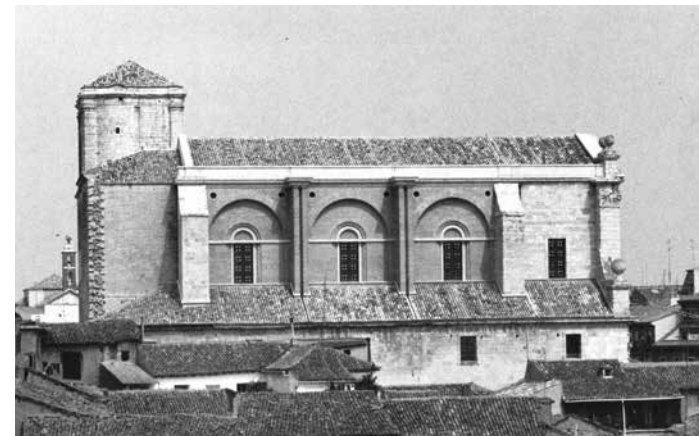


**30**  
The central nave after the  
intervention © Linazasoro &  
Sánchez.

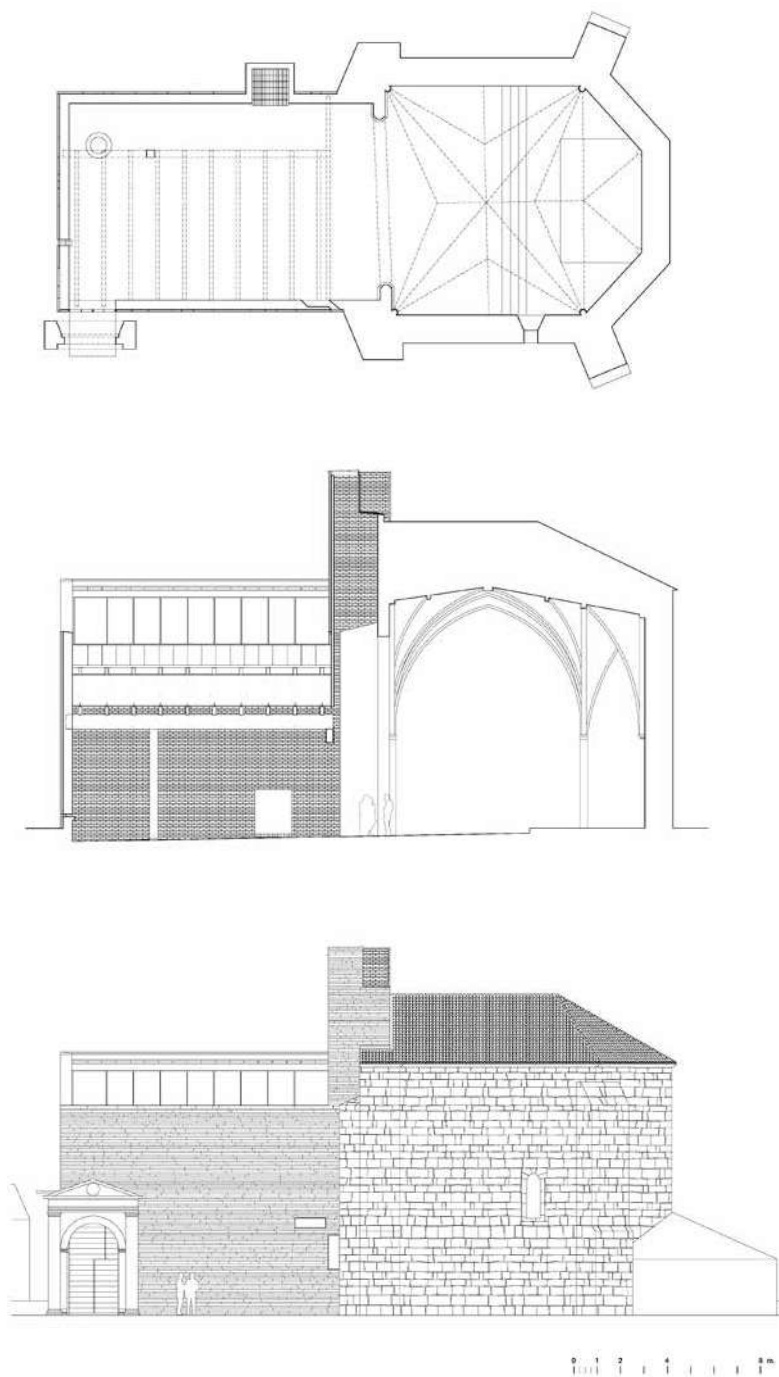




**31**  
Lateral façade, longitudinal  
section and plan  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.



**32 33 34**  
Exterior and interior views  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.



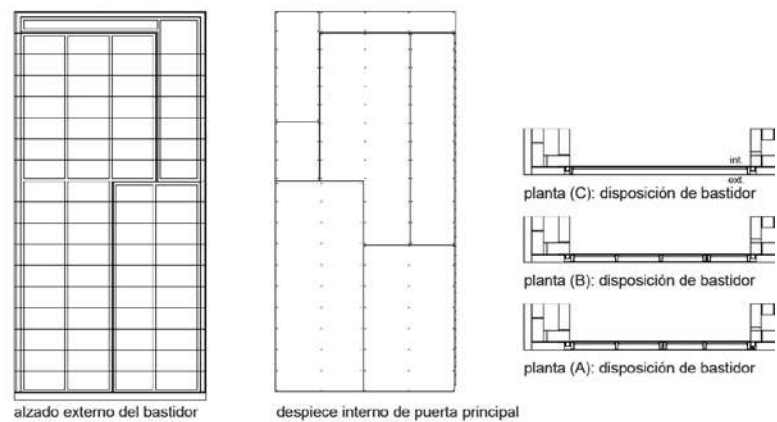
José Ignacio Linazasoro,  
*Iglesia de San Lorenzo de  
Valdequada* (Madrid, Spain  
1997-2001).

**35**  
Plan, section and Southern  
façade © Linazasoro &  
Sánchez.

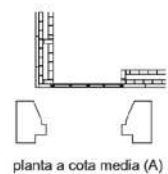
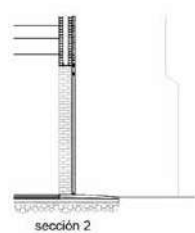


**36 37**  
The main entrance  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.

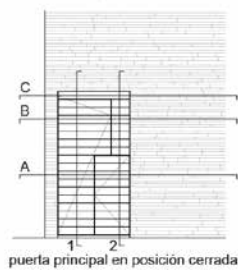
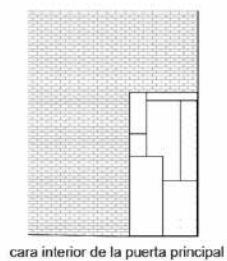
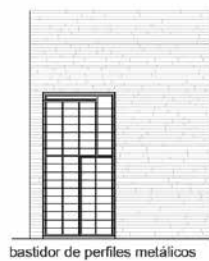




0 1 2 4



0 2 5 10 m.



38  
Details © Linazasoro & Sánchez.



39  
Interior view  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.

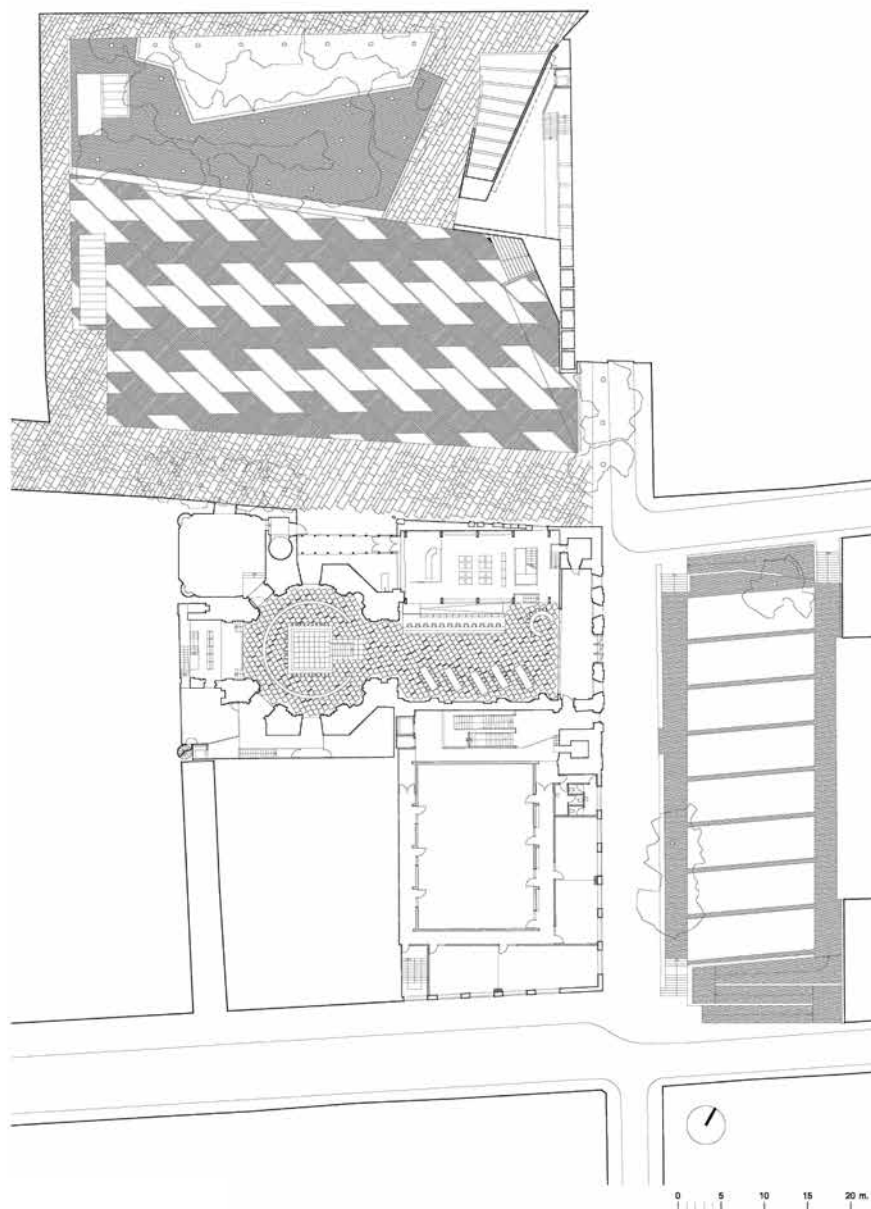




José Ignacio Linazasoro,  
*Centro Cultural Escuelas Pías  
de Lavapiés* (Madrid, Spain  
1996-2004).

**40**  
Found state  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.

**41**  
The building after the  
intervention © Linazasoro &  
Sánchez.



**42**  
Ground floor plan  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.

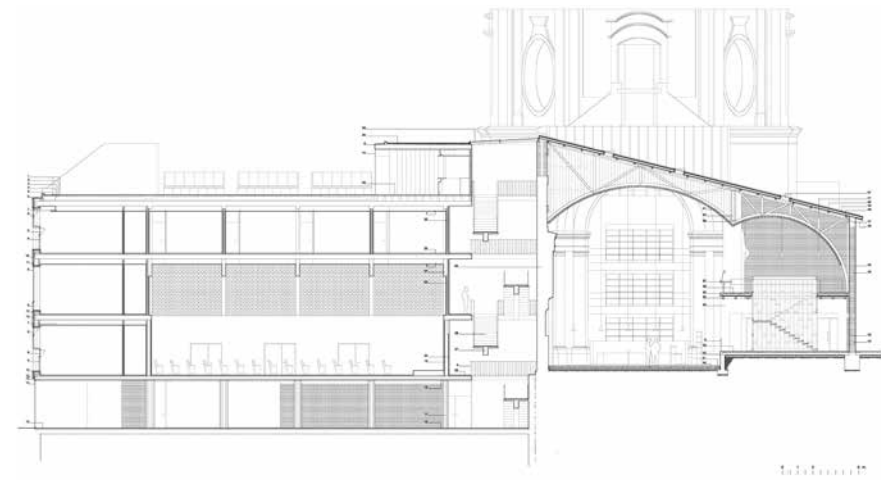


**43**  
The library © Linazasoro & Sánchez.





44 45 46  
Interior views  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.



47  
Longitudinal section  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.

48  
The main stairway  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.

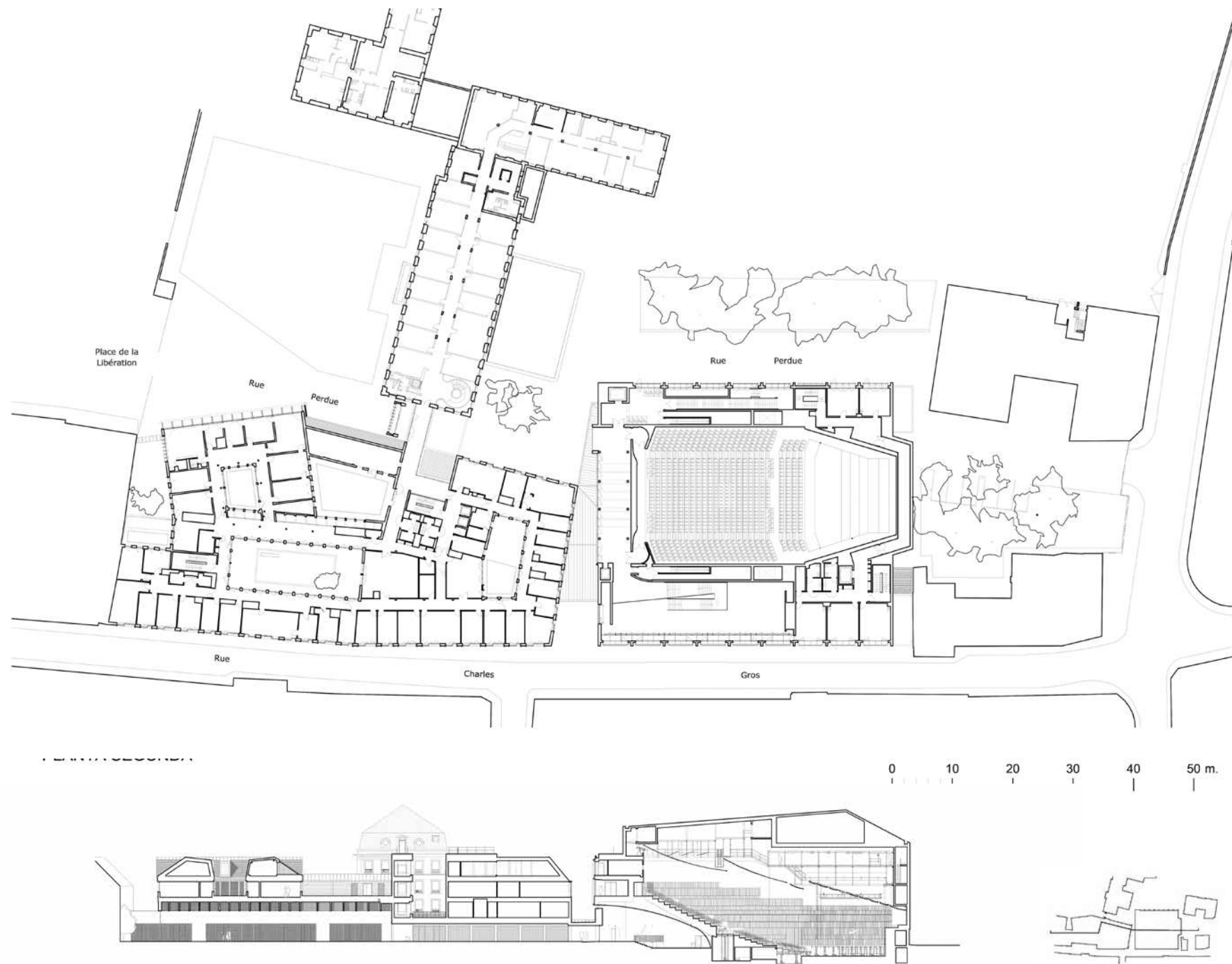




José Ignacio Linazasoro,  
with Thienot/Ballan/Zulaica  
architectes, *Oficinas y Auditorio  
Para el Conseil du Département  
de L'aube* (Troyes, France  
2008-14).

**49 50**  
The main front and interior  
space © Linazasoro & Sánchez.

**51 52**  
The secondary fronts  
© Linazasoro & Sánchez.



**53**  
First floor plan and longitudinal  
section © Linazasoro &  
Sánchez.



# Paolo Zermani. The Conscious Thriftiness

Massimo Ferrari

Without a snag, gesture by gesture, in that slowness that is conducive to reflection, the series of projects brought to life by Paolo Zermani — starting from the early opportunities afforded to him by the good masters who trained him and with whom he shared part of his journey — show a steady consistency which, bordering on the conscious anachronism, allows us to recognize an ability for critical thought that is renewed in the different declinations of the themes covered. A confident action with a focused perspective, which is never discussed again, refines a controlled lexicon ever more consistent with the demonstration of the contents proposed. A rare determination in terms of consistency and linearity.

Zermani's rational confidence is born first and foremost out of that sense of affection and belonging to an environment from which he has stolen — with complicity — all the experience it contained. Over time, he has compensated with equal generosity by updating the values hidden inside a land that contains both the fossils of ancient creatures of the deep, shells, skeletons and the jewels of *terramare* marshes, and the colourful oxides of a plastic material which, measured by human reason, becomes brick. The latter, more than the former which pushes us to distant flights, to unforeseen rejects, to a certain madness which the Emilians are known for — even more so the writer —, coincides with the habits of Paolo Zermani that, over time, have followed the consistent path which runs from the engraved ground to the capacity for construction, then to technique, and then to the tradition settled in an evolutionary process which straightens the back of mankind. This ongoing evolution appoints the intellect as the arbiter of the balance between the curved labour of learning and the shrewd straightness of demonstrating. An education in observation which ties knowledge to history, necessities to satisfactions, needs to the intrinsic qualities of the constructed space which, from the known proximities of familiar places, consequently interprets the infinite.

A figurative autobiography — a genealogy of genealogies — impossible not to recognize, unconsciously pervades each and every project or construction with that red that never changes except in the accents of brightness that appear first on paper through quick red chalk marks, which all too soon become opaque in the pinkish hue of the bricks that measure them out in reality, giving life to the disenchantment of the

obligatory passage from the illusion of the prefigure to the realism of the architecture; at the end of the magic that suspends the delight of expectation.

But the true sense of such a stubborn work is perhaps contained in the deepest layer of values well grounded in the earth which, starting from the orientation imposed by the imperial land surveyors, traces an uninterrupted underlying plot all the way to the most recent transcriptive abilities. This is an analogy of the contemporary with the stacking of the past models which, from Jacopo Barozzi to Galeazzo Alessi to Giovan Battista Aleotti, have indicated the passage of the chosen age from the singularity of the monument to the construction of the city, in a harmony of intent not unaware of the simplification necessary for both the composition of the parts and the tyranny of a planimetric design that still survives to this day. More than the individual protagonists of the renaissances of ages, then, the translations of the cornerstones of historical architecture — a sort of fortuitous handbook — are instead those which have attracted Zermani's critical thought, which still today rereads those far-off poems with the same depth of gaze.

A peaceful territorial coexistence binds together, with a cultural solidarity, recent projects with the existing ones of the past in a geography whose only clue lies in the dust of time which, from the parishes to the fortresses to the castles, spreads thinly over the newly-built houses, schools and town halls with a typological variety that continues to confirm a single direction of action.

The attention paid to the theme of the sacred also shows a certain constancy in the sound of the rite which, more than anything else, has provided a cultural unity to a territory — this time on a national scale — whose thousand different shades prefer variety over the norm as the distinctive character of its many bell towers. An ancient sound, always the same in the ringing of the bells, which Zermani's architecture translates into the deafest tones, all indifferent to the brazen extravagances of modern times, even compared to the happy modern complexities, with measured interpretations of a typological continuity wrung out of the superfluous. This is an approach that, as Zermani is aware, guarantees in its dry simplification a certain and automatic adherence, almost free of surprises, to the idea to be represented.

The research revolving around the theme of religion firmly picks up the need to return to a liturgy celebrated in an essential way<sup>1</sup>, in the primary sense of the term so dear to Romano Guardini. Liturgy seen as a universal approach which, oblivious to time and contingent worship, opposes the very limits of the ritual rule, seeking a sacred reinterpretation of the landscape in the elements of the architecture, the cross, the wall, the light.

As such, architecture comes before any liturgical form, even before any possible interpretation of the rite imaginable, be it ancient or modern; each design becomes, first and foremost, a symbol, a possibility open to the contemplation of the Mystery in a time when reality seems to be suspended «to affirm values that approach the eternal»<sup>2</sup>. Thinking back on the reflection of Romano Guardini, Zermani's chosen companion for his journey, the designs dreamt up seem to progressively become works of art, whose essential property for the Italian-German theologian «is not to reside — with its own, innermost core — in reality. The colours are real, as are the sounds we hear, the materials with which buildings are built; but all this is not unique to it. Its specificity lies in that intermingling between the essence of man and the essence of the object that we have illustrated above and that emerges in the manifestation of the expression»<sup>3</sup>.

In this meaning, sacred architecture is thus deprived of any contingent link and remains a *sign*: so says Hans Van der Laan in his text *Het vormenspel der Liturgie*, giving a precise guide to what we can consider to be a shared point of view: «In the liturgy, the furniture, the space, the altar all have a single purpose: that of being a sign»<sup>4</sup>.

Every time, in each and every project, only the relationship with the place seems capable of slowing this sought-after suspension. The sea of Malta in the design of the chapel in 1989, the hills that surround Perugia in the Church of San Giovanni in 2006, the fog-blanketed countryside in the Temple of Cremation near Parma in 2010, all the way up to the silent forest which is home to the small chapel in Varano, become the authentic rite which is the source of the views, ancient measures and proportions, enclosures or simple walls in a rewritten liturgy of the landscape.

In 2016, Mantova welcomed a dialectic reflection between architecture and liturgy, a difficult project designed by Paolo Zermani for

the *Basilica di Sant'Andrea*, within that space known and loved by all which, aside from being the resting place of the relics of the Precious Blood of Christ and the architectural imagination of Leon Battista Alberti, is accepted both as a religious figure and icon, and as a space which is evocative of a bygone era full of imagination which, in part through the important role attributed to the architecture, has constructed its own memory. A «new geography», in the words of Zermani<sup>5</sup>, is aimed at restoring a clear centrality to the presbyterial space strongly characterized by the presence of the crypt — designed by Antonio Maria Viani at the end of the 16th century — as the religious and architectural fulcrum at the intersection between the single nave and the transept. A temperate design places the first four actors on the existing stage by choosing new positions and measured approaches at the centre of the space, with the successful intention of gathering a community around its faith. Minimal movements translate the tradition of liturgical fires by a few meters, proposing leaps of many years in the direction proposed by the most recent Council — new synchronies which, in the precise measurement of the space, impose a renewed and much freer composition which can be noticed in the difference of sensation before it is even perceived concretely. The altar, bishop's throne and pulpit — the first three pieces of furniture to be made — are created out of an identical figuration, a single entity transformed into variants marked by their use, almost as if these fragments had been extracted from a single mass of red Verona marble; robust blocks featuring repetition in their straight lines which begin to stand out from one another due to their detachment from the ground, as well as their position within the nave. The altar, raised and brought closer to the congregation, is now once again fully visible just beyond the octagonal balustrade of the crypt stretching towards the community; the throne, even higher up, resting upon two slim bases, confirms the central axis of the altar which leads the eye directly to the main apse, towards the choir. To the left, looking at the composition, in its canonical yet even more advanced position, the place of the Word is distinguished by the more slender thicknesses of the slabs which make it up, pushed strongly towards the centre of the scene. Like a device designed to induce movement, in its ascent the approach to the reading of the Scriptures involves the succession of two raised platforms, until they feel inclu-

ded in the enclosed perimeter which harmoniously houses the sloped plane upon which the missal rests, a petrified metaphor for the book itself. Isolated, opaque yet vividly present, the new liturgical poles offer a clear reading of the proposed renewal which, well identified in the dryness of the present, manages to dialogue with an ideal continuity in the proposed direction, starting with the foundation of the sacred building. Yet to be produced is the immersion baptismal font, interpreting in the north side of the transept the second entrance to the Basilica which, over the years, has made the side entrance into a familiar atrium for the Mantuan community.

The projects constructed or merely designed<sup>6</sup> in which the role of the cross alternates typological memories with symbolic representations — just as the occasion not too distant from the Mantuan project, in 2015, in which Paolo Zermani was called upon to temporarily represent the idea of the sacred at the Ecclesiastical Conference — provide a measured account of this approach of the architecture which, freed from all circumstances, seeks out and represents absolute values in which to recognize others and itself.

In Florence, at the entrance to the *Fortezza da Basso*, a slender white cross tilted towards the entrance identifies the temporary sacred place, two crossed beams whose size and proportions seem to transform them into a figurative memory of the many crosses in Giotto's paintings; a warning, which welcomes whilst stirring a feeling, which asks for silence and induces a meditative mindset.

Inside, the chapel is a road which overturns the canonical axes and lines up the liturgical places in an almost theatrical trail of faith. Two decisive gestures that, for seven days, proposed a new interpretation of an ancient rite.

In a certain sense, it is light that explains Paolo Zermani's most profound work, that aspiration towards the transcendent that not only demonstrates his way of imagining sacred spaces, but also manifests the simple movements which, through it, as the hours pass, fall into a quiet harmony with the place that hosts them. A harmony of horizons that make space and time cohesive in so many works and which therefore have their reasons deeply rooted in that sacredness that surpasses the specific intended use.

The emblem of this manifesto, slightly more recent than the papal occasion, is perhaps the smallest work that Zermani put his hand to in 2012 in Varano dei Marchesi, more for himself than for everyone; a private monument, a *sacellum* composed of just three elements whose juxtaposition identifies it as a sacred place. An exposed brick wall marks out the field, an iron cross as both symbol and support — the crutch of the wall — and finally, a pew — this too made of brick — to watch the revolution of the sun which, in its projected shadow, along with time, speaks of the rite of prayer. It is not the combination of the elements which, in this case, constitutes the (concise) quality of the action but rather the necessary quantity of pathos which, without transcending the value, maintains the harmony between these three necessary figures, which are sufficient to fill the scene. Resting on the ground, this small yet precious place, beyond the personal reiterations that Paolo Zermani involuntarily repeats like an unwanted brand, conveys one of the truest lessons of architecture which, in the sobriety of its words, provides the maximum exaltation of the contents which slowly emerge from the silence. Whispered phrases and interrupted words which, in the midst of nature, suspend the silence to make space for reason, which will soon vanish like an incomplete dream.

Going back even further in the author's biography, the landscape of the Emilian agricultural countryside which entrusts the totality of its signs, the lines that organize its planimetric plot, the perspective paintings which bear its image, to the work and toil of man is the place which welcomes Zermani being put to the test with a typology which is still relatively uncommon in this day and age, but nonetheless close to the sacred rite.

The Parma crematorium, built in 2010, slightly detached from the compact city, takes Valera — a small fraction of the city of Parma which is, in turn, a section of a larger and more homogeneous territory which spreads as far as the gentle rolling of the hills — as its fixed scene, directs the quality of its reasons, traces suggestions, proposes comparisons so much so as to allow the Temple to become part of that Po Valley landscape, which finds the nature of its own identity in the most significant and persistent of signs.

The theme of cremation is, in many ways, new to our country, which is still strongly linked to the Catholic religious tradition and which

only saw the abolition of the ban on believers being cremated in 1963, under the Second Vatican Council; the issue is also new in many ways in terms of the research on sacred architecture in Zermani's work, but this does not stop the architect from continuing along a path that he started down years ago. A coherent line runs ideally in our imagination, connecting the Emilian cremation Temple to the few examples in 20th-century architecture; the image of Erik Gunnar Asplund's 1940 crematorium is the closest in its establishment within the Woodland Cemetery to Stockholm, a strong link with the landscape mediated only by the porticoed element that at once defines the atrium and the sacred place. But going back even further, the Eduard Muller crematorium that Peter Behrens built in 1906 in Hagen underlined the need, in the interpretation of such an ideal theme, for a form identifying its more general reasons, a compact volume which, in the case of Behrens, is redolent of the silhouette of a church, an element forming the base, almost «an altar at which the city celebrates the memory of itself» in the design and words of Paolo Zermani<sup>7</sup>. The search for the coincidence of forms and meanings in sacred architecture often comes back to the same obvious answer, the same selected world it belongs to, designs and variations on the theme are defined by a simplified grammar which is nonetheless made necessary, in which the weight of the words brings the attention back to the meaning of the story that transcends both time and misfortunes.

The design for Parma is already defined by the fact that it exists in comparison between the two actors of which it consists: the enclosure and the Temple of cremation which, in their arrangement on the ground, construct the path, the sequence of the spaces evocative of the ritual up to the scattering of the ashes. The solid walled enclosure, as is often the case, is first to define the sacred place, establishing the detachment from the domestic figures of the landscape that it is part of, establishing the necessary differences inherent in a collective yet sacred place, housing within it — in the depths of a portico — the place where the urns are kept. The enclosure constitutes the usual image of a burial ground.

The Temple is arranged within the perimeter, marking out two empty spaces located before and after it. The atrium and garden mark the moments of the ceremony, which entrusts the Temple of Cremation with the task of marking the threshold. Like a bridge, like the frag-



ment of a path, this compact building shows itself to be identical in the way it overlooks the interior spaces of the crematorium, the same front — or rather the same section — indicates the space for waiting and the space for remembering, underlining the idea of a transition, a journey. In its geometry, the section identifies the distributive hierarchy of the building, which brings together the main rooms on the same line, flanked by the service areas on the sides. The vast shadow that marks out the front accompanies the entrance, underlined only by a short series of pillars of no great structural necessity. Inside, the Farewell Room is empty. No symbols, no recognition for any confessions in the space which must accommodate each and every different religion; just the word, the pulpit in its translation into form, and the vertical light that welcomes the final goodbye.

The architecture, in its constructive forms, enriches this space; the metal roof embedded in the surrounding walls rests upon a series of columns standing close to the wall which stand out and support the greater stress placed on the beams; the light entering through the transparent roof underlines the gaps, making the static qualities obvious. A slender vertical break interrupts the perimeter of the room, indicating the next step of the journey in a space flooded with light that dissolves the memory. The Temple of Cremation rises out of the Emilian fog, bestowing order upon the signs and fragments of the landscape and entrusting its meaning to the order of its composition — it rises out of the fog like the theatre of Varano in the photograph taken by Ghirri in 1983 and like many of Zermani's buildings, which share only the same material.

The sacred and the profane actually coexist in a coherent fashion in the protected world of Paolo Zermani, responsible — in the necessary co-presence of both — for the construction of a fantastic landscape, a slowed-down sense of time, firm and anchored to the ground by the primal certainties that never waver due to their being placed in balance, never transforming in search of a new equilibrium<sup>8</sup>. A firmness that is translated in every dimension of the architecture, that traces stereometric forms, robust bases, solid volumes of fired clay, even voluntarily excluding from the repeated lexicon the concept of lightness, replaced by the proportionate gravity attributed to the volumes, serious and secure in their attachments to the earth, from which they seem to emerge preformed.

1 R. Guardini, *Vom Geist der Liturgie*, Herder, Freiburg 1918, trans. *Lo spirito della liturgia*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1930.

2 P. Zermani, *Architettura: luogo, tempo, luce, silenzio*, Electa, Milan 2015.

3 R. Guardini, *L'opera d'arte*, Edizioni Corsia dei Servi, Milan 1954.

4 H. Van der Laan, *Het vormenspel der liturgie*, Brill, Leiden 1985.

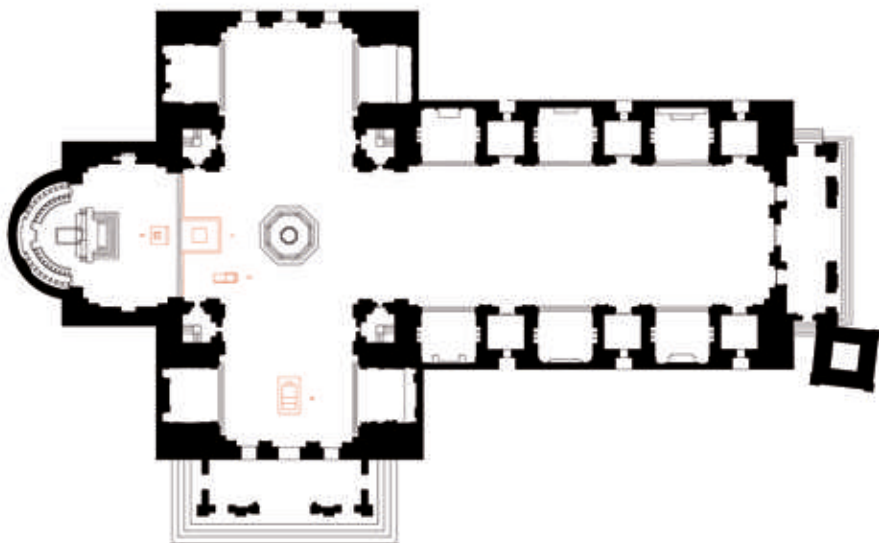
5 «Paolo Zermani, Disegno e identità», *AND*, 21, May-August 2011.

6 Among the many texts dedicated to Paolo Zermani's work, it is worth mentioning: F. Capanni (ed.), *Paolo Zermani. Costruzioni e progetti*, Electa, Milan 1999; P. Zermani, F. Rossi Prodi,

F. Collotti, *Paolo Zermani, Architetture 1983 – 2003*, Diabasis, Reggio Emilia 2003; R. Butini, *Architettura sacra. Paolo Zermani*, LIBRIA, Melfi 2014; C. Simioni, A. Tognon, *Paolo Zermani, Architettura, la luce del sacro*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2016.

7 R. Butini, *Architettura sacra. Paolo Zermani*, LIBRIA, Melfi 2014.

8 Among the writings by Paolo Zermani it is important to mention: P. Zermani, *Identità dell'architettura, parte prima – parte seconda*, Officina Edizioni, Rome 2002; P. Zermani, *Oltre il muro di gomma*, Diabasis, Reggio Emilia 2010; P. Zermani, *Architettura: luogo, tempo, terra, luce, silenzio*, Electa, Milan 2015.



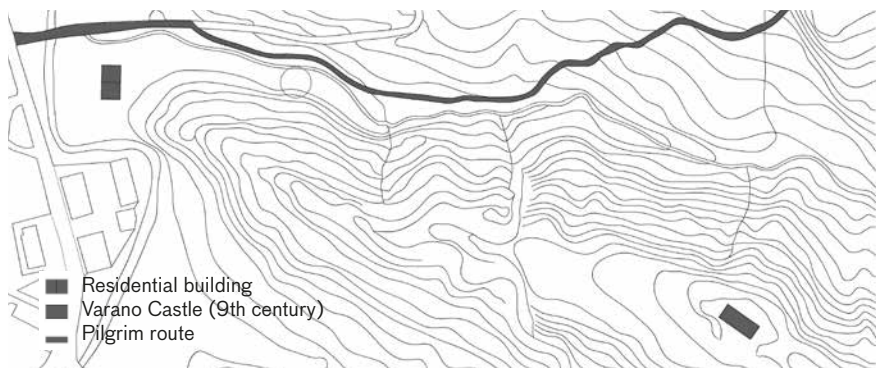
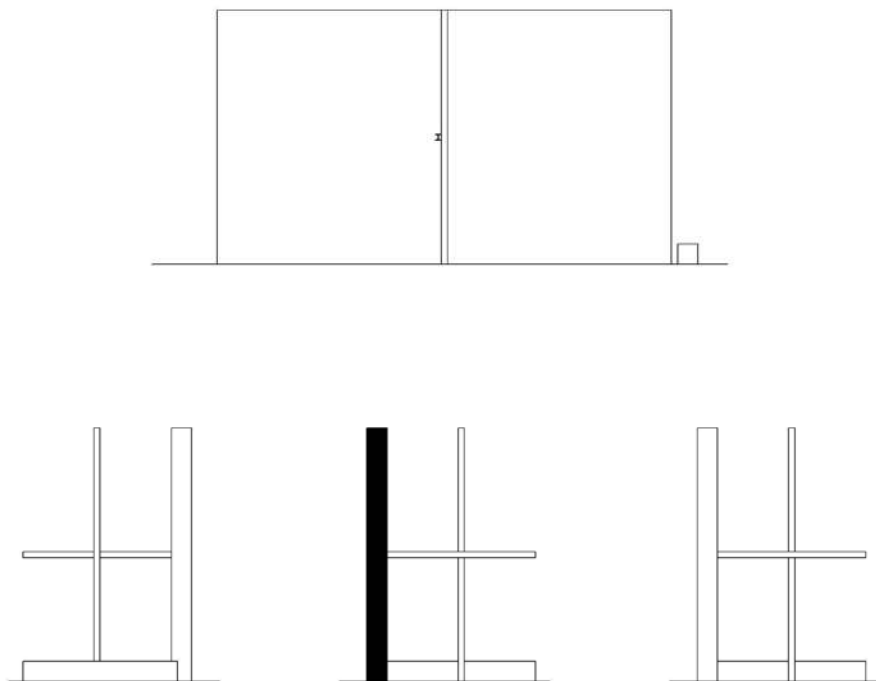
Paolo Zermani, Liturgical Reformation of the *Basilica di Sant'Andrea* (Mantova, Italy 2016).

**54 55**  
Plan of the Basilica and detail of the intervention  
© Paolo Zermani Associati, ph. Mauro Davoli.



**56**  
Overhead view of the apse  
© Paolo Zermani Associati, ph. Mauro Davoli.





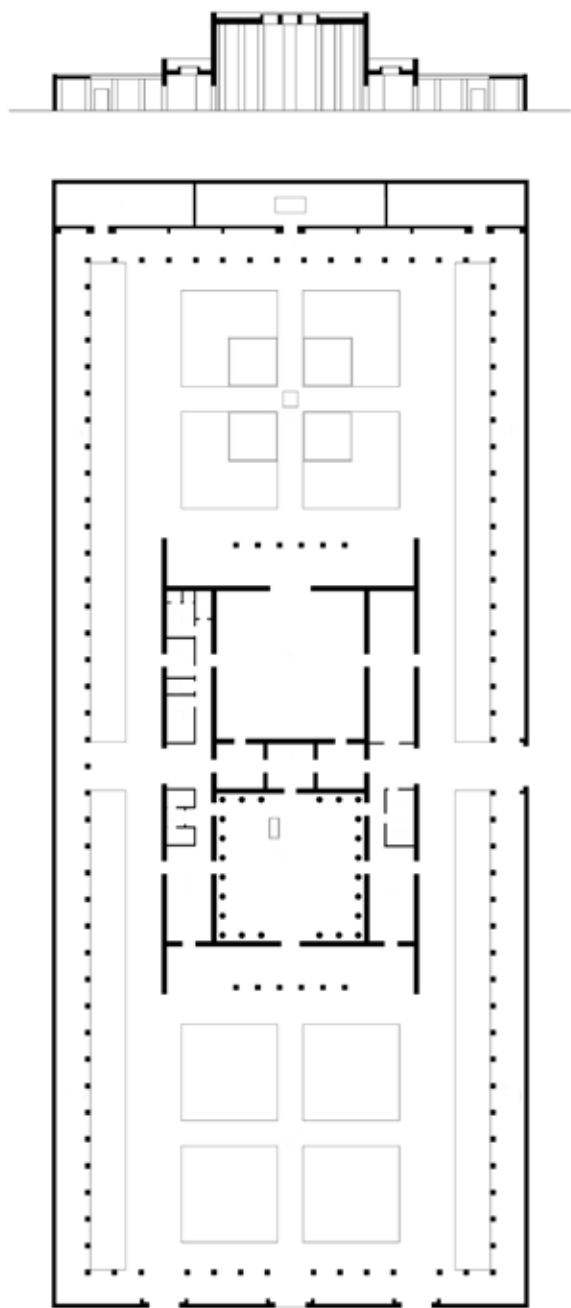
Paolo Zermani, *Cappella nel bosco* (Varano dei Marchesi, Parma, Italy 2012).

**57**  
Site plan © Paolo Zermani Associati.

**58**  
North-East, South-West and North-West façades, section and South-East façade © Paolo Zermani Associati.



**59**  
Side view of the chapel © Paolo Zermani Associati, ph. Mauro Davoli.



Paolo Zermani, *Tempio di cremazione* (Parma, Italy 2010).

**60** Longitudinal section and site plan © Paolo Zermani Associati.



**61 62** The Temple and its main interior space © Paolo Zermani Associati, ph. Mauro Davoli.



# Alberto Campo Baeza. Construction as a Manifesto of Architectural Theory

Emilio Faroldi

«When men set out to bring beauty into his buildings architecture was born». These are the words of Frank Lloyd Wright in the opening of the volume *La Suspensión del tiempo. Diario de un arquitecto*<sup>1</sup> written by Alberto Campo Baeza and published in 2017.

In his book the author reflects on the period of *utilitas, firmitas, venustas*, and memory, quoting characters and works dear to him, and declaring beauty as formal choice of artistic use. Recalling the words of his friend Massimo Venturi Ferriolo, we can reaffirm that beauty of living gives quality to places, realities that we contemplate by living in them; they are *garden landscapes* whose aesthetic experience is based on the inseparability between life and contemplation. Contemplation of the living environment cannot be separated from dwelling in it: we act in the space observed and we grasp the result of our action for better or for worse.

Architecture indeed represents an unparalleled opportunity for mutation that tends towards improvement. It is difficult to comprehend as now how and when it adheres to consensus and trend logics and/or, on the contrary, when it constitutes an element of dissonance towards the customs of an era.

The cultural exile to which the construction problem underwent, the parallel resolution between the designed world and the realized world, with evident reverberations on the relationship between the theoretical contributions and the applied actions, determine incisive disciplinary reconsiderations in terms of architectural practice and its conceptualization.

In such cultural context the research of Campo Baeza defines a common ground between compositional and constructive ambit, overcoming exclusively idealistic-formal approaches or attitudes aimed at observing limited technical and material variables.

Campo Baeza is a great architect, as well as master for entire generations of students: primary exponent of a Madrid school of *hacer arquitectura* that focuses on the relationship between *theory* and *practice* of the project. An architecture educator able to make theory through the built work which, by autogenesis, derives from the theory itself.

There are no ambiguities: you can *be an architect* or, equally, you can *act as architect*. Campo Baeza is an architect and, at the same time, works as an architect: this is a privilege reserved for a few.

An architect who, by making theory through the built work, appoints the latter as a real programmatic manifesto: a treatise on architecture that has become reality. His spatial thought is the result of an intellectual action.

Precisely on the word *construction*, composing together, lies the thought of Campo Baeza and his search for the absolute. A carpenter who becomes a poet: just like Tekton in the work of Sappho. Or again, a poet who becomes a carpenter: a soldier of architecture in search of beauty.

The concept of tectonics seems to him to be a pleasant obsession: the architectural project is both intellectual and technical action, since its conception, which is related to the construction's order and founded on a subtle and deep-rooted technological knowledge.

The observation of the professional reality in which Campo Baeza operates, together with that of his various colleagues and students whom he manages to gather with wisdom and love, highlights the almost «artisan» approach of his work. A cultural attitude not casual, not suffered but pursued and safeguarded by the advent of malformed methodological and project management approaches, due to the complexity of the reality in which we operate. A design poetics rooted in the classic values of our discipline and aimed at a technological knowledge with a contemporary meaning. A humanist architect understood as a man of knowledge, within an approach to culture pursued through the wise translation of historical and technical evolutions.

The relationship between professional and didactic experience, and the commitment in the diffusion of theory and criticism are the expression of an architecture whose successful outcome is inextricably linked to the balance between material and immaterial, between scientific and humanistic principles, between matter and poetics.

In *La idea construida*, his theoretical manifesto, Campo Baeza writes: «I would like my ARCHITECTURE to be / As PRECISE as Bernini's, as luminous. / As NATURAL as Barragán's, architecture for the man. / As DESHABILLÉ as Le Corbusier's, as strong and powerful. / NOT for the purpose of becoming famous / But to make man happy. / NOT to be photographed / But to be lived. / NOT only for this time / But forever»<sup>2</sup>.

The careful observation of Mies' work, reversing the paradigm and the point of observation, conveys doubts and disciplinary tor-

ments that are answered, at least as far as I am concerned, in the architectures of Campo Baeza which inevitably manage to dissolve that detachment from the reality of everyday life to which architecture should however aim.

The essence of *hacer arquitectura* exhibits the cognitive process of its project in the roots and not in the leaves of an imaginary building tree. Elementary doubts, spontaneous questions that require simple and therefore difficult answers.

It arises spontaneously to ask whether we are today spectators of a logical and intuitive process that still sees function originating form, or does form take on greater degrees of autonomy? Should we think of a modern antiquity or a model of ancient modernity?

And again: what weight does the image of architecture have towards an increasingly haunting architecture as image? And is it conceivable that an architectural project still exists or is now overwhelmed by the architecture of the project, that is, by its process?

In summary: what is the language of our time?

Our era, its demands, are better identified in the opacity and the solidity of the tectonic mass or in the transparency and lightness of the information society?

Campo Baeza's architectures reassure, comfort, seek and find clear, exact answers to the foundational questions of today's architecture.

In his work, the immediate expression of the «enclosure archetype» is represented by the wall, which identifies the original expression of the building. The wall: transition point, convergence of tensions between inside and outside, becomes for Campo Baeza the true architectural event.

Likewise, the façade: a border between the confined space and the external environment, performs the primary functions of physically delimiting the space, as well as filtering the building-city-landscape relationship. Limit between private conditions and public stage representation: architecture reveals its basis and proposes itself within urban fabrics or converses with the landscape through characters that represent the moment of encounter between internal spatial articulation and place measurement. Think in this sense of the *House of the Infinite* in Cadiz, Andalusia.

The etymology itself of the term *façade* is connected to the theme of the courtly and representative function: in Greek it is expressed with the word πρόσωπον (*prósōpon*, i.e. person) which has as its second meaning that of theatrical mask and, by analogy and reverberation of concept, the relative abstract meaning of «external appearance». In Latin, moreover, the terms *mask* and *façade* are identified with two distinct words, although in the term *frons*, *frontis*, in addition to the meaning of «forehead, face, feature, physiognomy», the figurative one of «look, external appearance» is found.

From a figurative point of view, the architecture of Campo Baeza is defined by the characteristics of its perimeter, by the construction rules and by the materials that represent it to weave a *fil rouge* with classicism, while condemning its sense of freedom. Thought flies to the famous headquarters of the *Caja Granada* (2001) and returns, in a metaphorical and diachronic exercise, with the memory of the *Pantheon*.

Using the words Ernesto Nathan Rogers wrote in 1960: «The present work serves as a link between the past and the future; it is not a moment of rest but the obligatory point of passage of history, from yesterday to tomorrow. The guarantee of the validity of today's work is precisely in obliging history to go through new inventions»<sup>3</sup>.

Classical architecture found in natural elements the tools to make its image «alive»: light, shadow, colours, vegetation, time and its work in the aging process. Campo Baeza's architecture identifies its presupposition in the reinterpretation of these elements: a reinvention and a Pirandellian renew that finds its essentiality in the cradle of classicism. The reduction of the limit between truth and fiction, between real and artificial, is attributable to the severe and rational tectonic articulation.

A technological and constructive truth that refers to the works of the classic and that through his «thinking with hands» first become *modern* and, in parallel, *contemporary*.

Campo Baeza states that: «Neither Mies van der Rohe nor Le Corbusier have ever copied, imitated the form or language of the Acropolis or the Parthenon, yet they have always known that there is a need to have one's roots embedded in history, not to copy but to know. And his wisdom is necessary. This wisdom, which is knowledge of history, is also knowledge of technology»<sup>4</sup>.

The concept of transparency, from a semiological point of view and in an empirical form, contrasts and alternates with the idea of body and heaviness, linking itself in an allegorical form to the theme of lightness. The opacity and transparency relationship in Campo Baeza's architecture refer to the antithetical combination of heaviness and lightness, between eternity and relativity of existence. His constructions remain perpetually suspended in an alternation of transparency and opacity, of liquidity and solidity, but even more of purity and severity, incorporating both properties internally.

«Reason, therefore, is the main tool of the architect: architecture cannot be defended as “artistic” or even as pure reason. Architecture is reason accompanied by knowledge of technology»<sup>5</sup>.

In all of this, the «suspension of time» leads to abstract concepts which it is up to the architect to transform into matter. «For the future, for the present and for the past — as he reported during a recent interview — I always hope to find beauty. Beauty as a mirror of truth, as Plato said in a dialogue with Saint Augustine. Humanity is hungry for beauty».

In his search for «concreteness in abstractness» and, at the same time, for «abstractness in concreteness», there is no duel between *ethics* and *aesthetics* and beauty is not necessarily attributable to effect and amazement. His architecture affirms this with great clarity.

Campo Baeza — paraphrasing one of his recurring quotations — is a Don Quixote who fights for the survival of architectural quality, in a scenario characterized by the continuous transformation and evolution of economic and production logics. An essential cultural battle aimed at preventing part of the built works from being irreparably compromised in the «translation» step of the project.

The history of Campo Baeza is, even before the story of an architect, the story of an intellectual who teaches by learning and learns through teaching, faithful to the logic that sees the teacher as the synthesis of three essential conditions.

As he says, it is necessary to KNOW, KNOW HOW TO TEACH and WANT TO TEACH, considering KNOWLEDGE, PEDAGOGY and COMMITMENT as synonyms of MEMORY, UNDERSTANDING and WILL.

In architecture the same principle applies:

YOU MUST TRY TO DO ARCHITECTURE — says Campo Baeza — with FEELING and MEASURE, INTERRUPTION and DECISION.

He believes «Architecture is an intellectual action that needs TIME»<sup>6</sup>.

«Teaching is luck. Teaching is a gift, because you learn more than you teach. As a teacher I try to convey architecture through what I am doing, not because my work is special but because I think it is the most precise and direct way to teach. Teaching and planning are not easy, but for me it is what allows me to continue “sharpen the blade”. Unfortunately, it takes a long time and the difficulty lies in not being able to sometimes choose what to do. Especially for young people. However, staying in academia, even if it requires sacrifices, is worth the effort. My teacher Alejandro de la Sota, with whom I had a special relationship, had advised me, once finished my studies, to stay out of university for five years to work and then return to university, to teach. Freedom is the key word»<sup>7</sup>.

His idea of architecture pursues the idea of *construction* as a centre of gravity of architecture, as a physical place and aspiration to which architecture unequivocally tends.

The construction, therefore, as a material synthesis of architectural theory, of its unchanged laws, and of its changing status.

In the introduction of the above-mentioned book, *La idea construida*, Campo Baeza states that: «Architecture is the IDEA materialized, with measures that relate to man, the centre of architecture. IT IS A BUILT IDEA. The history of architecture, far from being only a history of forms, is basically a history of constructed ideas. Forms disintegrate over time, but ideas remain, they are eternal»<sup>8</sup>.

He places the *built ideas* — and therefore his theories — in front of his own figure: architecture always comes before the architect.

There are two approaches to designing. One which works by subtraction of matter: a sort of architect sculpture that digs in the mass to bring out shapes and spatiality. Another which, on the contrary, works by addition, juxtaposing elements capable of having a sense accomplished in themselves and an absolute sense as a whole, through conforming relationships that one creates with the other. A sort of architect musician who composes by putting in sequence and in a wise relationship a few elements — the twelve notes — through harmonious, melodic and separated by pauses — the voids — to which he attributes equal importance to the notes — the solids.

The performance of a work by Campo Baeza follows the architectural score with precision and musical sense. In this sense, the theories of Nelson Goodman — an American philosopher who relates the creative musical act, the architectural one and their different execution methods — reverberate.

Execution is transformed — as by an impalpable miracle — into creation.

Creation: a magical word for Campo Baeza. A word around which the entire solar system of architecture revolves. It is no coincidence that the architect Baeza and the theorist Baeza, precisely in the word *creation*, meet.

They find an inscrutable point of reference and meeting in the profound theories of Stefan Zweig, Austrian philosopher, but also writer, journalist, playwright and poet, who held lectures between 1939 and 1940 in New York and Buenos Aires, entitled *The Secret of Artistic Creation*, trying to make sense of the miracle of the idea behind any artistic form.

Campo Baeza claims that it would be enough to replace the term artistic creation with architecture that everything would work equally well. His works stand out for their embarrassing consistency that often constitutes the fragility of the architect's work.

His works — as Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos*<sup>9</sup> would say — sing and continue to sing over time. In Valéry's work, Campo Baeza interprets both the figure of Eupaline, a refined lover of form and beauty, as well as the figure of Tridone, ship builder and profound connoisseur of instances of technical nature.

So what are the ingredients of his architecture?

Architecture — he says — is like good food: to be a good cook, you must use ingredients that are often well known. It is therefore the way of harmonizing the ingredients that transforms a normal diet — building — into an act of haute cuisine — architecture.

In the works of Campo Baeza, the themes (i.e. the ingredients) are those rooted in the history of the discipline and are unchangeable in architecture: the *ground link* and the *relationship with the ground*; the *section* as a space-revealing tool; *light* as a solid architectural element; the definition of the *elements* proper to the architectural phenomenon: the *context*, the *function*, the *composition*, the *construction*, and,



last but not least, *essential nature* — the «more», therefore, with «less» — as absolute sense of Architecture.

In February 2014 Campo Baeza published an essay dedicated and addressed to children, entitled *Quiero Ser Arquitecto*<sup>10</sup>, and dedicated to all those who have a dream and who want to build this dream.

In this short, but very clear text, he explains that architecture is comparable to «going up and down a staircase»: you can take two steps to go up but can't take two to go down. The text is intended to clarify what it means *to be an architect* (meaning by architect: a creator, a thinker, a builder). Translating these terms: the architect is a dreamer, an artist, a technician, who works similarly to a doctor, a chef, a poet.

A text that could be useful to introduce in our schools, in the presentations of our degree courses in the academic field as it brings the heart of the problem to the centre: doing architecture is a *job*.

Precisely in wanting to reaffirm architecture as a profession and in the action of looking for a way to understand its constructive and poetic essence, dwell the thought and talent of an architect who elects coherence and commitment, also social, to necessary pieces to become an architect by being an architect, promoting the architectural theory manifesto construction: the work of architecture as a book built to strive for eternity.

1 A. Campo Baeza, *La suspensión del tiempo. Diario de un arquitecto*, Fundación Arquia, Barcelona; Catarata, Madrid 2017.

2 «Me gustaría que mi ARQUITECTURA fuera / Tan PRECISA como la de Bernini, tan Luminosa. / Tan NATURAL como la de Barragán, para los hombres. / Tan DESHABILLÉ como la de Le Corbusier, tan fuerte y tan potente. / NO para alcanzar la fama / sino para hacer felices a los hombres. / NO para ser fotografiada / sino para ser vivida. / NO sólo para nuestro tiempo / sino para siempre». A. Campo Baeza, *La idea construida*, COAM, Madrid 1998, p. 41; trans. *The Built Idea*, Oscar Riera Ojeda Publishers, Shenzhen 2015, p. 58.

3 «L'opera presente serve da tramite tra il passato e il futuro; non è un momento di sosta ma il punto obbligato di passaggio della storia, dall'ieri verso il domani. La garanzia della validità di un'opera odierna è proprio nell'obbligare la storia a passare per le nuove invenzioni». E. N. Rogers, «Memoria e invenzione nel design», *Casabella-Continuità*, 239, May 1960, p. 1; now in E. N. Rogers, *Editoriali di Architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1968, pp. 137-149.

4 «Né Mies né Le Corbusier hanno mai copiato, imitato la forma o il linguaggio dell'Acropoli o del Partenone, eppure hanno sempre saputo che c'è bisogno di avere le proprie radici afondate nella storia, non per copiare ma per sapere. E questa sapienza è necessaria. Questa sapienza, che è conoscenza della storia, è anche conoscenza della tecnologia». M. P. Vettori, «Cultura tecnologica, teorie e prassi del progetto di architettura / Technological culture, theory and practice of architectural design. Jesús Aparicio, Jesús Donaire, Alberto Campo Baeza and Ignacio Vicens y Hualde», *TECHNE, Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, 13, 2017, p. 348.

5 «La ragione, pertanto, è il principale strumento dell'architetto: non si può difendere l'architettura come "artisticità" e nemmeno come pura ragione. L'architettura è ragione accompagnata dalla conoscenza della tecnologia». Ivi, p. 349.

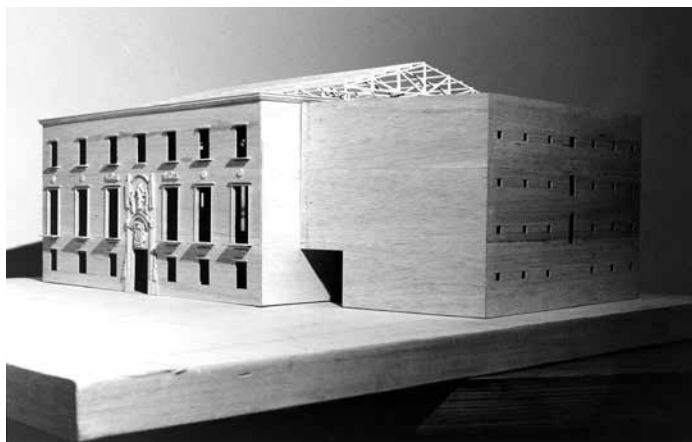
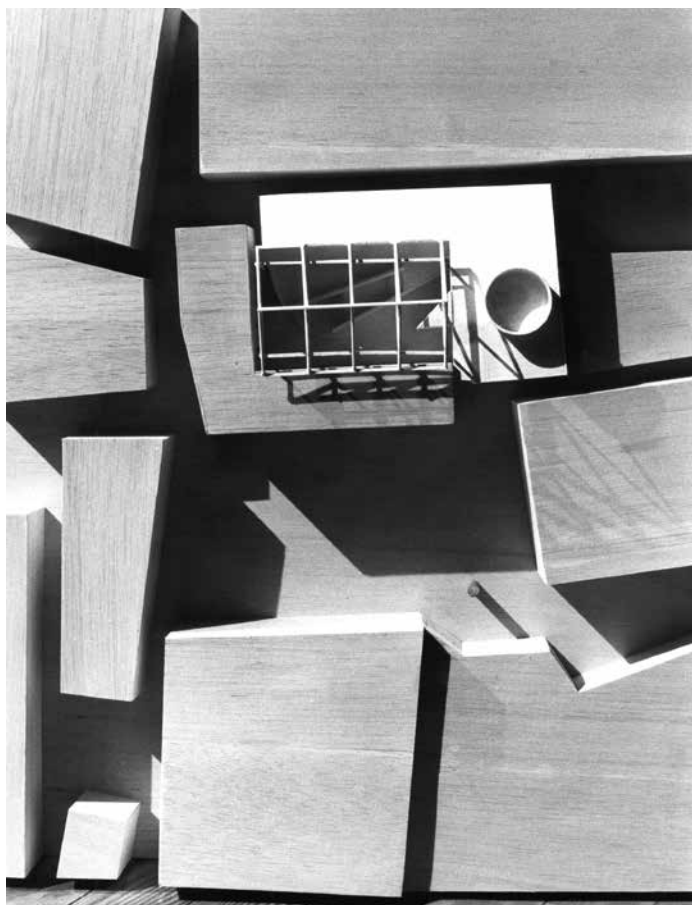
6 «L'architettura è un'azione intellettuale che ha bisogno di TEMPO». Ivi, p. 352.

7 «Insegnare è una fortuna. Fare didattica è un regalo, perché s'impara più di quanto s'insegna. Come docente cerco di trasmettere l'architettura attraverso quello che sto facendo, non perché la mia opera sia speciale ma perché penso sia la via più precisa e diretta per insegnare. Insegnare e progettare non è facile, ma per me è quello che mi permette di continuare ad "affilare il bisturi". Purtroppo, richiede molto tempo e la difficoltà sta nel non poter talvolta scegliere a cosa dedicarsi. Soprattutto per i giovani. Tuttavia, rimanere nel mondo accademico, anche se richiede sacrifici, vale la pena. Il mio maestro Alejandro de la Sota, con cui avevo un rapporto speciale, mi aveva consigliato, una volta finiti gli studi, di stare fuori dall'università per cinque anni per lavorare e poi ritornare in università, per insegnare. La liberà è la parola chiave». Ivi, p. 351.

8 «[Arquitectura] Es idea materializada con medidas que hacen relación al hombre, centro de la Arquitectura. Es idea construida. La Historia de la Arquitectura, lejos de ser solo una Historia de las formas, es básicamente una Historia de la Ideas Construidas. Las formas se destruyen con el tiempo pero las ideas permanecen, son eternas». A. Campo Baeza, *La idea construida*, op. cit., p. 6.

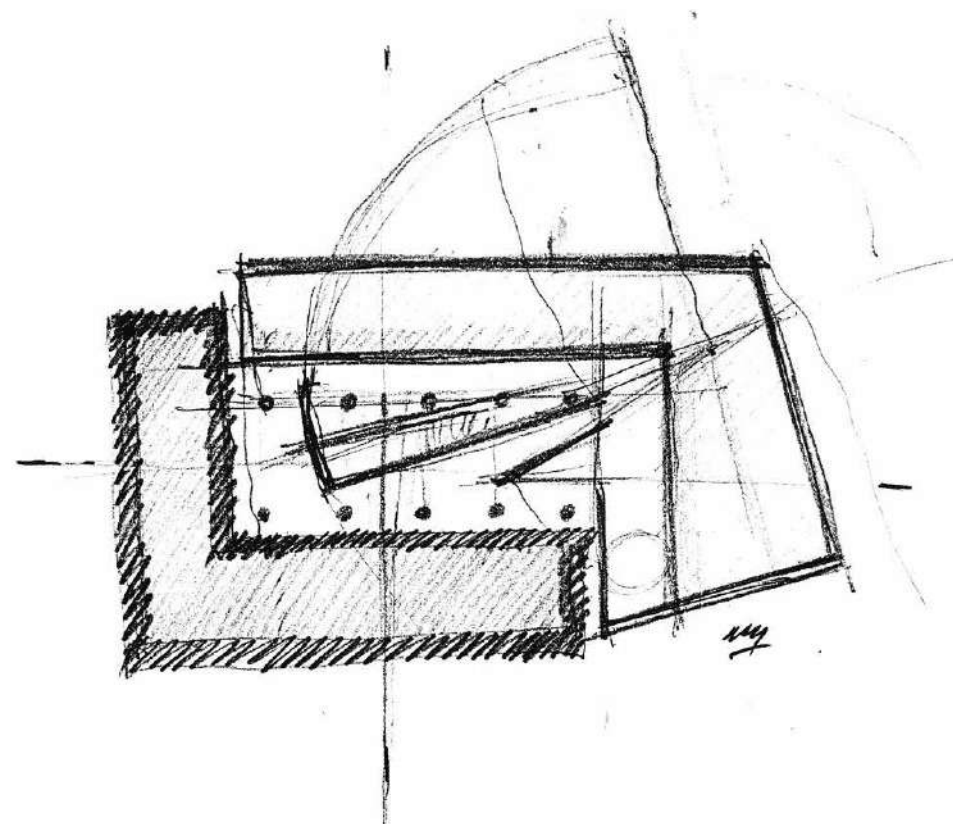
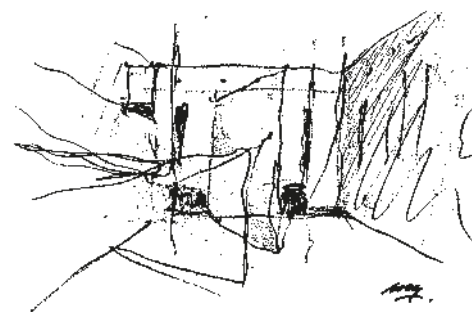
9 P. Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*, Nouvelle Revue Française, Paris 1923.

10 A. Campo Baeza, *Quiero Ser Arquitecto*, Ed. Mairea-UPM, Madrid 2014; trans. *I Want to Be an Architect*, AMAG, Madrid 2014.

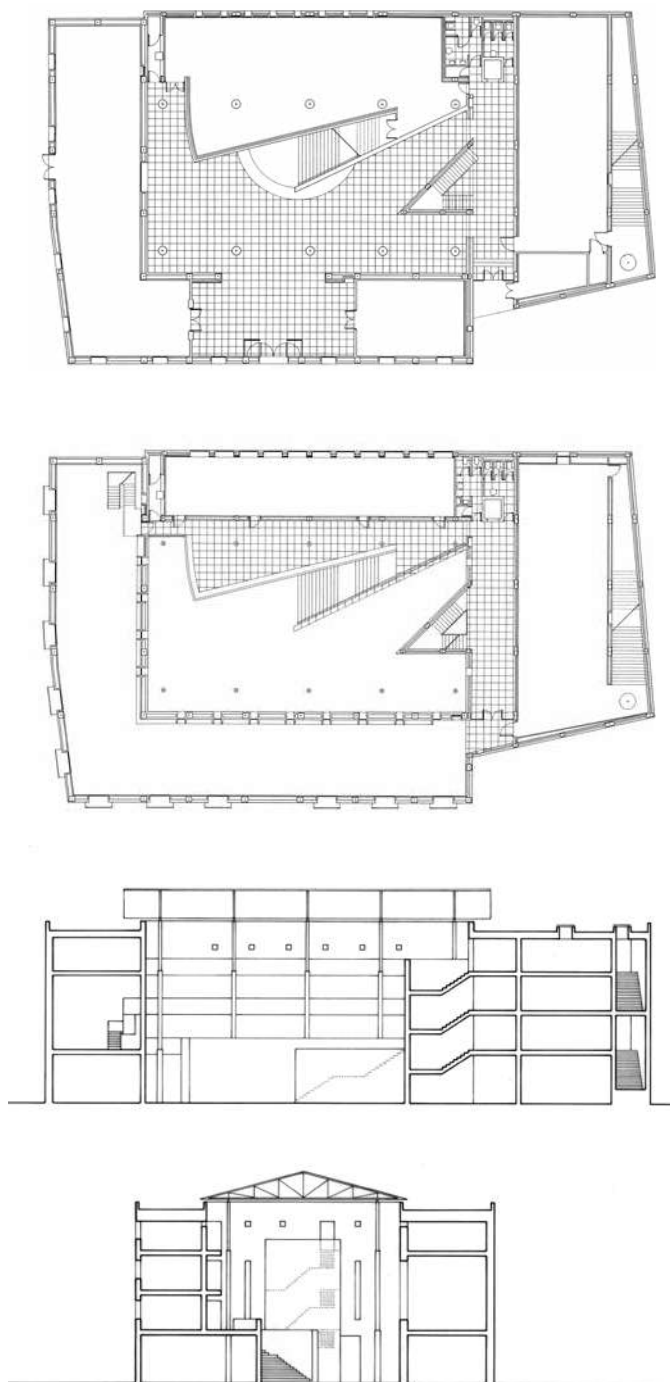


Alberto Campo Baeza,  
*Biblioteca Pública* (Orihuela,  
Alicante, Spain 1991-92)

63 64  
Scale models © Alberto  
Campo Baeza.



65  
The architect's sketches  
© Alberto Campo Baeza.



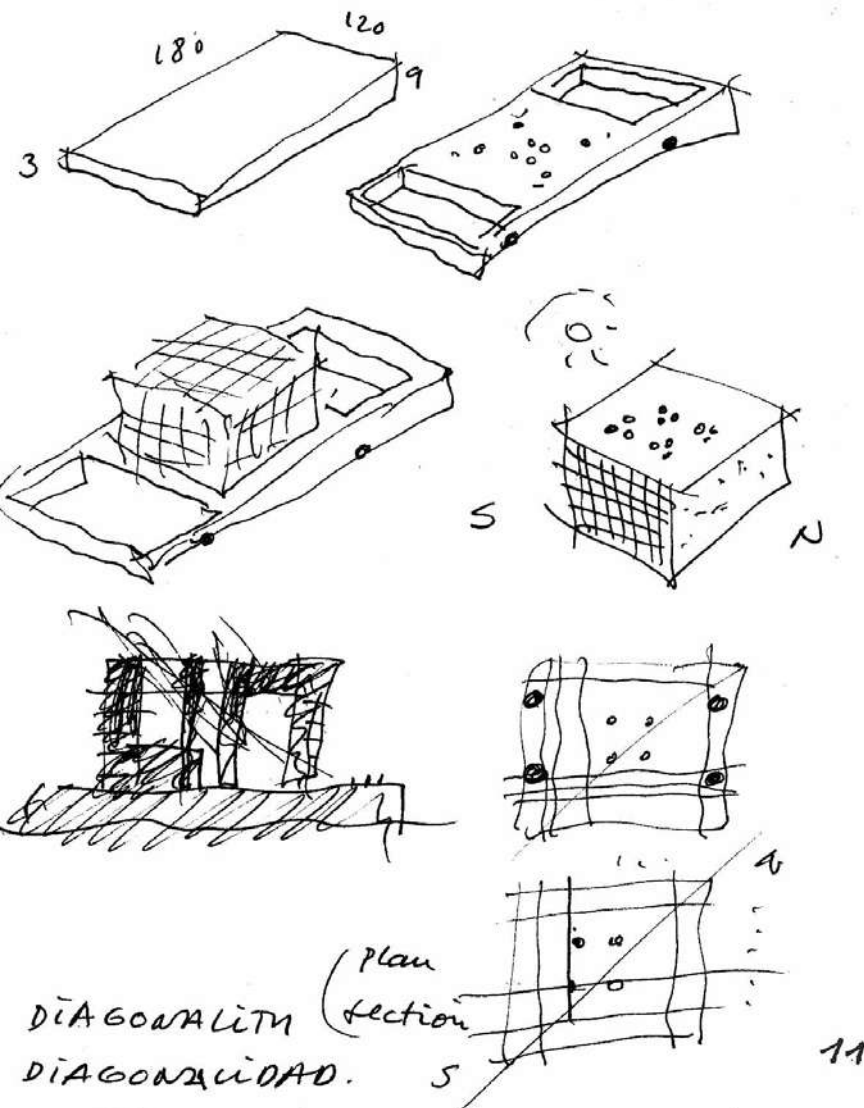
**66**  
Ground floor and first floor plan,  
longitudinal and transversal  
sections © Alberto Campo  
Baeza.



**67**  
The hall © Alberto Campo  
Baeza.

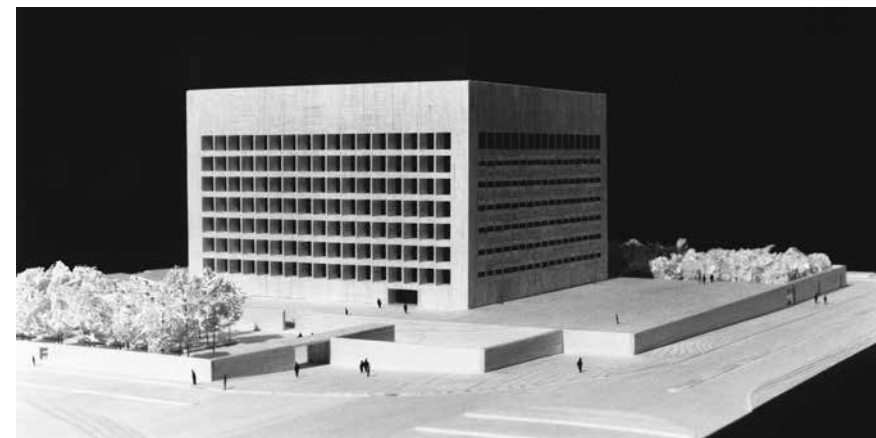
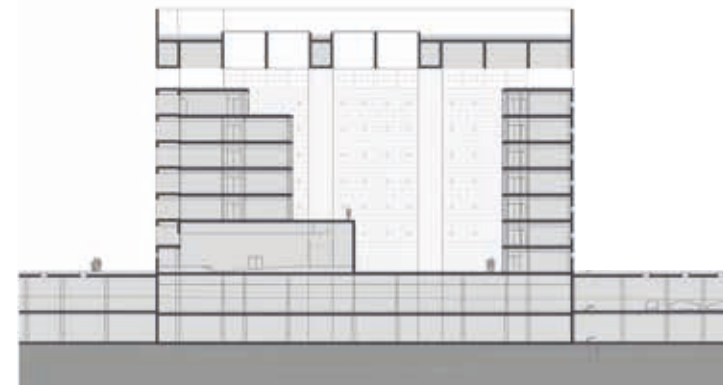
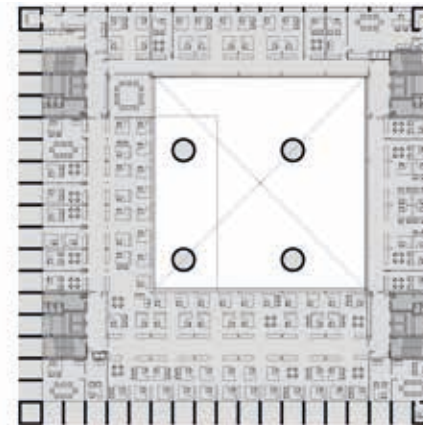


GRANTIA Aug 7 2002

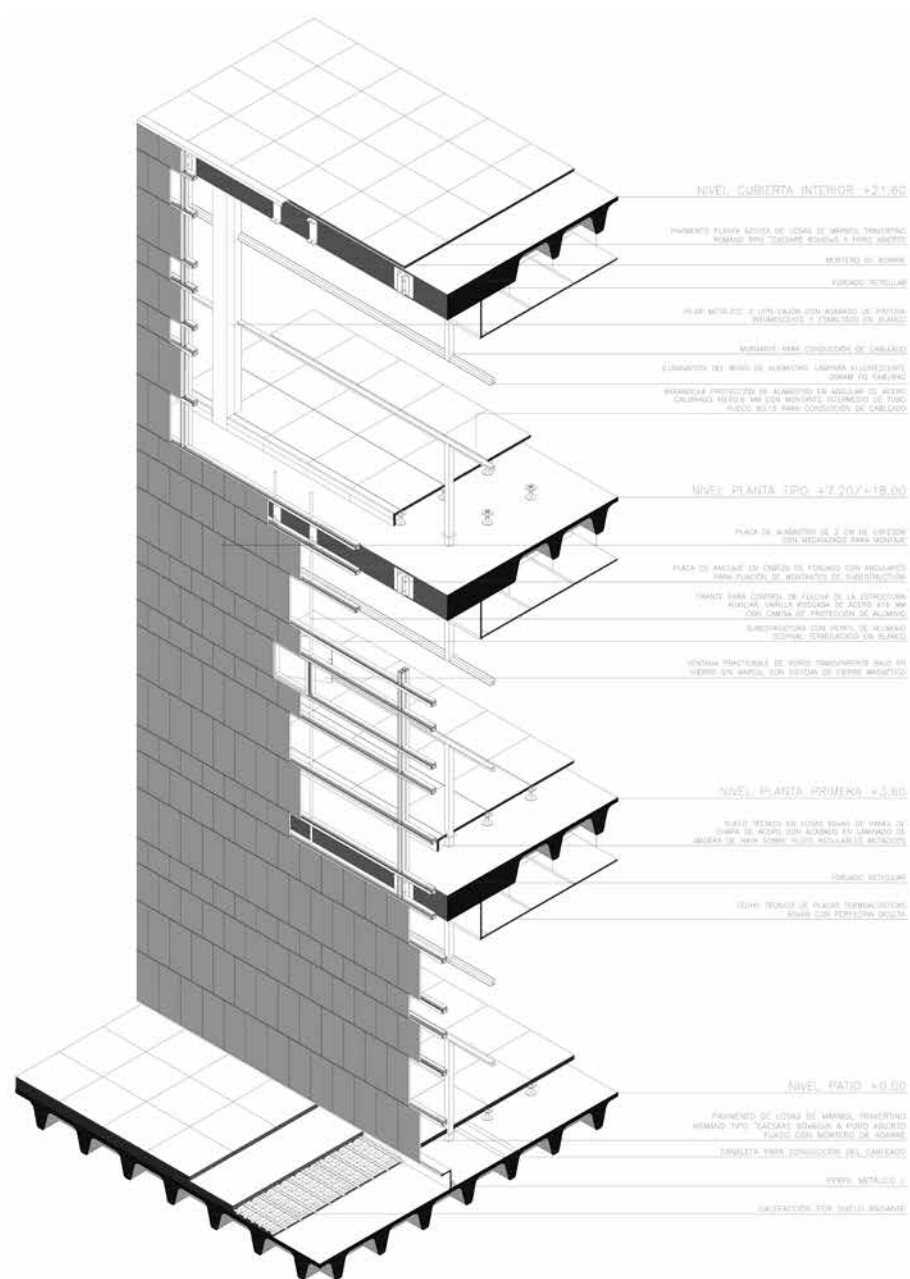


Alberto Campo Baeza, *Caja Granada* (Granada, Spain 1992-2001)

**68** The architect's sketches  
© Alberto Campo Baeza.



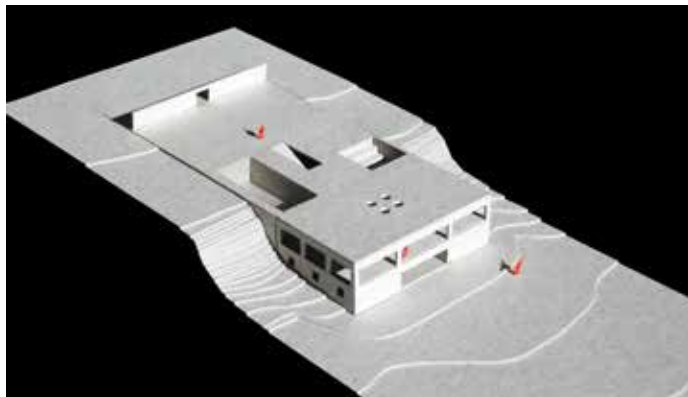
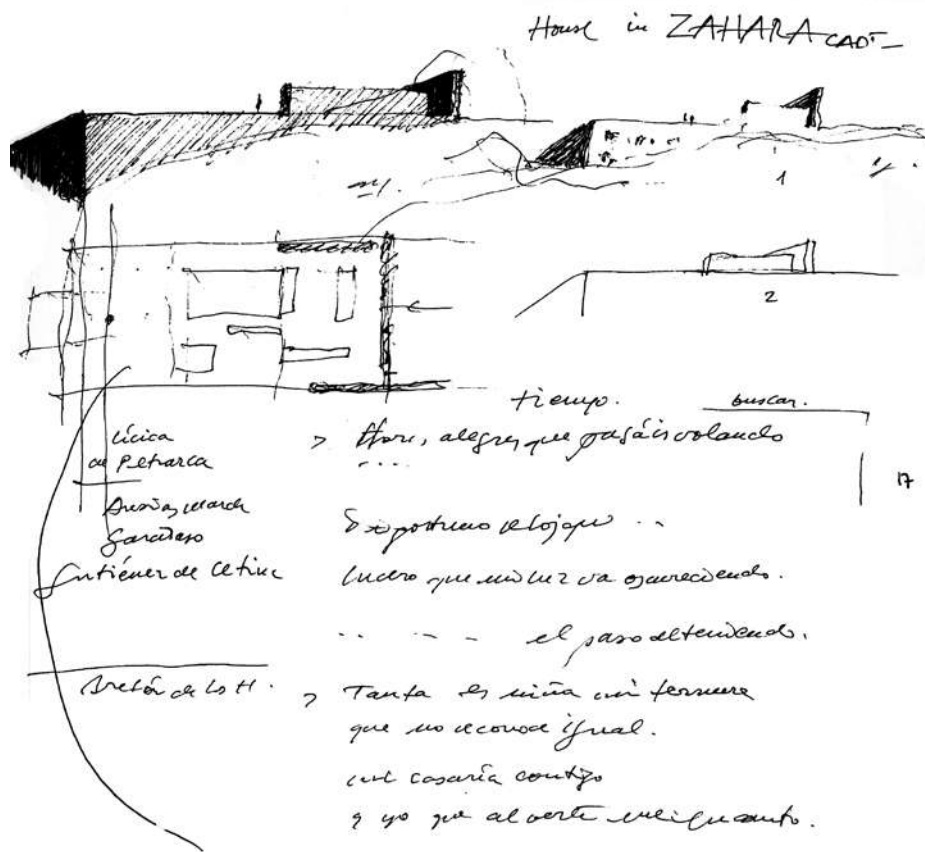
**69 70**  
First floor plan, section and  
scale model © Alberto Campo  
Baeza.



**71** Structural details of the travertine wall © Alberto Campo Baeza.



**72**  
The hall © Alberto Campo  
Baeza.



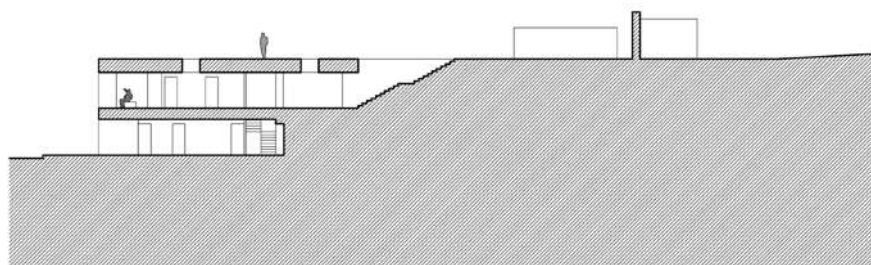
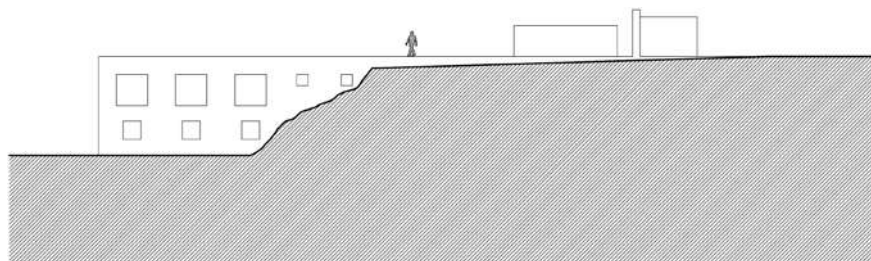
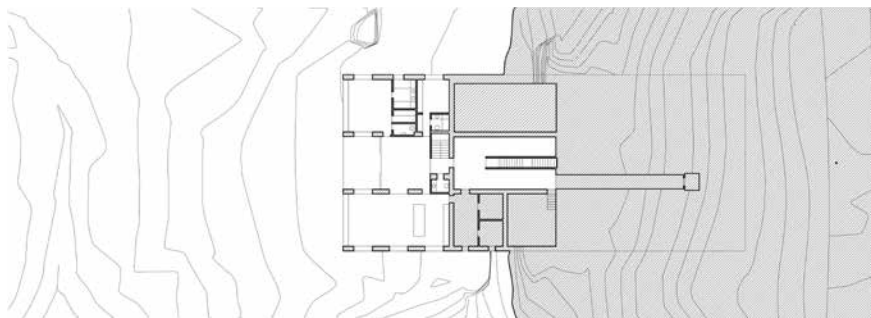
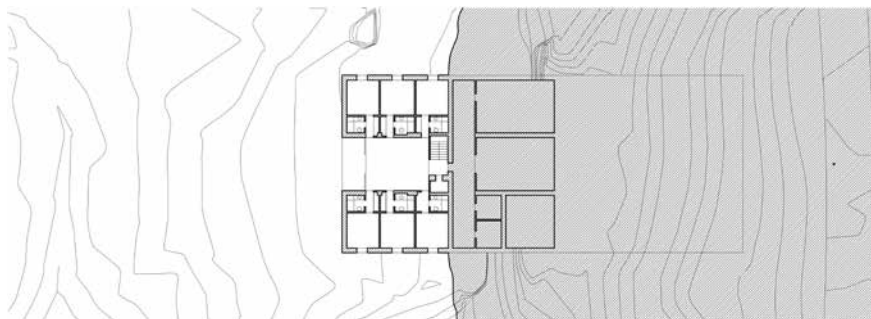
Alberto Campo Baeza, Casa del Infinito (Cádiz, Spain 2012-14)

73 The architect's sketches and a scale model © Alberto Campo Baeza.

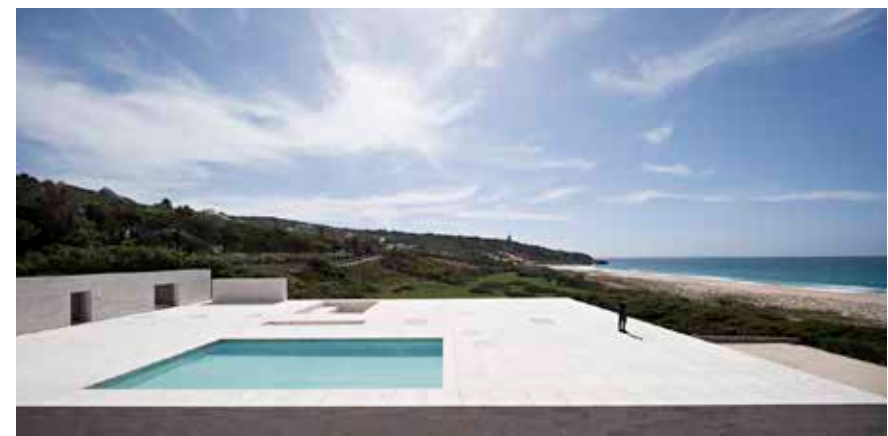


74 The roof © Alberto Campo Baeza.





**75**  
Plans and sections © Alberto  
Campo Baeza.



**76 77 78**  
Exterior and interior views  
© Alberto Campo Baeza.

**II.**

## **Memory and Narration**

# Guido Canali. The Semantic Interpretation of Displaying

Marco Borsotti

There is an evident condition of elective affinity between the museographic design tradition of the great Italian masters from the first post-war period and the designs created in this work environment, from the 1970s to the present, by the *Canali Associati* studio, which fully represent their ideal evolution.

Having always had the chance to act in highly stratified historical architectural contexts, Guido Canali reveals in fact an innate vocation for the historical and material re-reading and for investigating existing buildings, as well as for the interpretation of the act of exhibiting as a significant spatial ordering system.

This intellectual inclination paves the way to a very sensitive methodological approach, where every design action is calibrated on the rigorous, though never oppressive, control of the evocative power generated by the interaction between the «valorisation of the unexpressed potential of historical buildings»<sup>1</sup> and the development of set-up systems which, in skilfully displaying the collections, also activate the very interpretation of the architectural context.

It is precisely in the virtuous convergence between the search for the truest substance of the stratifications of a historic building complex and the «staging» of a rigorously designed layout that Guido Canali's museographic projects find the motivation of their high quality, firmly intertwining formal elegance and functional efficiency. A design that also pursues a scenographic intent because, as Canali himself states, with disarming simplicity, «museums must be pleasant, they must be places where people have fun»<sup>2</sup>.

This «having fun» however is never intended, as often happens elsewhere, as media entertainment — if present, in its museums the multimedia and interactive devices never have central or overwhelming positions, in a logic of *syntactical proximity* that always privileges the original artefact. Rather it is conceived as the result of a rational use of an instrumental lexicon which is traditional in its components, but innovative in the way they are employed. This task is achieved according to a coherent overall vision, where the nature of the venue, the layout and structure of the exhibition equipment, and the presence of the objects, contribute synergistically to attract the visitor.

This language, that is discreet, but by no means shy — as one can understand by observing the imposing structural scaffolding of the



*Galleria Nazionale* in Parma, or the magniloquent use of the lighting in the *Museo delle Stele Statue* in Pontremoli — reveals, orients, accompanies, underlines and creates what Canali defines as «semantic interpretation of displaying»<sup>3</sup>.

The grammar of this language acquires substance through the care dedicated to the design of the visitor routes (suggested and substantiated by the arrangement of the display elements), the highlighting of the structural elements (whether they are individual supports for the works on display or large load-bearing systems of consolidation), the use of simple, but expressive materials (with a particular preference for metal and wood), and the aesthetics of the construction detail (revealed with that discreet approach that derives from an absolute confidence about the execution).

These design attitudes are necessary to the very idea of exhibiting, because they lie at the foundation of a process capable of offering a more sensitive view to the plurality of connotations absolved by the gestures of *showing* and *handing out*<sup>4</sup>, when they become exhibition design. In fact, they fulfil the principles of getting in tune with the place (and its architectural values to be discovered, understood and reinterpreted), with the objects (and their urgent need to be valued individually, as unique artefacts, and collectively, as composite collections) and with the people (who must be able to fully appreciate beauty and value).

Therefore, in his museographic projects, Guido Canali pursues with firm consistency a calibrated relationship of continuous understanding between these attitudes, developing a rigorous expressive code, closely linked to the «know how», i.e. to the mastery of the capacity to practice.

For this reason, when investigated in their sincerest essence, the architectural environments are freed from historical inconsistencies, and reveal unexpected and forgotten portions, which offer themselves once again to the public in the truth of their stratified consistency.

«The architectural space preserves a plurality of traces and opens up to multiple interpretative areas. By living into it — in space — different historical times are evoked: a geographical time, a social time, an individual time. In historiographic investigation the notion of historical research as a *critical challenge* is already acquired»<sup>5</sup>.

A concrete proof of this lays in the reinterpretations of the rooms of the current *Galleria Nazionale* in Parma, where, in over twenty years of work (between 1967 and 1991), Canali carried out a meticulous process of historical investigation culminating in the particular reconfiguration of the North Wing of the *Palazzo della Pilotta*.

This original large space, used as a stable and shed for wagons and carriages on the ground floor and as a barn on the upper level, was heavily remodelled in the 1950s by the engineers of the Army who subverted its extraordinary spatial unity to adapt it for use as a barracks, completely saturating the volume with the insertion of concrete floors and brick partitions.

The restoration of the magnificence of this simple, but impressive environment, dictated by the exceptional size of the interior, no longer mortified by any interruptions, has conferred an almost sacred beauty to the exhibition space of the Pinacoteca. The recovery of the architectural linearity of the great single nave hides a complex work of structural consolidation and removal of the spurious elements, aimed at allowing the reading of the original elements, including the masonry texture in exposed brick, and thus at enhancing the discovery of a place with an impressive visual impact.

The definition of the final layout of the North Wing, completed by the set-up system, embodies an apparent architectural paradox. The exhibition space is populated by a complex apparatus of framework structures, constituted by tubular metal scaffolding painted white, that Canali himself defines as «almost a macro-furniture, [...] a shell independent of the ancient walls, made by typical elements of the exhibition»<sup>6</sup>. Transversal panels can be anchored to its beams, allowing for a great compositional freedom, so as to arrange variable settings.

The presence of this superstructure, which fulfils extremely functional, structural, load-bearing and exhibiting requirements, is evident and certainly relevant, yet thanks to the permeability of the metal weave in space, it appears not particularly invasive within the intense scenography it creates. «The materials used by Canali connote the museum as a thinking machine, coming out of the museum rhetoric. The iron, the iron-beams, the lattice structure, have an iconology that recalls a factory: the museum, therefore, becomes a workshop and a laboratory, almost like an open building site»<sup>7</sup>.

Presence and absence thus search and find each other, in the development of the entire museographic intervention, in a continuous cross-reference of opposing masses, where the intense physicality of the places is flanked by a prolonged syntax of technical connecting elements – platforms, stairs, suspended walkways. Federica Cavalleri describes them as «prosthesis»<sup>8</sup> – which, as they can be crossed by the body and the gaze, tend to physically resize, restoring the perception of a harmonic and symbiotic spatial balance.

Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi recalls Mies van der Rohe, affirming that «Canali takes [from the German master] the “almost nothing” approach and the strategy of working by levels, which allow for the opening of the building to the surrounding space. [...] Finally, he captures its lightness; in fact the structural material he prefers is iron, that with thin sections and elongated profiles is able to defy weight and the law of gravitation»<sup>9</sup>.

In all the rooms of the National Gallery, scenery flats and paneling with a treatment of glossy grey stucco alternate with walkways and aerial platforms, thus tracing an «exhibition score» that generates the operative forms of displaying (i.e. arranging, supporting, hanging, etc.) and guides the visitor by drawing the routes of the visit.

At the same time, a strong structural autonomy is affirmed, suggesting respect and willingness for comparison with the original volumes, even in the smallest details, which form an integral part of the building installations, to which Guido Canali dedicates almost maniacal care, so as to make them almost invisible, as the most refined design expressions benefit.

These characteristics have remained a distinguished features of Canali's interventions, and can be observed even in the latest refurbishment works – also in those that are still in progress, such as his further contribution to a major renovation process of the *Palazzo della Pilotta*, which started in May 2017 and is again being developed by the studio.

It is precisely the inseparable relationship between the understanding of the evocative force inscribed in the materiality of the places – that kind of «exalting the historical essence and natural physicality»<sup>10</sup> – and the use of the display devices as a punctuation system, that transmits a narrative rhythm and a dynamic perception to the

space, weaving a continuous dialogue between different memories (of the environments, the objects, the people), and sincerely defines the intellectual and architectural dimension of the museographic work, according to Guido Canali.

Hence at the *Museo del Duomo* in Milan (2008-13) – among Canali's works, probably the one that most closely researches and indulges in the exhibition scenography –, the complex visitor path (that was not easy to solve, due to the complicated succession of environments involved) becomes itself a narrative expedient, that adapts itself to the different spaces, hosting a varied geography of display solutions that resonate with the rich and broad nature of the collections. «The presence of intentionally compressed stretches of the route highlights by contrast the spaciousness of the large adjacent rooms. Thus the alternation of compression and expansions provides a distinctive guiding thread. What's more, to combine the exhibit materials by specific themes, always with an eye to chronological coherency, boosts the route from the striking scenography, owing to the clustering of exhibits»<sup>11</sup>.

This project also moves along the double track of the archaeological investigation and the displaying organisation.

The first track allows important structural interventions to be carried out on the ground floor of the Eastern Wing of the *Palazzo Reale*, coordinated with articulated building installations and regulatory compliances, and culminating in the discovery of large portions of the ancient late Gothic walls of the original complex, which are included in the design of the exhibition spaces. They become themselves «showcased» objects, through the revelation of their textures and many large pointed arches.

The second track completely revises the previous set-up system, realized in the 1950s and then expanded in 1974. Compared to the previous version, which deployed a limited selection of artistic works according to an almost «decorative-ornamental» criterion strongly linked to the «in style» nature of the host rooms, Canali's new version of the museum consolidates its path through an uninterrupted dialogue with the artworks, comparing itself with the exceptional richness of the collections of the *Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo*, deriving from the great variety of artistic elements that make up the very architecture of the Cathedral Basilica.

Thanks to this attitude, what could have represented an evident design problem turns into a subtle conceptual intuition, assuming a clear representative and operative connotation — i.e. «the theme of the multitude: showcasing as much material as possible, making reference to the great richness of the *Duomo's* decorative apparatus»<sup>12</sup>, as Canali himself calls it.

In fact the artworks on display, selected in large quantities from a meticulous survey launched at the beginning of the project, are placed in the different rooms according to coherent combinations, to generate an intense emotional involvement, and ideally referring to the original contexts of the *Duomo* itself.

The visitor path, in this way, becomes an explicit narrative plot, modulated according to moments of extreme concentration, nearly crowded, and more rarefied spaces, always supported by powerful, almost cinematic lighting characterizations.

The museum is, therefore, rich in exhibit solutions that solve the specific problems of display by turning the technical-structural systems into elements explicitly involved in a weaving of semantic references.

To name just a few: pedestals in metal bar section to support heavy Candoglia marble statues, re-proposing the play of glances of their original location on the façades of the *Duomo*; thick panels in structural honeycomb aluminium, paved in white Candoglia marble to create a kaleidoscopic sequence of capital sculptures; metal chains and tie-rods to hold up a moving *enfilade* of animal-like gargoyles that parade just above the heads of the visitors or, even, an imaginative display-room, completely covered with open shelves and some closed showcases, which recall the exceptional number of sculptural sketches in terracotta and plaster made between the 16th and 19th centuries.

In a game of variable density passages, these solutions are counterpointed by moments of meditated «absence», as in the case of the original metal soul — that was the invisible supporting body of the golden *Madonnina* that stands on the highest spire of the *Duomo*, and whose lonely twisted anthropomorphic figure resonates with a very modern abstract expression.

It also happens for several totally transparent showcases, which are a real lesson of fine executive awareness, in a continuous search for the rarefaction of every structural element, that often become almost

invisible by the adoption of basements drowned in the floor and large glass panes.

Moreover, the showcase is an almost unavoidable basic principle for any display system, so much so that Nicola Marras defines it as «a support specifically designed to show. [...] It seems to extend an object towards the observer; in reality it defends one from the other»; «its design is not so much a way of showing as the form of a separation»<sup>13</sup>.

Guido Canali, however, is very skilful in annulling this principle of separation and indeed he transforms these «containers» into controlled performances of apparent lightness and transparency, which he uses as instruments to connote the unfolding of the exhibition spaces.

An attitude clearly evident in the restoration and reuse of the ancient hospital complex of *Santa Maria della Scala* in Siena (1997-2002), where, in the labyrinthine rooms of the hypogeous spaces, he created the Archaeological Museum at Palazzo Squarcialupi, a space for exhibitions and congresses.

Here, the evocative brick vaulted rooms and the multiform tunnels dug into the tuff really fascinate the visitor, also through the topical impact of the oblique lighting from below along the walls. The public move around walking on simple wooden walkways, that are raised from the original tuff floors and also spaced from the walls, so as to suggest an idea of respect for historical stratifications and to conceal the presence of technical installations; these paths are populated by long suspended showcases.

The product of profound technical knowledge, these showcases achieve a rarefied lyrical beauty, with their thin metal frames hosting the glass boxes, while the whole system is anchored to underlying closed-frame beams whose sporadic floor and wall supporting pillars accentuate the idea of defying gravity, resolved with vertical metal tie-rods connected to the upper chains.

With their purely mechanical and contemporary language, in the unusual environment of the ancient Hospital, these prominent elements trigger and emphasize the assonance between the exhibition contents and the historical context. They provide a living space for the artworks, but at the same time, standing strong in their transparent permeability, they insinuate into different environments connecting them together.



«In renewing the visiting path I made sure to shape a unitary way, also exploiting on an emotionally vibrant sequence. That is to say, throughout the alternation of spaces diversified in dimensional, material and structural characteristics, [...] the exhibition path [...] determines a continuous spatial variability, accentuated by the modification of the grain and the colour of walls and ceilings. [...] The insertion of the showcases, which protect the small or fragile pieces, avoids any design exhibitionism. The crystal display cases [...] landed within the defiled loops of the articulated medieval cellars. Or, always in a discreet way, they take on the role of a spatial pivot around which the new path unfolds»<sup>14</sup>.

Again, in the monumental Senese architectural complex Canali's project was developed around a consistent work of redevelopment of the historical environments, including interventions aimed at clearing the tunnels from the accumulation of alterations and abandoned materials that had stratified over time, which enhance their reconnection in a coherent path, also implemented by the opening of some new passages in the tuff.

«The "light", subdued kind of architectural transformation that Canali has worked on over the years has proved to be on a par with the highest conservation standards and expectations. Leaving intact the ever-multiplying evidence of century past, Canali in effect x-rayed the monument by first analysing its structure [...]. And more than this, he has read the patient identity, unveiling a presence that could only have been guessed at before»<sup>15</sup>.

Once again, Canali acts in terms of maximum conservation of the material consistency of the historical rooms, underlining their natural dramatic force and interpreting the museum itinerary as an act of fascination.

The same, constant principle can be found at the *Museo delle Stele Statue Lunigianesi* in Pontremoli (2010-15), housed in the *Castello di Pignataro*, which conserves an extraordinary and unique collection of *Stele* — i.e. iconic and mysterious anthropomorphic monuments of prehistoric age made in sandstone.

Also in this case Canali's museographic project — which completely revises the previous exhibit layout commissioned by Augusto Cesare Ambrosi, founder of the museum — finds its innovative matrix

in the doubling of the surface area that can be visited, now arranged on two different levels and therefore able to display a greater number of items. This new spatial organisation was made possible through the recovery of the ground floor of the castle, which was previously used as a repository (and therefore was almost unknown to most) and thus, by reason of its particular condition, had been preserved intact with its large medieval sleeve.

As highlighted by the architect, «In these locations the people of the steles have found a greater charm»<sup>16</sup>. The *Stele* punctuate the environment on the ground floor as silent presences, while a careful oblique lighting enhances the material grain and the light sculptural relief, generating a landscape of shadows fading on the rough surfaces characterized by large ashlar behind them.

The exhibit system is enclosed within a declination of metal frames of slender section. They support some of the items, providing at the same time the housing for the lighting fixtures and captions, discreetly arranged on a slab slightly detached from the ground.

From the flooring, again made of wooden slats, the metal supports of the *Stele* arise; they are designed to allow a complete view of the objects, enhancing their surprising autonomous and abstract iconography; at the same time the low metal spacers (a functional tool realized to keep the public at a reasonable distance from the artworks) surround some of them, creating immaterial exhibition islands that place these ethereal presences in space and define the relationship of proximity between them and the visitors, soliciting a perceptive discovery — a detail of admirable «architectural kindness».

«A major feature in Canali's work is precisely the search for an unmediated encounter between the visitor and the artworks. Multimedia, didactic and informative presentations and panels with further information on the archaeological findings are inserted along the way, in secluded spaces, so as never to interfere with the "direct" enjoyment of the original objects on display»<sup>17</sup>.

Upstairs the visitor path finds a moment of maximum scenographic expression, in the space devoted to the seven stele of Groppoli, exposed in a perfect alignment that emphasises the diagonal axis of the room, right in the middle, so that the visitor can move around it, in a perimetral darkness that enhances the artworks' presence.

«Don't ask Canali to explain the appeal of his work. He will certainly disappoint you. He will talk to you about very concrete issues — the solution of technical problems, the needs of the users, and the quality of a material. Poetry, if there is one, explains itself, it cannot be a point of discussion»<sup>18</sup>.

His environments are inhabited first of all by their own history, which becomes part of a narrative: moving from mutual dialogue with memory, as Canali writes, «the patient participation to places — to the slow transformations of long duration — has not been an obstacle to an interpretation of places through the lexicon of the contemporary architecture»<sup>19</sup>.

The poetry of Guido Canali's museographic works is silent. It doesn't need special effects or imaginative materials: it is concretely welded to the material essence of the places it is destined to animate, and prefers to give expression to the language of aesthetic rigour, of executive essentiality, of an apparent absence — that, on a closer look, reveals itself as a telling and significant presence.

1 C. Baglione, «Così lontane, così vicine. Guido Canali. Museo delle Statue Stele Lunigianesi, Pontremoli», *Casabella*, 867, November 2016, pp. 76-85.

2 G. Canali, «Storia e progetto. Musei e fabbriche verdi», lecture at *Accademia di San Luca*, Rome, October 10, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2qBIY3P\\_N4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2qBIY3P_N4). Accessed on December 20, 2019.

3 Ivi.

4 For the use of the terms «show» and «offer», reference is made here to F. Dal Co, «Una lezione sull'allestire: Francesco Venezia a Palazzo Grassi», *Casabella*, 686, February 2001.

5 G. Canali, M. Caldarola, *Lo spazio antico e la declinazione archeologica del testo nel progetto di allestimento*, in G. Donini (ed.), *L'architettura degli allestimenti*, Edizioni Kappa, Rome 2010, p. 74.

6 G. Canali, «Storia e progetto. Musei e fabbriche verdi», *op. cit.*

7 Studenticollegio, «Il rispetto della tradizione nell'opera di Guido Canali a Parma», *Allievi del Collegio Superiore, Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna*, December 8, 2015. <https://studenticollegio.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/il-rispetto-della-tradizione-nell'opera-di-guido-canali-a-parma>. Accessed on December 20, 2019.

8 F. B. Cavalleri, *Palazzo della Pilotta, Parma: galleria nazionale d'Arte*, in M. Boriani, (ed.), *Progettare per il costruito*, Città Studi Edizioni, Novara 2008, p. 201.

9 L. Prestinenza Puglisi, «Architetti d'Italia. Guido Canali, il genio isolato», *Artribune, Architetti d'Italia* #18, *Guido Canali*, September 26, 2017. <http://www.artribune.com/progettazione/architettura/2017/09/storia-guido-canali>. Accessed on December 20, 2019.

10 A. Mottola Molino, «Qual è il confine tra artista e architetto?», *Il Giornale*

*dell'Arte*, 203, October 2001, as quoted in *Abitare*, 434, December 2003.

11 G. Canali, «Museo del Duomo, Milano», *Domus*, 976, January 2014, pp. 52-65.

12 G. Canali, «Storia e progetto. Musei e fabbriche verdi», *op. cit.*

13 N. Marras, *Breviario strumentale*, in S. Polano, *Mostrare*, Edizioni Lybra Immagine, Milan 2000, p. 46.

14 DIAPReM (Centro Dipartimentale per lo Sviluppo di Procedure Automatiche Integrate per il Restauro dei Monumenti), «Dalla conservazione all'architettura. Appunti sugli interventi entro il Santa Maria della Scala a Siena», September 28, 2010. <http://www.unife.it/centri/diaprem/archivio-progetti/progetti-di-comunicazione/focus-r/bologna/l2019ampliamento-delle-gallerie-dell2019accademia-di-venezias>. Accessed on December 20, 2019.

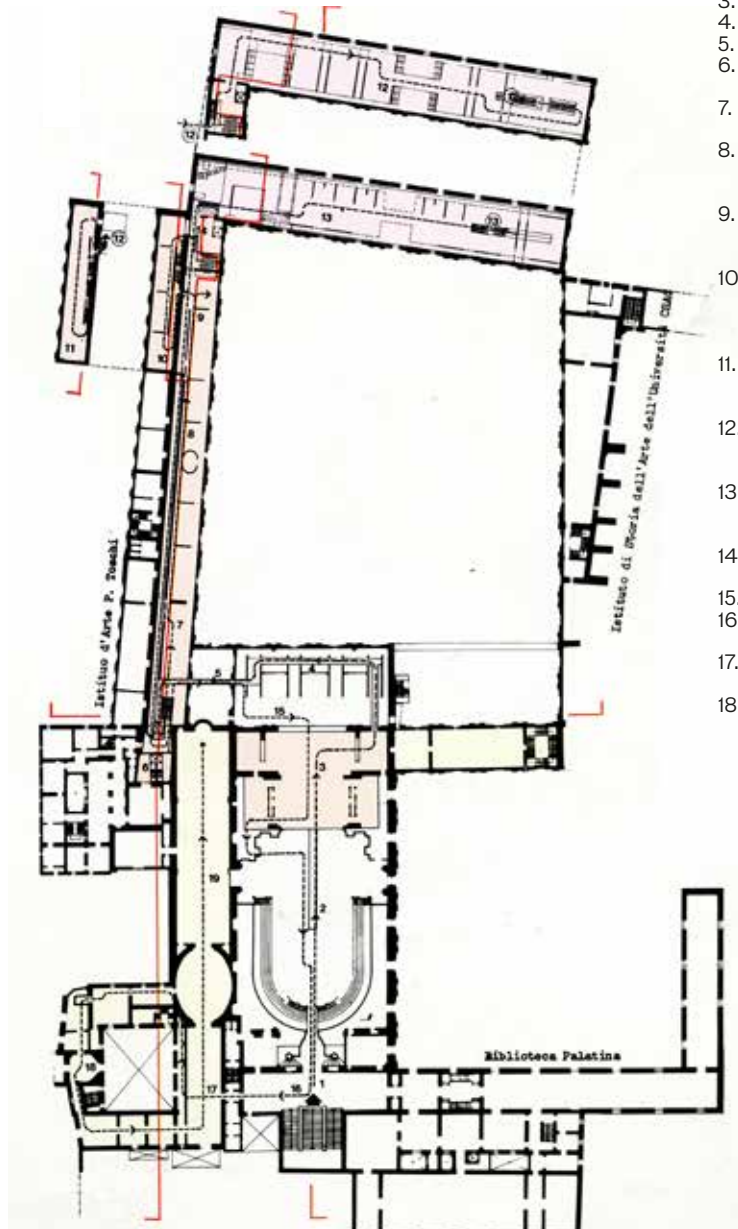
15 F. Irace, «Guido Canali a Siena. Dalla terra al Cielo. Santa Maria della Scala. Museo Archeologico e Sale espositive a Siena», *Abitare*, 434, December 2003.

16 As quoted in L. Pellis, «Museo delle Statue Stele a Pontremoli, ecco il nuovo allestimento firmato Canali», *Toscana Oggi*, April 21, 2015. <https://www.toscanaoggi.it/Cultura-Societa/Museo-delle-Statue-Stele-a-Pontremoli-ecco-il-nuovo-allestimento-firmato-Canali>. Accessed on December 20, 2019.

17 C. Baglione, «Così lontane, così vicine. Guido Canali. Museo delle Statue Stele Lunigianesi, Pontremoli», *op. cit.*

18 L. Prestinenza Puglisi, «Architetti d'Italia. Guido Canali, il genio isolato», *op. cit.*

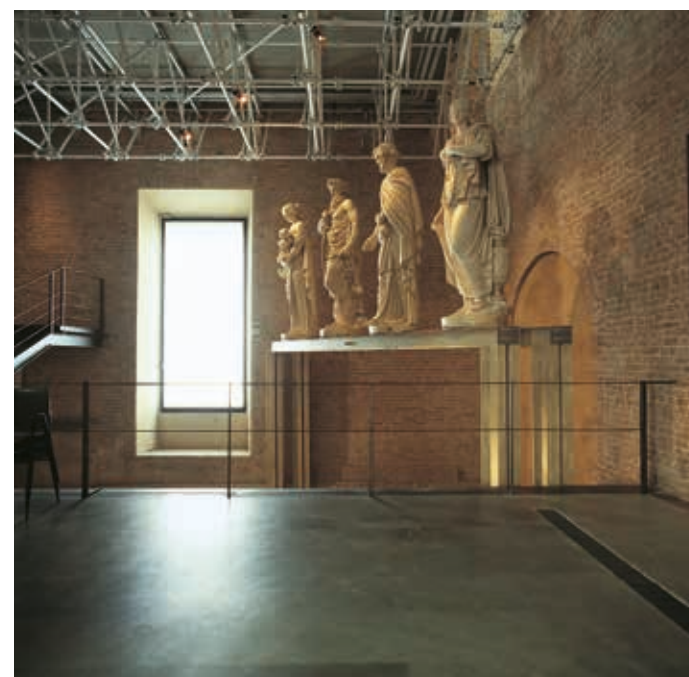
19 G. Canali, M. Caldarola, *Lo spazio antico e la declinazione archeologica del testo nel progetto di allestimento*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.



1. Entrance to the Farnese Theatre
2. Pathway to the stage
3. Stage
4. Backstage
5. Double level bridge
6. Emergency staircase and elevator
7. Start of the exhibition path
8. West Wing (Tuscan painters, 14th-15th centuries)
9. West Wing (Emilian and Lombard painters, 15th century)
10. West Wing, lower level (Emilian painters, 15th-16th centuries)
11. West Wing, higher level (Emilian painters, 16th century)
12. North Wing, higher level (Italian painters, 15th-16th centuries)
13. North Wing, lower level (Emilian painters, 17th-18th centuries)
14. Aerial path over the West Wing
15. Return path
16. Exit from the Farnese Theatre
17. Access area to the Rocchetta
18. Rocchetta Gallery (Correggio and Parmigianino)

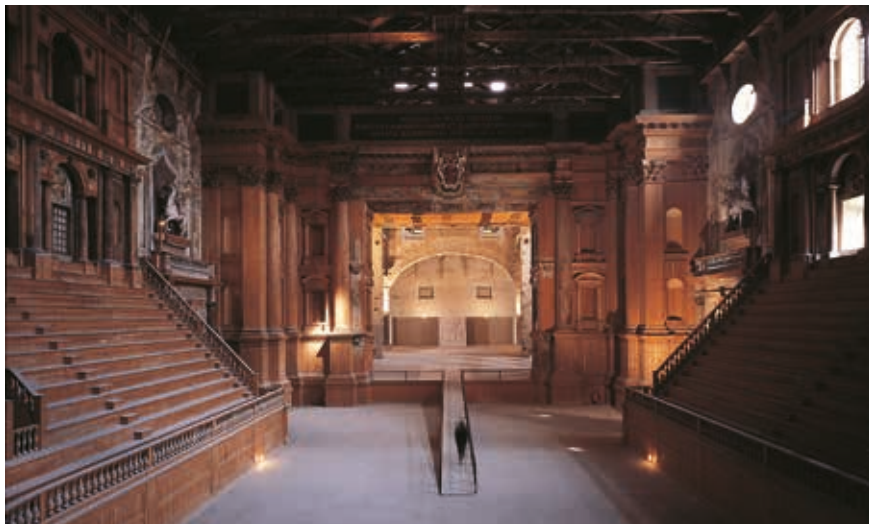
Guido Canali, *Galleria Nazionale, Palazzo della Pilotta* (Parma, Italy 1967-91)

79  
First floor plan © Canali Associati.



80 81  
Exhibition settings installed in the North Wing  
© Canali Associati.





**82**  
Overhead view of the  
reconstructed Farnese  
Theatre © Canali Associati.



**84 85**  
A recent view of the updated  
exhibition settings, ph. Marco  
Borsotti.



**83**  
Detail of the pathway allowing  
access to the galleries © Canali  
Associati.







Guido Canali, *Museo del Duomo* (Milan, Italy 2008-13)

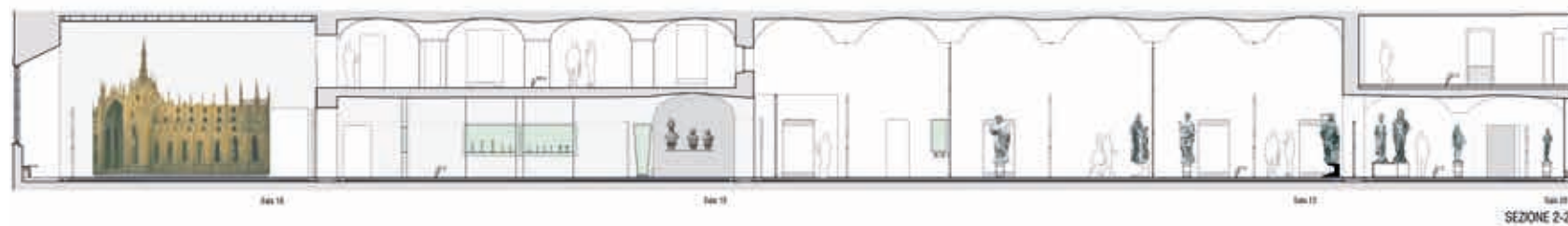
**86**  
Plan of the museum  
© Canali Associati.



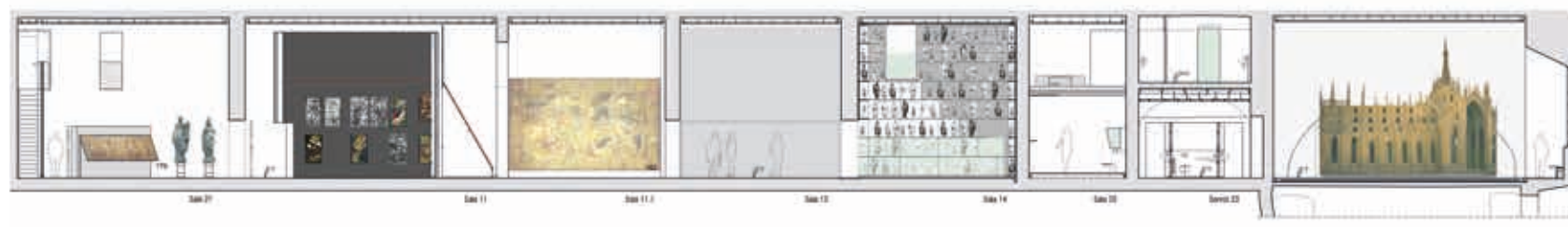
**87 88**  
Exhibition settings  
© Canali Associati.



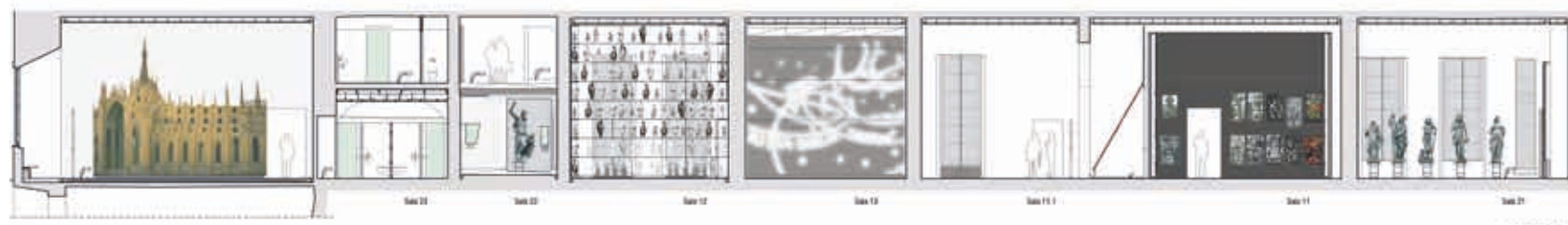
SEZIONE 1-1'



SEZIONE 2-2'

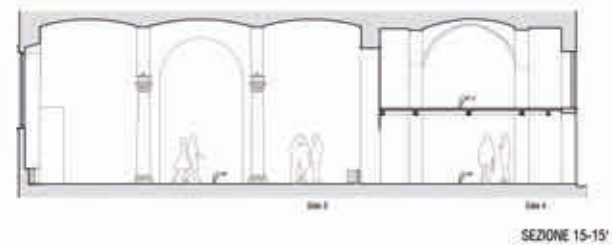
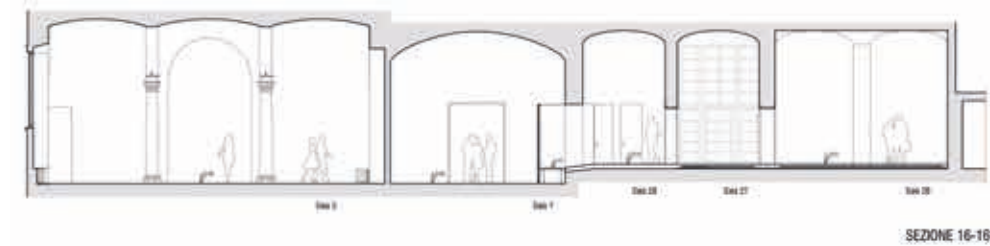
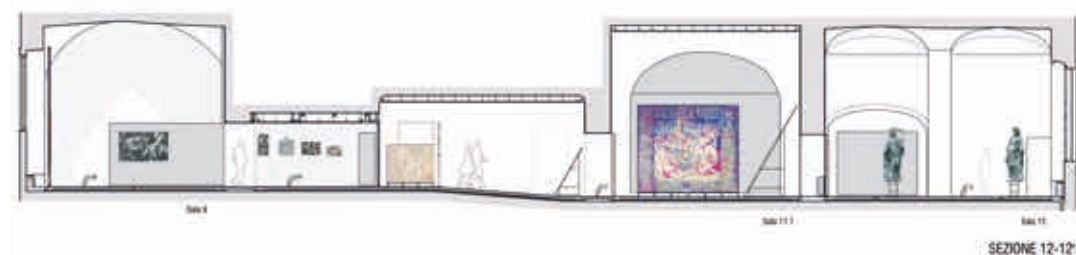
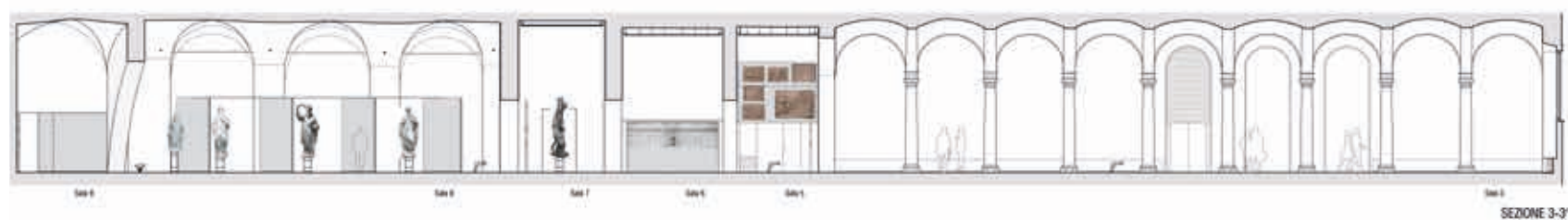


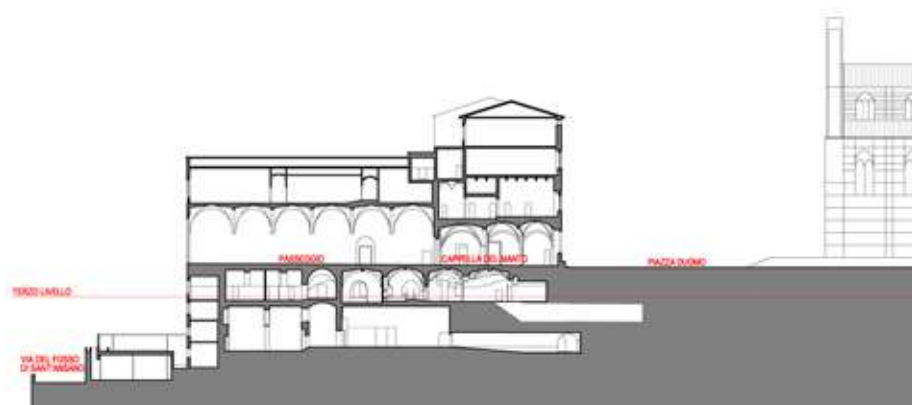
SEZIONE 10-10'



SEZIONE 9-9'







Guido Canali, *Museo archeologico nel complesso museale di Santa Maria della Scala* (Siena, Italy 1997-2002)

91 92 93  
Exhibition path and transversal section © Canali Associati.



94  
Display settings  
© Canali Associati.





Guido Canali, *Museo delle Statue Stele* (Pontremoli, Italy 2010-15)

**95** Ground floor and first floor plans © Canali Associati.



**96** Display settings © Canali Associati.





97 98 99  
Display settings  
© Canali Associati.



# Pierre-Louis Faloci. *Camera Obscurae* to Display «Difficult Memories»

Federico Bucci

As suggested by Susan Sontag in her first essay on the subject<sup>1</sup>, «Photography extends the 18th-century literati's discovery of the beauty of ruins into a genuinely popular taste». This critical position on war photography has foretold the development of a process which has reached global dimensions and resonance — a sort of «memorial rush»<sup>2</sup>, enhanced by the celebration of new anniversaries and by the emergence of a «war culture», which manifests itself in literature, movies as well as in the exponential spread of exhibitions and museums dedicated to the «difficult» memories and heritages related to past conflicts.

European territories are scattered with the material and immaterial traces of battles and war. These markers of the past — steles and tombstones, cemeteries, memorials and monuments, trenches and walkways, fortifications, bunkers, shelters, concentration and extermination camps, remains of bombed buildings, usually associated to multifarious rituals and stories — are jealously conserved as precious «forms of time», which witness the devastation of places, but also of the history of cultures and identities.

Nevertheless, some of these places of memory lie in a «silent» condition, i.e. when no clear mark of the events that transformed them is visible, although their presence still remains embedded into the local identity through anecdotes and celebrations (in the form of «mental heritage»), archival studies and cultural productions (e.g. paintings, photos, movies). Such contexts preserve a «histoire sourde»<sup>3</sup>, which needs to be given a voice — hence soliciting the experimentation with new strategies for the design of site-based museums.

Operating as visitor centres, education poles and exhibition spaces, these institutions serve as magnifying lenses for the difficult memories embedded in these places, taking symbolic strength and communicative eloquence from the material and immaterial traces integrated in the landscape. These experiences are indeed based on the construction of a «resonance» between contents and places: the museum space becomes part of the surrounding territory, not only through the strategic interaction between the different spatial elements combined to define the visitors' pathway, but also because the authenticity of monuments, cemeteries and remains disseminated in the landscape reinforce the sense of truth which is embodied by the objects displayed inside the exhibition areas<sup>4</sup>.

The raise of this new chapter of the contemporary museographic culture sets the framework to understand the work of Pierre-Louis Faloci (1949), a French architect with a long, recognized expertise in museum design, who is the author of many important pages of this story.

The architectural practice he founded in 1975 has since then realized a remarkable body of work, which includes various public buildings — e.g. the Paul Lapie high school (2007), the multimedia library in the city center of Meudon-la-Forêt (2002), the courthouse of Avesnes sur Helpe (2008), the town hall and civic centre in Fosses (2011-14) — and several museums — e.g. the Rodin Museum in Paris (2007), the Art and History Museum in Rochefort (2007), the intervention in the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp to house the *Centre Européen du Résistant Déporté* (2007-08), the Burgundy archaeological archives (2012-14), the learning center and museum in Dunkerque «Halle aux Sucre» (2011-18). The outstanding quality of his architecture is highlighted by the number of acknowledgments and rewards; beyond the nomination as *Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite* (Knight of the Order of Merit), *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* (Knight of Arts and Letters), *Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur* (Knight of the Legion of Honor), he was awarded with the *Prix de l'Equerre d'Argent* in 1996 (for the European Centre for Archaeology of Mount Beuvray, 1996), the *Grand prix Site de France* in 2008 (for the Mont Beuvray Museum, 2007-10) and in 2014, the EMYA (European Museum of the Year Award) 2016 special prize, and the *Grand Prix national de l'architecture* in 2018.

The buildings designed by Faloci are characterized by a special relationship between architecture and landscape: although the abstract, almost minimalist language of beams, pillars, horizontal and vertical planes is juxtaposed to nature, the simple volumes they compose develop a special affinity with the site, and are always firmly rooted in their settings<sup>5</sup>. Each project is integrated into the environmental as well as historical context, and indeed it seems to be conceived as an instrument to make the stories, traces, metrics, logic and forgotten meanings embedded in the place visible to the eyes of the visitors.

This task is particularly crucial on the sites that have been the theatre of important battles, whose memory may have become «silent» or «difficult to hear», because of the disappearance of physical marks in the built and natural environment: it is in the work carried

out by Faloci in this kind of places where the inventive and innovative character of his architecture stands out the most.

The distinctive features of Faloci's approach are particularly visible in the *Centre Historique Valmy 1792* (2011-15), a museum and research center realized on the site of the Battle of Valmy, and dedicated to the celebration and documentation of this milestone in the development of the European culture.

This famous episode of the French Revolution is well known: on 20 September 1792 the Austro-Prussian army, under the command of the Feldmarschall Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Duke of Braunschweig (1735-1806), together with a large group of French monarchists (called *émigrés*), marched on Paris to free Louis XVI; but on the hills of the Marne, between Reims and Verdun, their advance was stopped by slightly more than 20.000 *citoyens* of revolutionary France, guided by the generals Charles-François Dumouriez (1739-1823) and François-Étienne-Christophe Kellermann (1735-1820). The miraculous military victory, to the notes of the Marseillaise, was the result of a series of lucky causes whose effects, nevertheless, go beyond the confines of the history of the French Republic and triumphantly enter, not just as an example of heroic populism, in a mythological literature that has spread across Europe, down to the present day<sup>6</sup>.

The relevance of this battle is underlined by the wealthy testimonies that remember it, including a number of artistic expressions of remarkable value — starting from the famous paintings depicting the young Duke of Chartres Louis Philippe (1773-1850), clinging to the mill of Valmy with the soldiers and paysans of the Revolution, before the long exile that came before his proclamation as «Roi des Français» in 1830. The authors, respectively in 1826 and 1848, are the painters Éloi Firmin Féron (1802-76) and Émile Jean Horace Vernet (1789-1863), the latter quite well known for having been the object of the weighty invective of Charles Baudelaire (1821-67), that pungent and brilliant commentator on the *Salon de 1846*<sup>7</sup>.

Also some of the giants of 19th-century poetry have dedicated iconic words to this memory — such as the *Ça ira* composed in the first months of 1883 by Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907): the bard and senator of Umbertine Italy singed the praises of the acts performed at Valmy by the «shoeless civic army», that «chases the exile band back to its refu-



ge» also thanks to «hunger and cold» and a not-so-noble «dysentery» (a detail, after all, well-documented by history). At the end he concluded: «issuing from a group obscure, Wolfgang von Goethe on the turmoil cast his eye», saying «Today from this place starts the world's new story».

The source of this quotation, which is mentioned in a note by Carducci himself, is the diary that the German poet kept in the following of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, who understood the social and economic impact of the defeat at Valmy, from the «losers' side»; consequences of greater portent than the heroism of the general Kellermann, or the strange behavior of the Austro-Prussian troops, to be interpreted in relation to the future geography of Europe.

Goethe's prophecy at Valmy, regarding a «new era in world history», has to do in fact with the advent of an unprecedented popular impulse of emancipation, driven by the ferments of the French Revolution and forged in the Era of Mechanization. This brilliant key of interpretation is supplied by Walter Rathenau (1867-1922), president of *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft* (AEG) and Minister of the Weimar Republic, in a lecture given in Berlin in 1921<sup>8</sup>, one year before he was assassinated by the Organisation Consul, the notorious far-right terrorist group active in Germany in the early 1920s.

The architecture conceived by Faloci to house the memory of these stories hides beyond the Valmy village, unwinding in a recessed itinerary and merging its segmented body into the topography of the site, from which it only emerges through the black concrete walls that welcome the visitors and guide them inside the exhibition path.

A first courtyard provides parking. Then, after a trench-like corridor, a second rectangular open space leads to the entrance to the building excavated in the hill. As highlighted by the architect himself, this project is voluntarily built into the existing topography, leaving the dominating subject — the windmill — isolated in the landscape at large. Architectonic work of the terrain, including terracing, burying, framing of the mill.

The museum operates as a large «camera obscura»<sup>9</sup> with a rectangular form, divided into rooms by display panels hanging from the upper slab<sup>10</sup>. Walking through a space with a length of about 40 meters and growing height (from 4.0 to 5.5 meters), the visitors arrive at a visual channel pointed towards the mill. In the darkness of the space,

the exhibits are organized in a timeline that very simply illustrates the facts and the personalities that contextualize the Battle of Valmy in the years of the French Revolution, while at the same time amplifying the narrative power of the objects (uniforms and weapons, like the cannon with the innovative Gribeauval system) and the backlit reproductions (paintings and documents) on display, also taking advantage from multimedia tools and surprising animations (e.g. the «talking» portrait of General Kellermann) aimed engaging with an audience of all ages.

This «battle museum» lacks in tragic evidence of death: some orthodox historians might turn up their noses when faced with such playful aspects, ironic concessions to the mythological aura of the event, but this choice follows a precise museologic strategy aimed at widening the public of these site-based institutions, and especially at mediating these narratives to address youngsters and schoolboys, accompanying them in the acknowledgement of «difficult memories» through a less explicit and more engaging communication, designed to transform them into «second generation witnesses».

Furthermore, in this type of museum the display of objects and documents is only one of the many elements that participate in the construction of the visit, which includes the direct experience of the traces and the sites where the memory of the events is directly inscribed. Indeed, leaving the museum rooms, the exhibition path prosecutes in the open courtyard and through a new slightly sloping ramp, bordered by concrete walls, which takes the visitors to the hilltop where they can see the reproduction of the famous mill (which was realized in 2005, after the destruction of the first copy made in 1939).

This «landscape architecture», designed by a tectonic element interacting with the topography, is capable of taking us by the hand and accompanying our immersion into nature as well as into history. The effectiveness of this tour is strengthened by expansion of the exhibition path inside and outside the building and by the visual interplays among the different sites — reaching the highest peak in the visual channel which frames the view of the mill and projects it inside the museum space.

Similar design strategies can be detected also in the *Centre d'Histoire du Mémorial '14-18* (2013-15) realized in Souchez, a French village between Arras and Lens. This area had been the theatre of famous

events pertaining to the history of First World War — and in particular the Battle of Arras (9 April-17 May 1917), that is remembered especially for the swift and spectacular gains made by the British army on the German defenses in the opening phase — and, in the occasion of the first centenary, it has become the epicenter for major operation of territorial regeneration organized by the Region Nord-Pas de Calais and launched with the construction of the SANAA's facility of the Louvre at Lens (2006).

Faloci's museum operates as visitor centre within the site *Mémorial '14-18*, composed of three different memorial places, which complement each other to offer visitors a thorough insight into the First World War in northern France and to pay tribute to all those who sacrificed their lives for peace. The new building is situated at the foot of the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette hill, on top of which, little more than a kilometer away, visitors can also reach the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette necropolis — the French military cemetery, where the bodies of 42.000 French soldiers fallen in the First World War on the front lines of the Artois region and French and Belgian Flanders lie at rest — and the *Ring of Remembrance* — a memorial in the shape of a concrete ring designed by Philippe Prost in 2014, bearing the names of almost 580.000 soldiers who fell in northern France between 1914 and 1918, etched into golden panels without any distinction between nationalities or rankings.

In this site — the so-called *Enfer du Nord*, the name assigned in the 1920s to this zone by the broadcaster of the Paris-Roubaix bicycle race, whose notorious cobblestones are about one half hour from here — Faloci was asked to design a new architecture that could house an important collection of objects<sup>11</sup>, large-scale photographs<sup>12</sup>, interactive maps and period video footage that document the phases of the battles fought on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918, and at same time a structure that could narrate the stories of destruction and reconstruction embedded there in plains and hills, roads and railroads, houses and churches, coal dunes and war cemeteries.

Again, the architect articulates this proposal on the principle of the «camera obscura», here based on two complementary elements: the visual scope pointed towards the landscape and the slices of light that filter into the space through the gaps between the walls and the roof, creating fascinating «shadow sculptures».

These features are fundamental in the design of the building, which is divided into four volumes of concrete painted glossy black (echoing the blockhouses constructed during the First World War), each possessing its own architectural specificity: the first has a lateral wall detached and hung from concrete posts; the second is a suspended volume that receives light that grazes the ground; the third is also suspended, with an L-shaped form, and is characterized by a series of cast shadows; finally, the fourth volume is completely opaque. During the course of the day each volume changes its appearance, with tones that modulate the dramatic key. In this way the structure of the installation, composed of tables, partitions and display cases, becomes part of the space in a luminous chromatic game dominated by the black backdrop that holds together the photographs, writing, objects and films.

The *Humanitas* with which the architecture of Faloci comes to terms in the interpretation of a war construction, almost a trench, aims at recovering the strategic role of those spaces, well captured by the lieutenant Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920): «This whole device should be imagined as an enormous underground fortress that extends apparently without life through the terrain, but inside of which a well regulated service of vigilance and labor is carried out». Through the four volumes, the museum itinerary unwinds along eight sections inside which the visitor can learn more about the various phases of the war, prior to finding out about the extraordinary operation undertaken by the national governments and aimed at the conservation of the memory of the dead.

Drawing on the well-balanced interplay between documentation and experience (i.e. on the development of both intellectual and emotional engagement of the visitors), on the coalescence of landscape and architecture, and on the development of a new formula merging museums and memorials, Faloci's works prove the possibility to fuse the physical, visual and «mental» heritages embedded in certain places, hence contributing to the development of new museographic strategies for the exhibition of «difficult memories», capable of revealing the «hidden harmony» (*harmonie aphanes*) of history.

1 S. Sontag, *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York 1973, p. 79. This statement is then expanded in the last text by the American writer, published shortly before her premature death, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), unfolding the critique of war photography, which produces fragments of a memory that put humankind in relation to death but at the same time transmit a dramatic sense of alienation.

2 P. Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, Berg, Oxford 2007.

3 P.-L. Faloci, «Histoire sourde du lieu», *Monumental quarterly*, March 2007.

4 J.-Y. Boursier, *Musée de guerre et mémoriaux: Politiques de la mémoire*, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris 2005.

5 M. Biagi, *Pierre-Louis Faloci. Architettura, educazione allo sguardo*, Electa, Milan 2018.

6 Starting with national political chronicles, which a few years ago, inspired by a former President of the Republic, evoked the «rag-tag» fighters of Valmy to define one of those classic parliamentary skirmishes with which the governments of our peninsula are quite frequently built.

7 It is worth stopping to read one phrase, because it represents an admirable example of the kind of lambasting that is carefully avoided by today's critics: «H. Vernet is a military man who has taken up painting. I detest this art thought up to the beat of drums, these canvases daubed at the gallop, this painting fabricated by pistol-shot, just as I hate the army, armed power and anyone who clanks weapons noisily around in a peaceful place».

8 Outlining the ongoing «epoch of great capitalism», Rathenau refers to the words pronounced by Goethe at Valmy and before reasoning about the relationship between economy and society and the rationalization of production processes, he offers a snapshot of the first years of the 20th century, impacted by a transformation «that is almost unspeakable and unthinkable, that expands over all of human action, the whole of our thinking, our behavior, our environment and emotional life. The utensils have changed, the dwellings, the way of dressing, the landscape, trades and jobs have been transformed. The air, the aether is full of news, lights, tensions, and movement races with deafening speed».

9 The *camera obscura* (*boîte noire* in French) is the ancestor of the photographic camera; the earliest versions, dating to antiquity, consisted of small darkened rooms with light admitted through a single tiny hole; the result was that an inverted image of the outside scene was cast on the opposite wall, which was usually whitened. For centuries the technique was used for viewing eclipses of the Sun without endangering the eyes and, by the 16th century, as an aid to drawing; the subject was posed outside and the image reflected on a piece of drawing paper for the artist to trace. Portable versions were built, followed by smaller and even pocket models; the interior of the box was painted black and the image reflected by an angled mirror so that it could be viewed right side up; the introduction of a light-sensitive plate by J.-N. Niepce created photography.

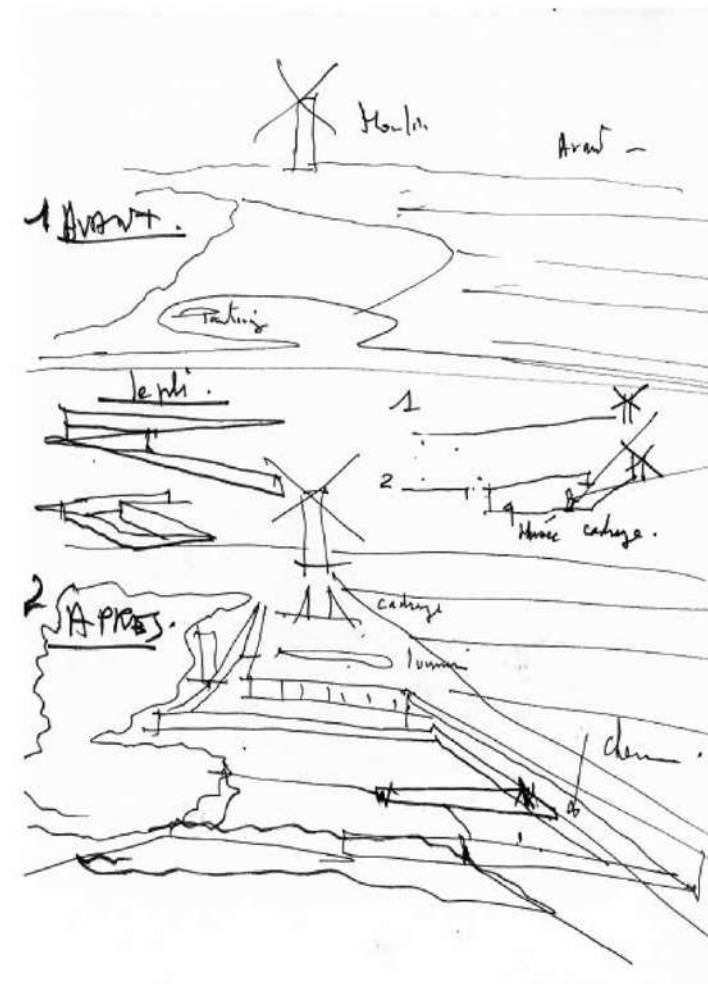
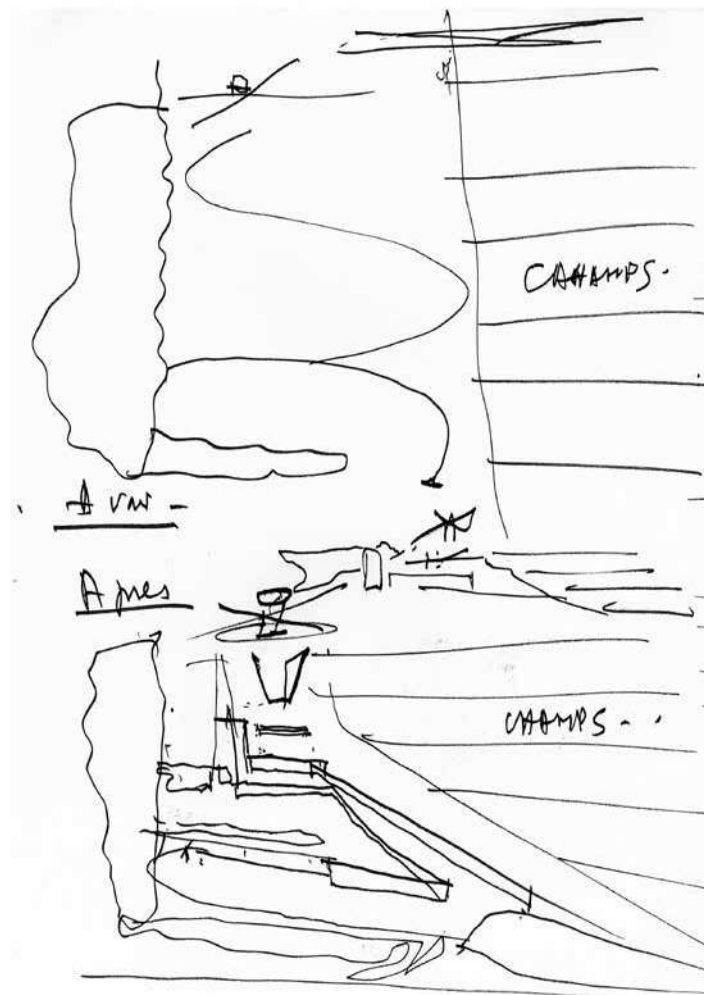
10 One of the particularity of this project is the suspension of the partitioning elements, thus allowing for the continuity of the floor.

11 Among the objects, beside weapons and military uniforms, it is important to highlight the presence of the various personal objects that populate the display cases: combs, razor blades and straight razors, pacific signs of very human everyday decorum, aimed at providing a new representation of the reality of war, with a focus on the lives of the people who have experienced it.

12 Beside the black and white photos of the war, witnessing the historical events, some other unforgettable images are included in the display – such as one picture «in color», illustrating a recent excavation made in this area where

still more soldiers were found, whose bodies had been hastily buried during the conflict, namely the *Oubliés du Point du Jour*, i.e. the skeletons of twenty British soldiers discovered in 2001, which can be added to the approximately 10 million dead among the Allies, as opposed to the 7 million of the Central Powers. Big, impressive numbers, necessary to understand the question of the «net body count» debated in the most recent and informed historiography, of which Niall Ferguson (author of *The Pity of War*) is undoubtedly the most enlightened representative.

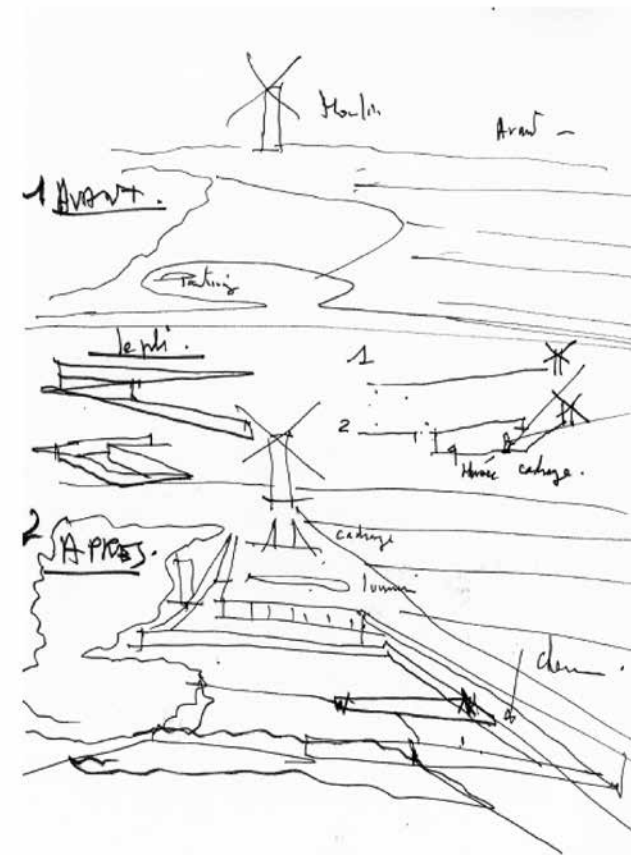
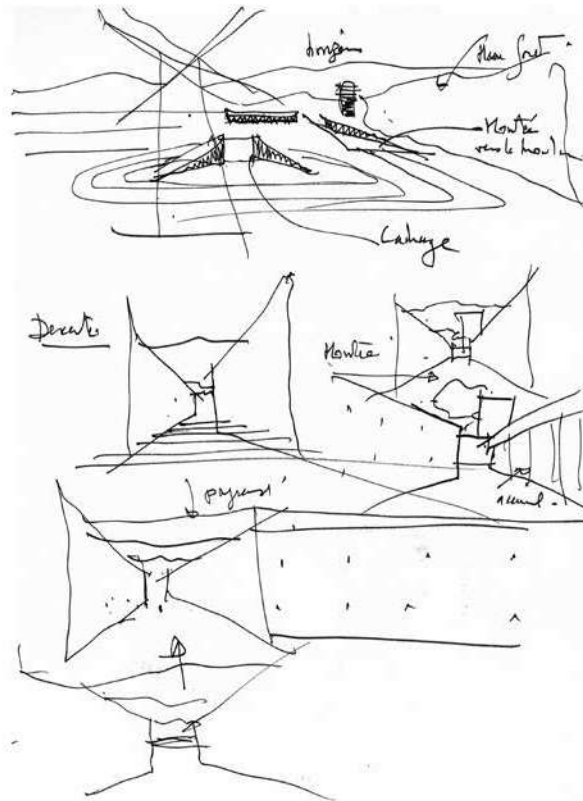




Pierre-Louis Faloci, *Musée de la Bataille de Valmy* (France 2011-15).

100  
The architect's sketches  
© Pierre Louis Faloci.

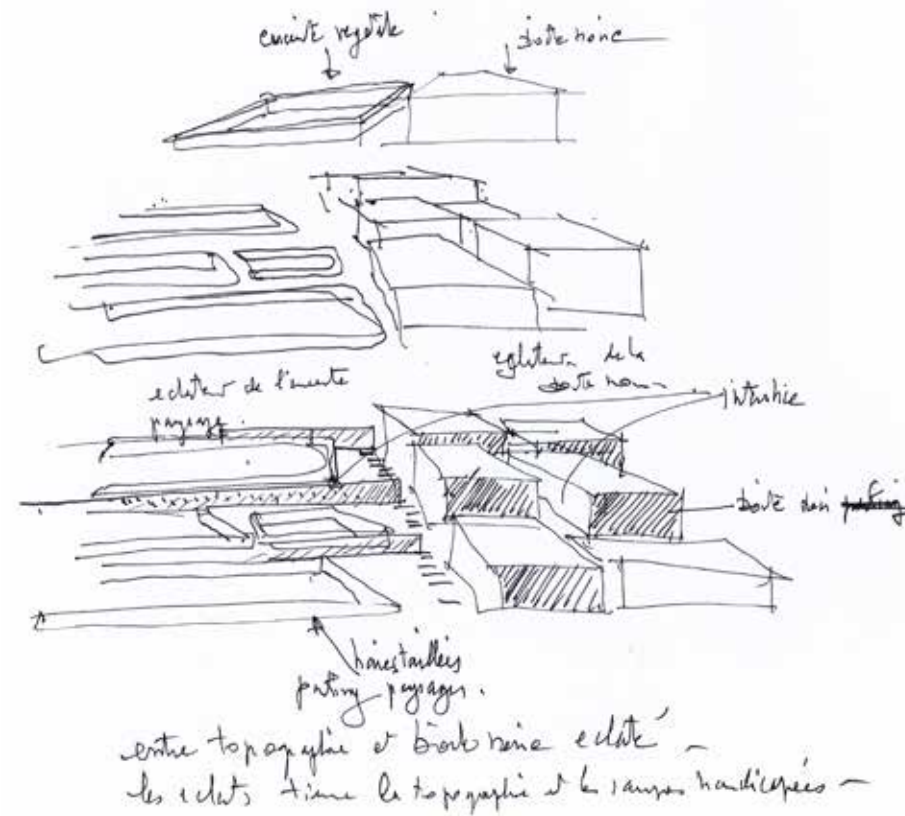
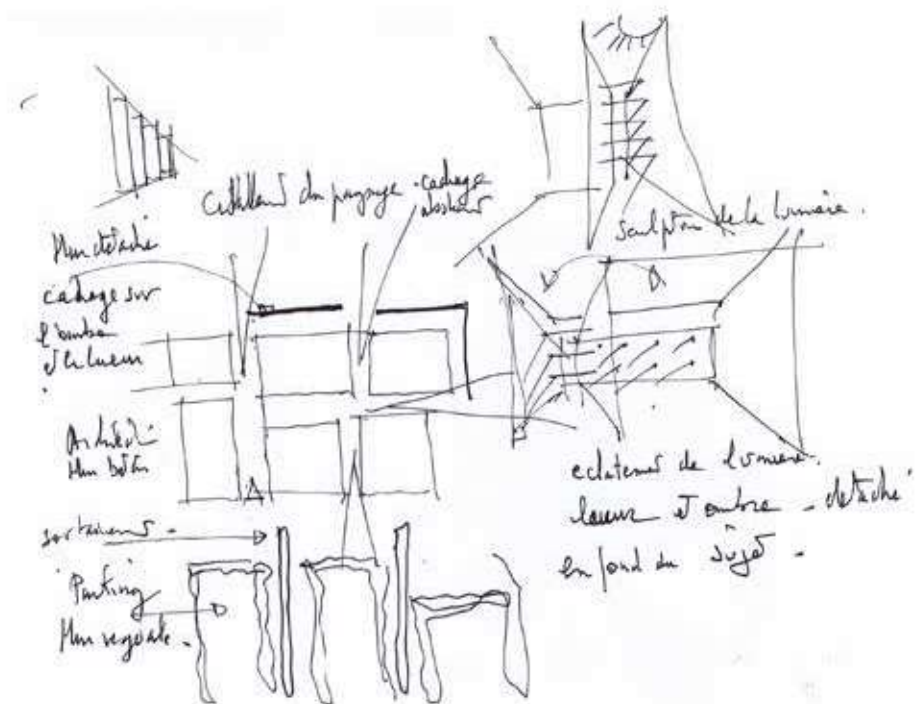
101  
Longitudinal section © Pierre  
Louis Faloci.



102  
The architect's sketches  
© Pierre Louis Faloci.



103 104  
Visual relationships between  
exterior and interior spaces  
© Pierre Louis Faloci,  
ph. Daniel Osso.

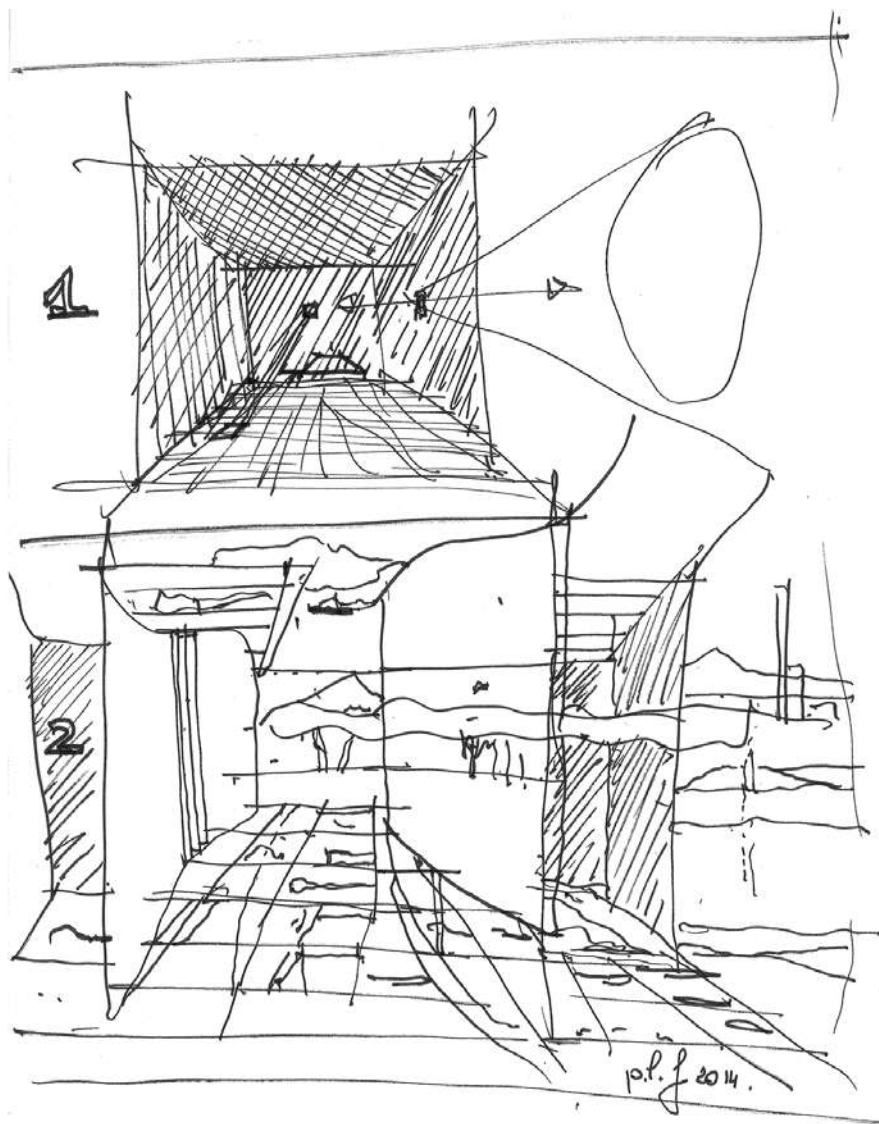


Pierre-Louis Faloci, *Centre d'Histoire du Mémorial '14-18* (Souchez, France 2013-15).

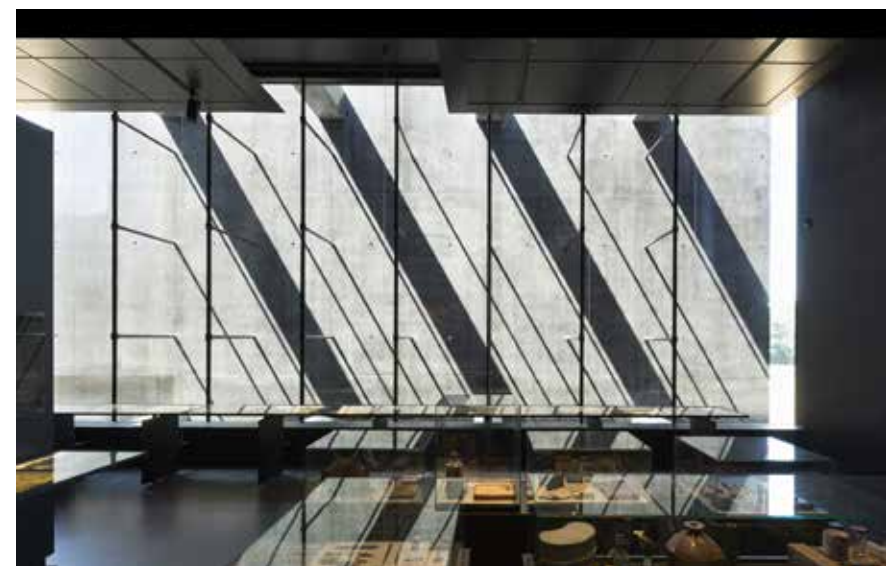


**106 107**  
The interpretation center  
© Pierre Louis Faloci,  
ph. Daniel Osso.





**108**  
The architect's sketch  
© Pierre Louis Faloci.



**109 | 110**  
Interior spaces © Pierre Louis  
Faloci, ph. Daniel Osso.

# Philippe Prost. «L'Espace du Vivant» Between Memory and Innovation

Elisa Boeri

«Linking the design to the place, the architecture to the site, the site to the space of living»<sup>1</sup>: these are the words of André Chastel who inspired Philippe Prost, founder of the *Agence d'Architecture Philippe Prost* in Paris, to find his way of understanding the relationship between architecture and space.

Prost's definition of a personal architectural process began with his studies on Vauban's military architecture<sup>2</sup> and the related redesign project, started in the early 1990s, of the citadel of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, the Breton island outpost of the French Atlantic defense against England.

The *citadel-Vauban*, is the final result of three project campaigns, implemented in 1683, 1685 and 1689.

Here, Vouban's plans for the rationalization of the military square and the reuse of the preexistences — i.e. the stylistic code of the French engineer — are combined with a series of architectural additions promoted between the Middle Ages and the 17th century.

In addition to the ramparts, the project by Philippe Prost includes several individual buildings (or groups of buildings) restored with design choices, materials and construction techniques that already reveal the main character of his method. We are talking about the use of a carefully historical analysis, all along with the study of sources and a well developed sensitivity towards the memory of the spaces and historical places.

This is the same sensitivity and design coherence that Prost adopts in one of its best known projects, the so-called «Ring of Memory» or *Mémorial international Notre-Dame-de-Lorette*, in Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, in the north of France<sup>3</sup>. Winner of a competition held by the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region with the French Ministry of Defense, it was inaugurated in 2014 and awarded with the famous French prize *Équerre d'argent* for the 32nd edition of the *Prix d'architecture du Group Le Moniteur*. Prost's memorial project has definitely established the deep connection between *Atelier Prost* and the historical memory of the places in which he works.

The *Mémorial* is a cultural symbol of unity in a territory where the main landmarks are patches of war cemeteries and the *terrils*, the black artificial hills formed by the slag from mining activities. We are in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais French department, which today tries to

respond to the decay of the mining district by launching a series of operations to encourage tourism through art and history, and now affected by a large landscape redefinition project. The *Nécropole of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette*, located a few kilometers from Arras, is the largest French military cemetery; with about 40.000 graves, its field occupies a site that had a strategic role during the Great War, which involved the Deutsches armies against the French, English and allies of the Commonwealth countries. Inside it stands a neo-Romanesque Basilica and the 50 meters high *Lanterne*, built from 1921 to 1927 by Louis-Marie Cordonnier (1854-1940). All around, along the departmental road that reaches the place straight from Arras, there are many national military cemeteries.

At the exit of the *Nécropole*, the memorial project by Philippe Prost starts with a ramp that slowly descends into the ground between walls of hammered concrete, designing the enclosure of the new *Mémorial*.

Inside, the project is developed in a horizontal elliptical ring, about 4 meters high, with a perimeter to walk along of about 300 meters. Partially placed on the slope covered with a grassy surface, the ring is gently suspended in the void at the opposite side, looking towards the countryside. On the inner wall of the ring, arranged in a triangle, there are 500 gilded metal panels with imprinted the names — in alphabetical order, without distinctions in terms of rank or origin — of about 600.000 soldiers of all nationalities who died during the battle of Artois. The selected type of font, measured and elegant, was specially designed by the graphic designer Pierre di Sciullo.

The golden colour of the inside of the ring is counterbalanced by the roughness of its exterior. Outside, the structure looks like a smooth concrete surface, forming a horizontal line beyond which we can see the profiles of the Basilica of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette.

Hence this piece of Europe — a place of pilgrimage, which silently continues to watch over war monuments and cemeteries, thanks to the work of Philippe Prost and other architects (e.g. SANAA and Pierre-Louis Faloci<sup>4</sup>) — is becoming a great «museum of Memory» in the open air.

Furthermore, less than 30 kilometers away, in the small village of Bruay-la-Buissière, it is possible to visit another project by Philippe Prost dedicated to the memory of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region.

*La Cité des électriciens* (The city of electricians) — initially known as *Cité n. 2* because of its proximity to the mine shaft or «pits n. 2» — was built by the *Compagnie des mines de Bruay* between 1856 and 1861, in an area which became one of the most important scenarios of French industrial development during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The small village was built to host the families of miners working inside the mining basin in the area between Béthune and Bruay-la-Buissière; in 2012 it was registered among the top five pilot sites registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list. The *Cité* was included under the title of *Paysage culturel évolutif vivant* for its archetypal function as a mining town of the 19th century.

Philippe Prost's project redevelopment affected the whole urban area; it includes seven residential buildings organized on two levels — the so called *barreaux*, containing small mono-oriented apartments — as well as two museum spaces dedicated to the *Center for the interpretation of the habitat and the mining landscape*<sup>5</sup>. The new center is divided between the architectural restoration of the *barreau central* and a new building, designed by Prost on the historical site of one of the two large sheds built in 1910 to house the Great War refugees' families, then demolished in the second half of the 20th century.

The residential blocks, five of which are parallel to the main axis and two perpendicular to it, are counterpointed to the *carins*, small land plots intended for each family, cultivated as gardens or containing small annexes masonry such as chicken coops, rabbit hutches, laundries or latrines. Today the *carins* are entirely renewed with new receptive functions.

It is exactly in-between the new construction and the historical memory of the place that the work of Philippe Prost fits: a cultured and measured project where every detail is the result of a process of study and research on site. The traces found on the exposed brickwork of the houses were therefore used to establish the colour scale of the *Cité*, guiding also the choice for the color palette of the new museum pavilion.

Furthermore, a fine work of registration and analysis was carried out starting from the original colours of the floors, fireplaces and wall-papers that covered the interiors of the houses, now transformed into residences for artists and small cottages. Alongside this new function,



established to meet the needs of a region preparing itself to embrace its tourist vocation, the client wanted to maintain (at least in part) the original function of the *barreaux*, using three of them as contemporary social residences.

During the transformation from dwellings for workers to residences for artists, Philippe Prost wanted to preserve as much as possible the shape and the structure of the original buildings. Firstly, he avoided insertions while he preferred invisible grafts, acting on the energy qualities of the new construction materials.

Thus, in order to allow light and air to enter along the north-facing walls, the masonry is dematerialized through brick slits, finely worked to resume the original texture used in the rural architecture of the region. Finally, the internal comfort of the houses is ensured by the *Métisse*, a new insulating panel produced from recycled jeans.

In addition, the collaboration between *Atelier d'Architecture Philippe Prost* and *Agence FORR* — i. e. the landscape architecture firm that dealt with the greenery of the project — has produced an impressive result. The outdoor areas of the houses, used as vegetable or cultivated gardens, have been reconstituted thanks to the results of the analyses carried out on the biological traces founded on the ground.

Including about 1.000 square meters of freely accessible space, the ordinary architecture of the *Cité* dialogues with the new insertion designed by Philippe Prost. History and memory merge in the two buildings used as a museum space, one restored — the volume at the centre of the plan — and one newly built.

Like a long timeline, the new museum narrates the historical and urban changes of the mining landscape between the 19th and 20th centuries. The building is slightly distanced from the dwelling areas and serves as a welcoming place for the visitor.

The museum has two different points of view: on the one hand, the *terrils* that border the area of the coal mines and, on the other, the *Cité* and the places of community life — reproducing the measures of the traditional *barreaux* in plan and elevation. The classic double-pitched shape roof of the living quarters is here reinterpreted in a contemporary key. In fact, it is transformed into a monolith covered with a hard skin, almost a carapace of handmade tiles painted in iridescent red, wrapping the building on each side.

The dividing walls of the old houses are then vertically cut to become large ground-to-sky incisions that rhythm the interior of the museum, letting in natural light along the main façade and through the underlying structure in wood and metal.

Finally, the proportions of the materials used in the new construction are almost exactly reversed: if the historical buildings consist of approximately 77% terracotta bricks and only 10% wood, as it was reserved for roofing and secondary works, the new Interpretation Centre consists of 70% wooden structure, while the glazed terracotta cladding provides less than 10% of the total volume.

Combining restoration and new materials, the *Atelier d'Architecture Philippe Prost* opens up a coherent way of approaching the renovation design project — patient research work that claims the importance of the analysis of traditional construction techniques and historical research, an essential starting point for the rehabilitation of the existing architectural heritage.

This design method thus becomes the *fil rouge* that binds the projects of the studio, acting not only on urban regeneration in extensive areas and landscape, but also within the urbanized grid of the historical city — as for example in the case of the project Prost developed in the Île de France region, and more specifically in the heart of the city of Paris.

Here, in 2009, a competition assigned the architect the task of restoring and reorganizing the *Hôtel des Monnaies*, home of the *Paris Mint* in the central 6th Arrondissement, with the aim of opening it to the public and putting centuries-old craftsmanship skills on display<sup>6</sup>.

Built in 1775 on the banks of the Seine — at the n. 11 of the Quai de Conti, facing the *Musée du Louvre* —, the *Monnaie de Paris* (the Parisian Mint) has hosted in its halls some of the greatest intellectuals of the Age of Enlightenment, including Benjamin Franklin, the first American ambassador in Paris, and it is the oldest institution in France, founded in the 9th century. Prost's intervention in the historic building was focused on the compound of industrial, cultural and commercial ambitions. The peculiarity of the *Monnaie* building, designed by architect Jacques-Denis Antoine (1733-1801) and today recognized as a model of intact neoclassical architecture<sup>7</sup>, lies in its hybrid typology:

a palace occupying a trapezoidal and irregular parcel and a highly specialized manufactory where 150 workers are still employed to process precious metals. In 1793 the *Hôtel des Monnaies* integrated the nearby Jules Hardouin-Mansart's *Petit Hôtel de Conti*, bringing the complex to its current size of over a hectare.

Prost's intervention gives a central role back to the mint's foundry, workshops and studios, which have been located for over two hundred years in this neoclassical building.

The project started with the collaboration of design, archival and historical skills to retrace in detail the architectural history of the place. Prost worked both on what was visible and on what was no longer visible, adjusted over the centuries due to the update of requirements. Perhaps Prost's greatest challenge has been to completely rethink the permeability of the original architecture, initially conceived to be impenetrable. This result was achieved thanks to a complete rethinking of the horizontal and vertical distribution systems, that was able to «break» the insulation of the building in its urban surroundings.

The request of the client was in fact to open up this building to the community, to create a close link between production and cultural spaces, and to add new functions without ever putting a stop to the mint's activity.

The idea of a design narrative comes from an in-depth knowledge of the geography and history of the project site. And it is thus the very knowledge of the place the factor that allowed Prost to redesign flows and routes (aimed at enhancing storage spaces and security) in respect of the historical building.

For those reasons, visitors today enter through a monumental set of access areas consisting of a colonnaded hall and the large semi-circular courtyard.

Apartments and offices were placed behind the main façade on the Seine, while the part at the back, laid out around few courtyards, was dedicated to the mint's workshops.

The ground floor of the building along the Seine houses the studios, located in the median strip and laid out around three large courtyards. This area includes commercial spaces, a permanent exhibition and an area devoted to craftsmanship, while the offices are located in the large zone at the rear.

The main floor of the palace houses temporary exhibitions, hosted in the *Salon Dupré*, overlooking the Seine. Beyond the main staircase, a food and wine restaurant was installed (in the place of the old offices and the director's apartment). Prost was able to maintain the hybrid character of the building: industrial activities are relocated inside the factory, and combined with permanent exhibitions.

The restoration of the *Palais Conti*, completed in 2015, was followed by the opening to the public of an architectural promenade, which leads the visitor throughout the five inner courtyards to the permanent museum of numismatic collections, from which the foundry and large workshops are clearly visible, including a new engraving workplace, laid out on four floors and located along a boundary wall clad in perforated copper panels.

Great importance has been given to the choice of materials, a selection dictated by the site itself — and a leading role was assigned to the allure and fascination of metals. In fact, in the working ateliers, it is possible to observe large perforated metal plates, namely the waste from which the raw coins were made to be sent into production. This image suggested to the architect the possibility to use metal in all its forms along the project: brass, copper, steel and stainless steel. In an engaging spatial and sensory sequence, a glimpse of glittering materials is offered to the visitors in the darkness of the foundry.

The materials (steel, copper and brass) shape the identity of the contemporary project and mediate its role within the narrative of the place, in dialogue with the bare stone of the pre-existing architecture. The stereotomy of the stone façades of the 19th century sets a dialogue with the factory building, and enhances the memory of the productive function of the site.

The main façade of the palace has been restored to its original conformation. In particular, the reinforced concrete elevation of the second half of the 20th century, which weighed down the composition of the building, has been eliminated and replaced by a new zinc roof.

The permanent museum was opened in September 2017, making the precious collections of coins and other items housed in the mint accessible to the public for the first time. Finally, the project was inaugurated in 2019, with the rehabilitation of the *Petit Hôtel* and the creation of a Gallery of Metals, a garden and a concept store.

Through a clever interplay between restoration works and the use of new materials, the interventions developed by *Atelier d'Architecture Philippe Prost* exhibit a coherent way of understanding the renovation project, the basis of which are grounded on the importance of the analysis of traditional construction techniques and historical research.

With the *Paris Mint* and the *Cité de Bruay*, Prost was able to confirm that subtle and very solid sensitivity towards the memory of the places and their inhabitants. The awareness of reading history as a building material is in fact the precious quality of the Parisian architect, as demonstrated by his youthful studies on Vauban and military architecture and the challenging subject of the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette war memorial.

This sensibility is clearly visible also in his latest works, which provide us with a special lesson: historical buildings cannot simply be labeled as «world heritage» and then immediately forgotten. The owner has the responsibility to take care of these places, by endorsing contemporary projects capable of narrating the memories they conserve.

1 «Relier l'oeuvre au lieu, l'architecture au site, le site à l'espace du vivant». The sentence is reported in its original translation in P. Prost, «L'hôtel de la Monnaie», *Monumental. Revue scientifique et technique des monuments historiques*, 2, 2017, p. 31.

2 P. Prost, *Vauban. Le style de l'intelligence. Une oeuvre pour l'architecture contemporaine*, Archibooks, Paris 2017.

3 P. Prost, *Pas de création sans mémoire*, Ed. Cité de l'architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris 2016; P. Prost, *Par art et par nature: architectures de guerre*, Edifiantes éditions, Paris 2019; F. Bucci, «Ci rivediamo lassù: dai cimiteri di guerra a un'architettura per la pace», *Casabella*, 844, December 2014, pp. 5-12.

4 The other projects concerning these areas have been published in *Casabella* and include the following architects: Lacaton & Vassal (*Casabella*, 847, March 2015), SANAA (*Casabella*, 823, March

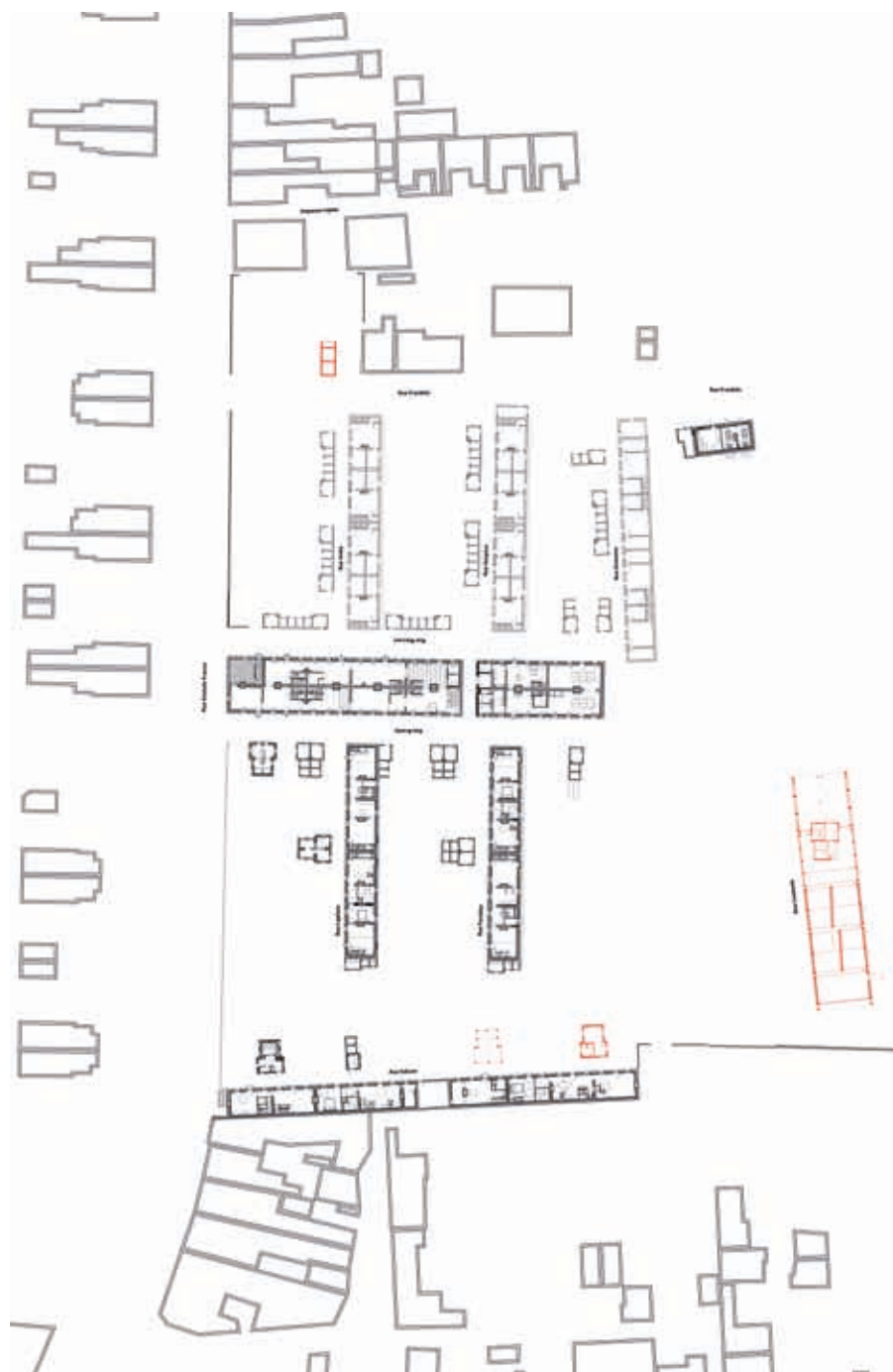
2013), Pierre-Louis Faloci (*Casabella*, 847 and 855, November 2015).

5 I. Priest, «Heaps of history in northern France», *The RIBA Journal*, July 2019; J.-P. Robert, «Cité des électriciens, Bruay-la-Buissière, Pas-de-Calais», *D'Architectures*, 273, July-August, pp. 108-117; E. Boeri, «Un monumento alla memoria del lavoro», *Casabella*, 902, October 2019, pp. 24-35.

6 For an overview of the project, the following articles should be compared: P. Prost, «L'hôtel de la Monnaie», *op. cit.*, pp. 30-35; J.-F. Cabestan, «La Monnaie, de l'hôtel à l'établissement public», *D'Architectures*, 258, November 2017, pp. 83-91; E. Franzoia, «Un trionfo di metalli», *Abitare*, 572, February 2018, pp. 28-37.

7 On Jacques-Denis Antoine's project for the *Monnaie* see: M. Mossier, «L'hôtel des Monnaies de Paris: Œuvre de J. D. Antoine», *L'information d'histoire de l'art*, 6, 1971, pp. 94-99.





Agence d'architecture Philippe Prost, *La Cité des électriciens* (Bruay-la-Buissière, France 2012)

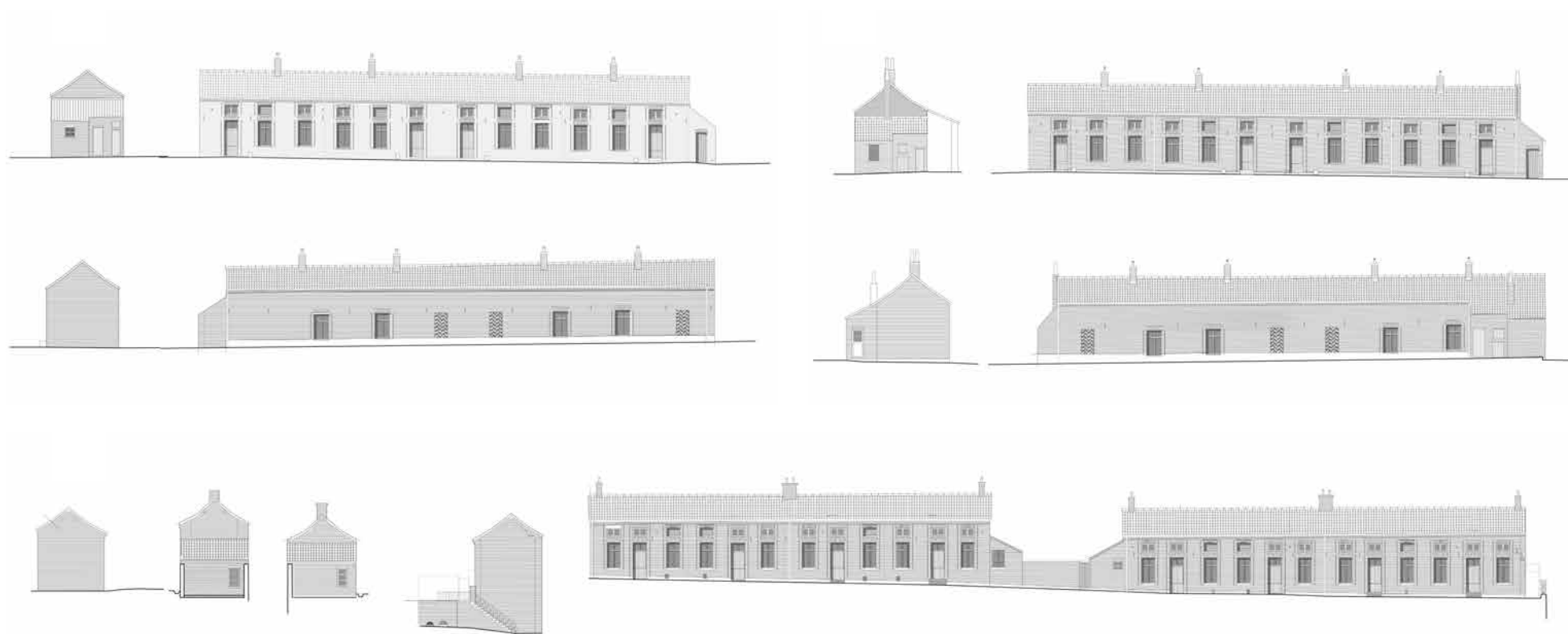
**111** Overall plan of the ground floor of the Cité © AAPP/adagp.



**112** The mining landscape of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region © AAPP/adagp, ph. Philippe Frutier/Caisse des Dépôts.

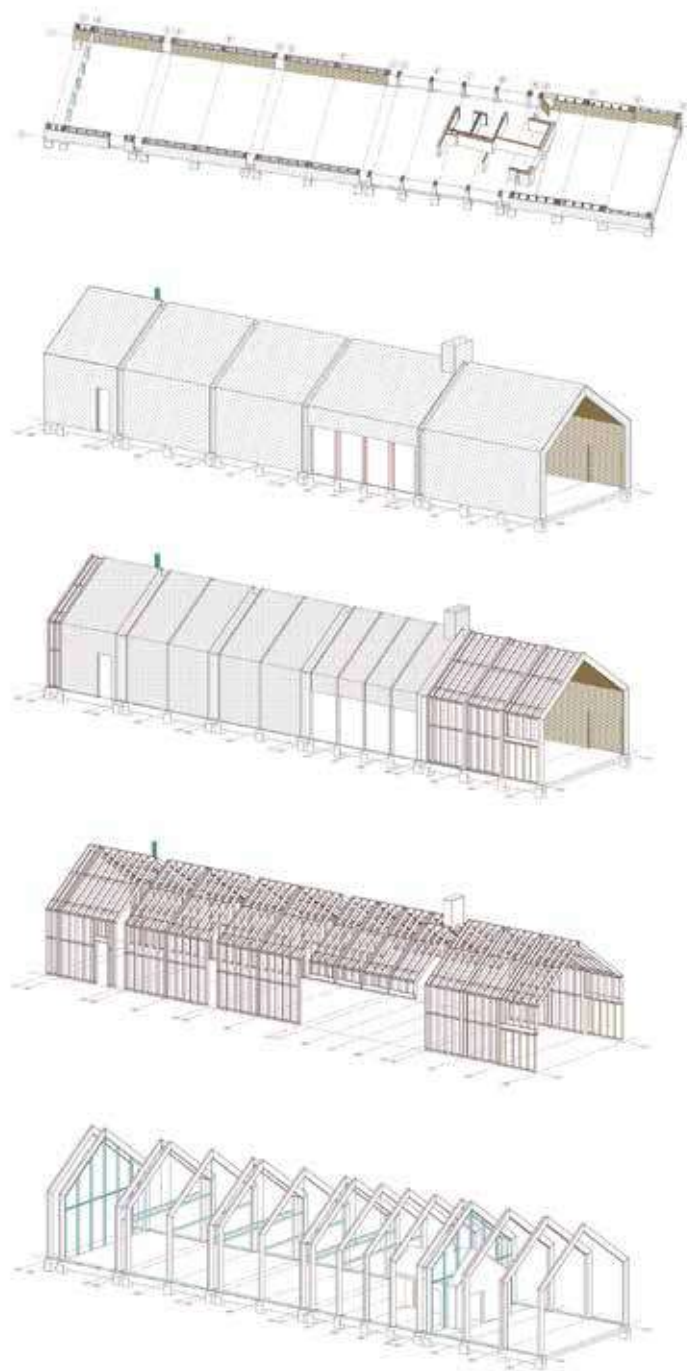


**107** The settlement © AAPP/adagp, ph. Julien Lanoo.



113  
Survey of the elevations of the  
existing buildings © AAPP/  
adagp.





**114**  
Plan and axonometric views  
of the wooden structure of the  
*Center of interpretation of the  
habitat and the mining landscape*  
© AAPP/adagp.



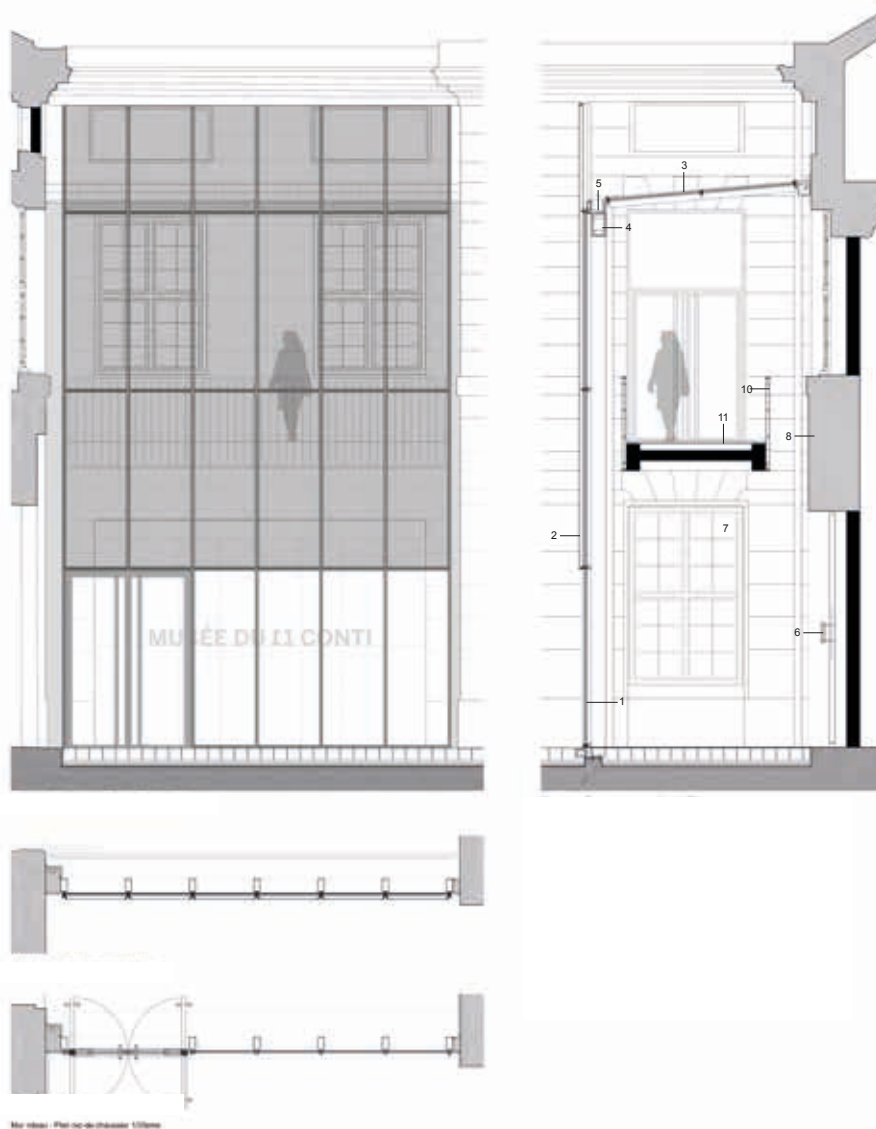
**115**  
The relationship between the  
new museum and the existing  
buildings © AAPP/adagp,  
ph. Julien Lanoo.

**116**  
Interior view of the new museum  
© AAPP/adagp, ph. Aitor Ortiz.









- 1 Mur rideau en acier sablé thermolaqué, vitrage feuilleté
- 2 Toile métallique tendue sur cadre acier
- 3 Verrière acier thermolaqué
- 4 Poutre acier
- 5 Chéneau zinc
- 6 Panneau signalétique d'entrée du musée 11 Conti en cuivre
- 7 Menuiserie bois à l'identique sur atelier
- 8 Façade pierre restaurée
- 9 Passerelle béton
- 10 Garde-corps en acier termolaqué à barreaudage vertical
- 11 Faux-plancher stratifié

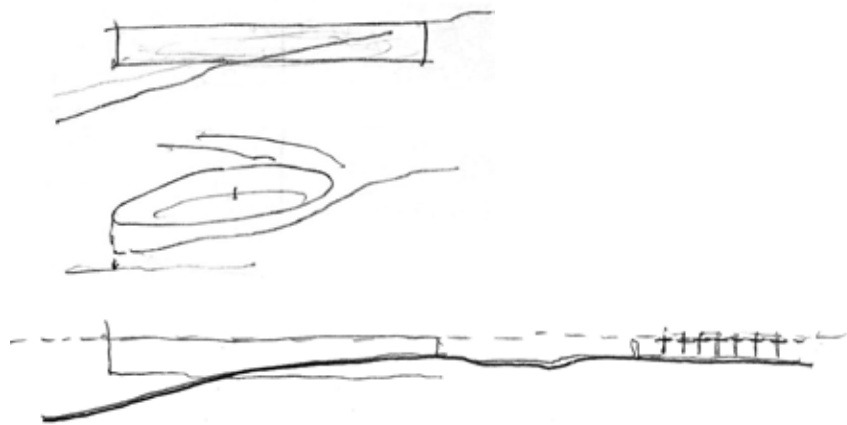
**122**  
Section of the footbridge of the museum and detail of the new curtain wall © AAPP/adagp.



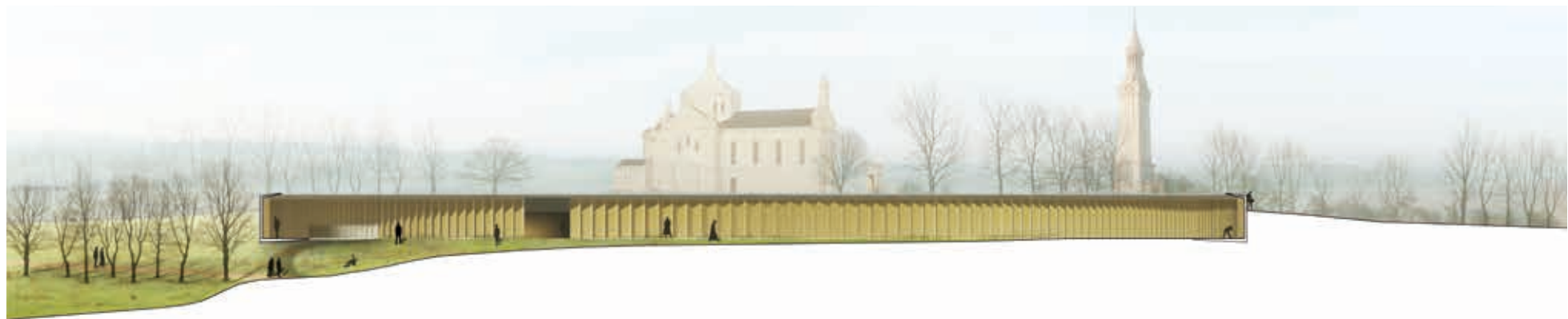
**123**  
The Benjamin Franklin Court  
© AAPP/adagp, ph. Aitor Ortiz.

**124**  
The footbridge and the new metal cladding of the façade  
© AAPP/adagp, ph. Aitor Ortiz.





le monument ne dépassera pas la  
ligne formée par le sommet des croix



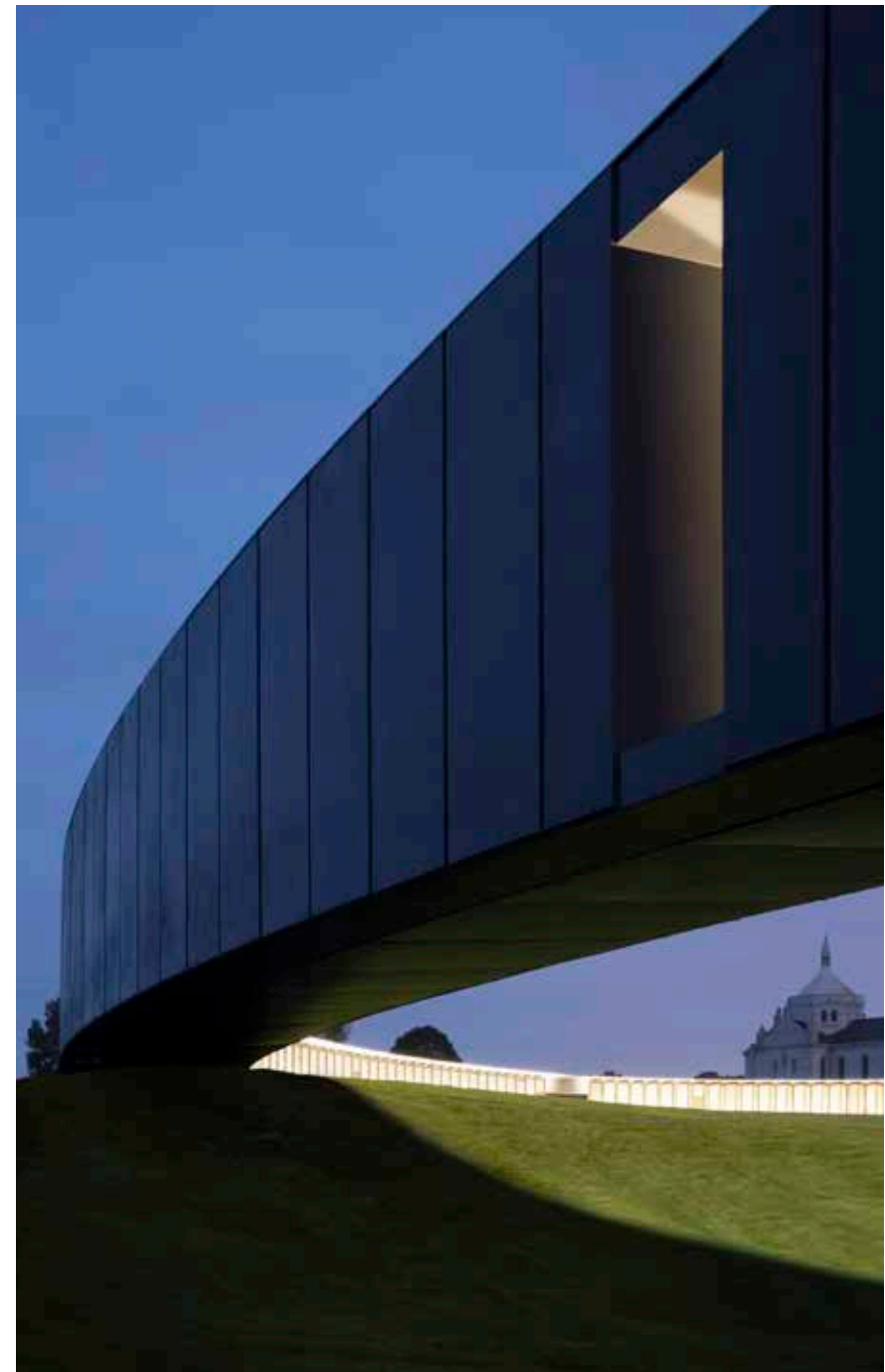
Agence d'architecture Philippe  
Prost, *Mémorial international  
de Notre-Dame-de-Lorette*  
(Souchez, France 2014).

125  
The architect's sketches  
© AAPP/adagp.

126  
General plan, section and East  
elevation © AAPP/adagp.



**127**  
The gilded metal panels  
© AAPP/adagp.



**128**  
The suspended part of the Ring  
© AAPP/adagp.

**III.**

## **Memory and Architecture**



# Elisa Valero Ramos. Two or Three Things I Know About Her Work

Luigi Spinelli

Elisa Valero Ramos' work can be understood through the reading of few fundamental themes, that are visible in her architecture and closely related to each other.

The first one is the ability to redeem the constraints that are always included in the events of the project, through a common approach to different situations, focused on the logical appropriateness of the solutions. Very often conditioned by the economy of means and time, Elisa Valero demonstrates the courage of those who are aware of being able to master the distributive characters of architectural space and to inflect the visual and tactile expression of surfaces and materials, adopting the experimental attitude of those who want to perform a service to the society they belong to through architecture, and those who show in their work a mode of strong affection for the spaces inhabited by the people<sup>1</sup>.

When she established her new studio on *Calle Belén* in Granada in 2009, she bet on the enhancement of the quality of her dwelling and working spaces in a small size — a lot with a front of 10 meters and a depth of only 3.6 meters. Perfectly inserted in the curtain road, the tall and shallow building is organized vertically on five levels; at the ends of the rectangular plan, the vertical distribution and the services absorb the geometric irregularity of the lot and produce a free space in the center. A double height underground level, intended for archives and projection rooms, is illuminated by rectangular skylights cut out on the upper level floor. At the level of the road, a driveway accessible by a large sliding door acts as an entrance. Through a steep staircase that occupies the southern portion of the house depth, it is possible to reach the two intermediate levels, which house study and meeting rooms, illuminated by three row openings. The upper level, characterized by a double-height ceiling, is the architect's private studio, illuminated by a large horizontal window, onto which a small but functional kitchenette topped with a relaxation space<sup>2</sup> is opened. Some years earlier (2000-03) she had worked in similar conditions, when she designed the house of Luis Garzón Isác and Maria José García García in *Calle San Isidro* 54, a six level building surmounted by a terrace overlooking Granada.

As in 2009, Elisa Valero managed to achieve three results with one simple solution, which can be synthesized with the motto «a cros-

sed garden» – which includes the creation of an art gallery, the connection of two buildings, and the saving of a garden. The project in fact shapes a new relationship between two stone architectures immersed in a property in the Sierra Norte country, delimited by a low stone wall and dotted by oaks and corks, through the addition of an underground space, covered by a 25 cm reinforced concrete slab supporting the garden.

This new space is a gallery, housing the art collection of Plácido Arango, a collector from Madrid, and gives him the opportunity to have a continuous relationship with his artworks, day and night, without renouncing to the relationship with light and nature. The underground environment is organized on one level, with clear surfaces and a plan designed to avoid any interference with the roots of the trees. The environment is interrupted by a single longitudinal load-bearing partition, and it is connected to the vertical distribution of the two pre-existing houses (one intersecting a large reception room, the other the sleeping area and the library). A sequence of 45 rectangular skylights, arranged along staggered rows, are composed of two overlapping 8 mm high sheets, with a 2 cm cavity inside; inserted in aluminum boxes about half a meter high, they are placed on the upper edge of the garden 20 cm high turf. Beside complementing the illumination of the gallery during the day, these rectangular openings offer a double image of the sky and the trees above, through the reflection on the external surface and the view from the underground gallery, throughout the roof.

Between 2009 and 2011, Elisa Valero carried out the design of a small kindergarten for 102 children in El Serrallo, north of Granada. Here she arranges the spaces on two levels, following the topography of the site, and orienting and opening them towards the best direction to enhance the contact with nature. The following year she intervened on an ancient primary school managed by the Dominican nuns of *Santa María de Llano*, in Ogíjares, where she had to deal with the restrictions of an extremely low budget. Working as a surgeon on removals and additions to the existing brick structures, she functionally integrates the spaces with small volumes plastered in white by adopting the technique of the fragment. When, in 2013, she was asked to expand a parish school for about 250 students, that had been built fifty years earlier in the popular area of *Cerrillo de Maracena*, «the rules of

the game» were many and different, as Elisa Valero herself uses to say. The construction of a new double-height multifunctional space – with a classroom on the ground floor and a new safety staircase which connected it to the existing building, and remodeled the west image of the school – is conditioned by a limited budget (i.e. 83.000 Euros), as well as by the numerous restrictions provided by regulations, the condition of energy efficiency, and a short amount of time (as the building had to be completed in two months)<sup>3</sup>.

The same experimentation capacity, addressing the residential theme by redeeming the hilly topography and the susceptibility of the city of Granada to earthquakes, can be observed in the construction of eight experimental homes in the *Realejo* district between 2015 and 2016. Eight houses offering different dwelling solutions, tailored for the components of a neighbourhood cooperative, which share an internal garden (at a level lower than the street).

Alongside the residence and the architectures for education, the logical simplicity of Elisa Valero's solutions is also redeemed facing the theme of the sacred building. In Playa Granada of Motril, overlooking the Alborán Sea, the design of the Church of *Nuestra Señora del Carmen* in 2017 is her first commission on this theme, a challenge which allowed her to deal with expressive and symbolic richness, the call to tradition, the needs related to a community meeting, in the framework of the search for «a coherent, silent and strong space». The liturgical hall, characterized by a simple geometry, is accessed from the south through a few steps; on the opposite side, a direct access is provided to the underground crypt. The longitudinal section reveals the architectural composition of the liturgical spaces of the entrance hall and the baptistery, the choir, the presbytery, covered by a single inclined roof that favors the acoustics. The only element emerging from this simple volume, to signal the presence of the church in the surrounding garden, is the thin bell tower. The only concession to the common visual expressiveness of the church are the concrete surfaces. The only decoration is provided by the cuts of the openings distributed with precision and thrift on the tactility of these surfaces. These are the answers to the limitations defined by the orientation dictated by the liturgy, a restricted economic program, an urban regulation that assimilated the church to the surrounding two-storey residences (with

the obligation to contain the height in 8 meters with the exception of the bell tower), and the problems related to salt corrosion and acoustic requirements.

This redemption of the conditions of one's work finds its design resource in natural light, which continuously changes without renouncing to be itself.

«Architecture through the ages can be summed up in two apparently simple actions: taking away light, and adding light. How these two deceptively simple actions are carried out determines the nature of the architecture»<sup>4</sup>. In her book, *Light in Architecture. The Intangible Material*, Elisa Valero explains how the equation for calculating the contribution of light necessary to the architectural project can constitute the election material on which the quality of space is played, knowing how to conduct the lights and shadow game in the design process. And she demonstrates her refined knowledge of interesting pages dedicated to the Roman chapels of Gian Lorenzo Bernini and to the churches of Francesco Borromini<sup>5</sup>.

Hence the second aspect of her architecture that needs to be underlined refers to her sharp understanding of the value of natural light as a material of the project, and her ability to technically use it through creative control devices. Shape, size, position, exposure of the openings, the different functions performed by a window (allowing for the entrance of light, ventilation, orientation of view outside, which Le Corbusier was able to independently decompose or combine): all these aspects contribute to the design of the quality of the space, as outstandingly demonstrated in the design of the experimental residences at the *Realejo*.

In the two architectures inserted along the narrow streets of Granada, the façades receive the warm light of the east through special devices that take on the role of architectural detail and eventually also characterize the quality of the interior spaces. In the San Isidro house, the façade devices include the formal redesign of the traditional element of the closed balcony; the internal patio becomes a reservoir for the accumulation of natural light, released in a controlled way up to the innermost rooms of the house, also through the steps of the staircase; the sides of a tank, closed inwards at the top, help to reflect

the light downwards<sup>6</sup>. In the vertical studio of *Calle Belén*, the white screen façade is perforated from seven orders of thin vertical openings, in addition to the large sliding element on the street and the upper big window. At each level, arranged on three orders above the skirting and under the ceiling, these pierce the reduced depth of the working spaces and illuminate the underground room through openings in the floor. Horizontal devices similar to the glass plates arranged neatly on the lawn above the private gallery of the Arango property (laminated safety glass mounted on the upper edge of the steel window frame) are integrated by a removable shielding system with aluminum slits<sup>7</sup>. Also the 5 cm thick colored ceramic grid walls that filter the west fronts of the preschool in El Serrallo are natural light devices. In the large multifunctional classroom of the school in Cerrillo de Maracena, a sequence of vertical openings on three sides of the space allow in the light of the sun and follow its path through the shadows changing at different times of the day; these elements are designed with a series of circular holes obtained with the profiles of the downspouts and placed exactly in the center of the double height dimension.

Finally, in the church of *Playa Granada*, the bare architectural surface finds its ornament in the light. The symbol of the Trinity is obtained through the modulation of three different ways to introduce natural light inside the building: a skylight carved in the variable thickness of the concrete roof slab, at the point of transition between the assembly and the presbytery, which intercepts and deflects the light of the east towards the altar; a series of slits drawn in the wall of the choir to the west, which project the figure of a cross on the apse using the grazing light of the evening; the side wall of the nave hit by full light from the south, filtered by lateral brise-soleil<sup>8</sup>. The suggestion comes from the variations of light inside the chapel of the *Monasterio Benedictino de la Santísima Trinidad de Las Condes* in Santiago de Chile (1960-65), realized by the young monks Martin Correa and Gabriel Guarda, documented by a sequence of twelve shots at hourly intervals, from 7 am to 8 pm, facing the apse consisting of the intersection of two cubes on their diagonal axis<sup>9</sup>.

A third aspect of her work is related to precision. In a theoretical text by Alberto Campo Baeza — whose work seem to share many com-



mon themes to that of Elisa Valero — dedicates a chapter to precision, comparing architecture with poetry. «I want to propose an essential architecture, built only with the indispensable number of elements. A precise and exact architecture. A logical and simple architecture. And since I want to emphasize the importance of precision in Architecture, I dare to compare it with Poetry. [...] Poetry requires, in addition to a generating idea, concrete, precise words, placed in such a way that not only translate that idea well but are also capable of generating Beauty. For Architecture it is the same»<sup>10</sup>.

In the architectures of Elisa Valero the sign is so essential and precise as to become definitive, and it is such as to assume an ethical value. In May 2006, *Casabella* magazine published her essay entitled *In praise of precision*, where she states that «The architect, with the humble attitude of someone who interprets his profession as a service, must become a surgeon to heal or improve the living conditions of the organism that we call city. If you had to choose a single word to define its work, that would be precision. Precision understood in the double meaning that the word has in the Spanish language: as necessity and exactness, setting aside any temptation of free exhibitionism or arbitrariness, to work with the awareness that each intervention is one more tile in the mosaic of a town that must rediscover what it already preserves, and endow it with new potential. What we are asked for is simply the right answer for a place, a time and a problem; mastery can be concealed in the apparent simplicity of the solution»<sup>11</sup>. An ethical testimony that recalls the essay *No son genios lo que necesitamos ahora* by José Antonio Coderch (1961): she shows the same proud character than the Catalan architect, as well as some compositional analogy — for example in the home-studio of the painter Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona (1960-63), which was organized as an architectural device aimed to interact with natural light<sup>12</sup>.

This personal ethic addresses the theme of sustainability and technically entwines it with a building solution that she often uses, patented in 2009 by engineer Manuel Rojas, professor at the University of Granada. The related structural vision refers to the beginning of her professional career, in Mexico, to the restoration of the restaurant *Los Manantiales* built in Xochimilco by Félix Candela between 1957 and 1958. The thin concrete shells, with their harmonious curved

structure, which protect this historical architecture, seem to be the prototype of an innovative structural element called ELESDDPA (*Elemento Estructural de Doble Pared de Hormigón Armado Proyectado*). Its sustainable philosophy aims to obtain a more resistant moment with the minimum use of material, and the maximum exploitation of the mechanical capacity of the materials. This system, which can be used in construction or civil works, is based on walls or floors consisting of a double or multiple wall in reinforced concrete that uses disposable prefabricated internal formworks, already designed with holes for connecting reinforcement, with external concrete finishing on both sides. The result is a hollow structure, inside which the thermal insulation material and systems are housed without interruption, with characteristics of lightness and slenderness, and excellent fire resistance; the saving of material and the ease of installation make this application economic also for construction site times, for elements that are both structure and casing. The qualities of formal flexibility and great rigidity, self-supporting and lightness are suitable in seismic areas, as is the condition of Granada.

Elisa Valero adopts this building solution in the floors and perforated walls of the studio in *Calle Belén*, in the double level of the nursery school in El Serrallo (located in a seismic area), in the volume of the Cerrillo de Maracena school, in its internal and external surfaces in exposed concrete. The eight experimental residences in *Realejo*, whose project included only one pillar, exploit the bioclimatic values of this choice, through the correct orientation, with a zero energy result. The church of *Playa Granada*, realized with 480 Euros per square meter and with minimal maintenance costs, has made the sober aesthetic of exposed concrete a symbolic value.

A further recognizable theme in the work of Elisa Valero Ramos concerns memory — an instrument of her work that is articulated in various expressions and that ensues from different experiences.

We have already mentioned the understanding of the time factor of light and its possible implications in architecture. This is complemented by a pronounced sensitivity to beauty and to the variation of light in colors, a passion that was transmitted to her by her mother, painter Elisa Ramos; and also by the numerous professional assign-

ments focused on the theme of childhood, that is the period in which memory is more precisely fixed on spaces, lights and colors. From this scenario come the re-design of the traditional material of glazed ceramic tiles, such as in *El Serrallo* and *Santa María de Llano*.

Finally, the memory theme can also be found in the knowledge and daily experiences of the historic center of Granada, where she lives and works, and where, after some research and teaching experiences abroad, since 2012 she has held the chair of architectural design at the School of Architecture. This knowledge appears in the initial part of her essay *In praise of precision*: «Granada is a land of dreams, a mix of cultures, a city crowned by the *cármenes* on which the Alhambra stands superb and majestic. City of belvedere, slopes, squares and alleys. City of water stored in cisterns and flowing sound from sources. Granada is the mosaic that shows us the traces of a history that is ours. Traces that overlap, loading with shades the perception of the city as a complex and living organism. In it, the new architecture nestles in the old one, without destroying or canceling it, and is configured by dialoguing with what preceded it. Granada is a living city that, like light, changes without giving up being itself, with a constant dedication to change, which cannot be given for completed, finished, because it responds to the concerns and needs of its inhabitants and adapts to them. It is a city where change is a condition of life, a link with the present and tension towards the future. The pretension to immobilize her would imply its death»<sup>13</sup>.

With this perception, Elisa Valero acts confidently by sewing up the sites of the historic city marked by small gardens and vegetable gardens recalling the Arab tradition, the *cármenes*<sup>14</sup>; she reinterprets the façades of the houses in the historic center inserted in the continuity of the urban texture, facing each other on narrow streets, impenetrable outside but inside open to heaven; she knows the views, from below and foreshortening, as well as another point of observation over the city, from the terraces on the roofs. As a place of election for her work she chose a difficult site behind *Campo del Príncipe*, overlooking the Garden of the Martyrs and the south west slope of the Alhambra, in one of the oldest and most characteristic areas of Granada. She interprets the ground of the ancient walls with a vertical volume in width. Her interventions take place in the Jewish quarter of the city,

the *Realejo*, of which she interprets the way of living, distributed on different levels, which can be up to 15 meters distant in altitude, and are provided with internal shared courtyards, and special views on the historic city towers. Of this context, she knows and respects the rules, although intervening with a contemporary and improving attitude. «In this beginning of millennium, intervening in Granada is not a nostalgic feat, but a rebels feat, willing to face the serious limitations that make the operation of the historic center difficult and to prevent a rich heritage from being transformed into a mere scenography, into a beautiful corpse, embalmed so that it cannot decompose, at the service of traffickers of tourists»<sup>15</sup>.

In a recent lecture she gave in Milan<sup>16</sup>, Elisa Valero defined the architect's office as the diamond factory, where three fundamental actions are taken: «la mirada atenta», that is the analysis of the raw stone to understand its authenticity and value (which in architecture are the place, the reason and time); «la talia precisa», to minimize waste (which in architecture is the theme of sustainability); finally, «un officio arriescado», focused on experimentations, where both teamwork and the freedom of the creative act are important. I think this suggestion fits perfectly what I have tried to tell.

- 1 F. Bucci, «Tre opere di Elisa Valero Ramos a Granada», *Casabella*, 848, April 2015, pp. 42-59.
- 2 F. Dal Co, «Merry-Go-Round/ Contemporaneità dell'inattuale», *Casabella*, 809, January 2012, pp. 38-39.
- 3 F. Bucci, *op. cit.*
- 4 E. Valero Ramos, *La Materia intangible: reflexiones sobre la luz en el proyecto de arquitectura*, Ediciones Generales de la Construcción, Valencia 2004, trans. *Light in Architecture. The Intangible Material*, RIBA Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015, p. 187.
- 5 Ivi, pp. 111-125.
- 6 M. Daguerre, «Dirigere, filtrare e dominare il sole», *Casabella*, 744, May 2006, pp. 30-35.
- 7 S.a., «Galerie in La Pizarrera», *Detail*, 7/8, München 2009, pp. 730-733; s.a., «Elisa Valero Ramos. Espacio para el arte en la sierra, Madrid (España)/Art Space in the Mountains, Madrid (Spain)», *AV Monografías*, 140, November-December 2009, pp. 50-51.
- 8 G. Crespi, «Verso l'essenziale», *Casabella*, 870, February 2017, pp. 14-23.
- 9 E. Valero Ramos, *La Materia intangible, op. cit.*, pp. 131-133.
- 10 A. Campo Baeza, *Principia architectonica*, Christian Marinotti Edizioni, Milan 2018, pp. 17-18.
- 11 E. Valero Ramos, «Elogio della precisione», *Casabella*, 744, May 2006, p. 34.
- 12 L. Spinelli, *José Antonio Coderch. La cellula e la luce*, Universale di architettura, Testo & Immagine, Turin 2003, p. 60.
- 13 E. Valero Ramos, «Elogio della precisione», *op. cit.*
- 14 M. Daguerre, «Dirigere, filtrare e dominare il sole», *op. cit.*
- 15 E. Valero Ramos, «Elogio della precisione», *op. cit.*
- 16 From the lectures Elisa Valero Ramos gave within the conference series entitled *Experiences of contemporary architecture*, organized by *Casabella Laboratorio* in Milan (November 18, 2019).



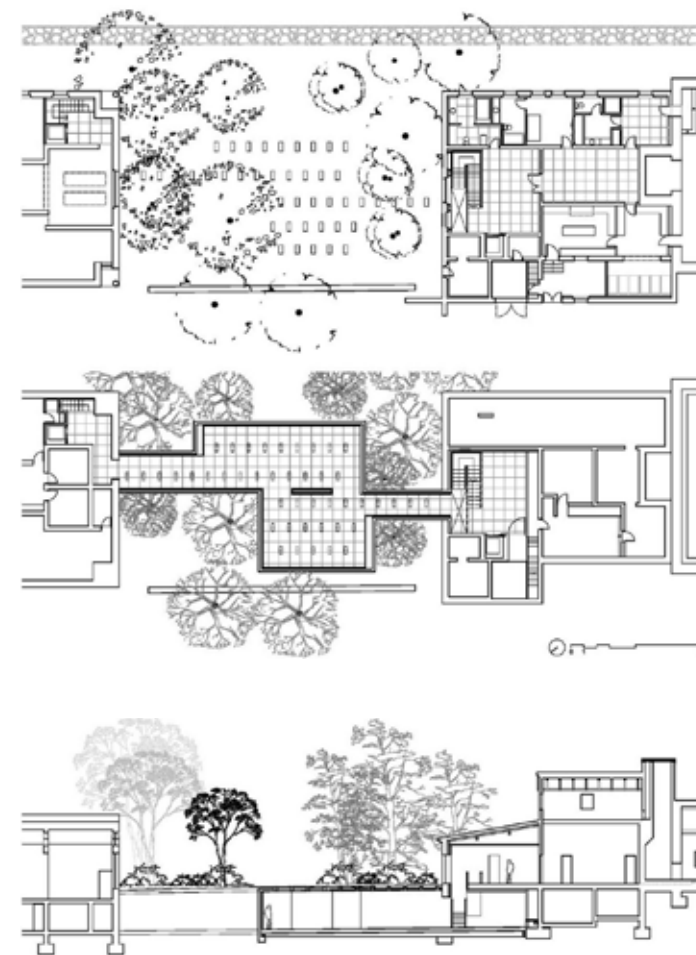
Elisa Valero Ramos, Art gallery in the *Casa Plácido Arango* (Madrid, Spain 2009).

129  
View of the garden from the underground gallery  
© Elisa Valero Ramos.





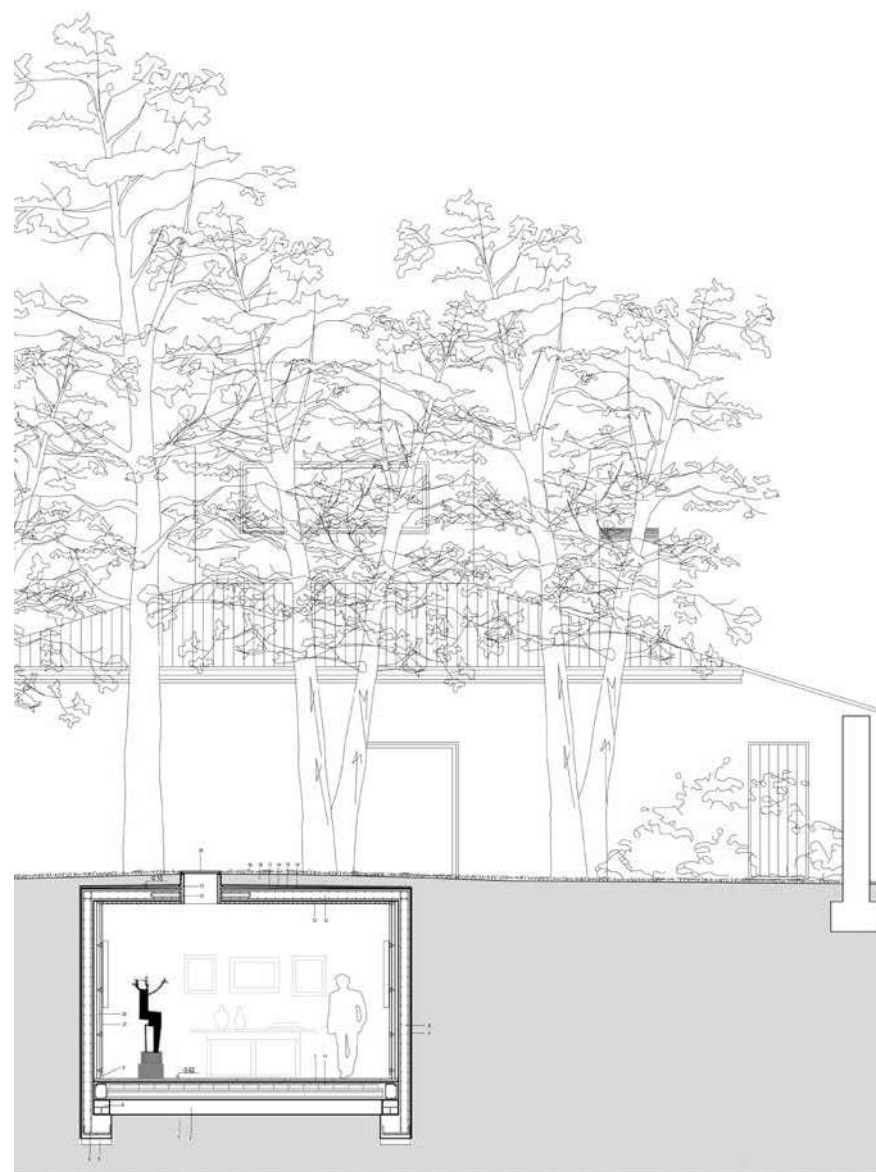
**130**  
The garden © Elisa Valero  
Ramos.



**131**  
Plans of the ground floor and  
underground floor (gallery) and  
section © Elisa Valero Ramos.



132 133 134  
The art gallery © Elisa Valero  
Ramos.



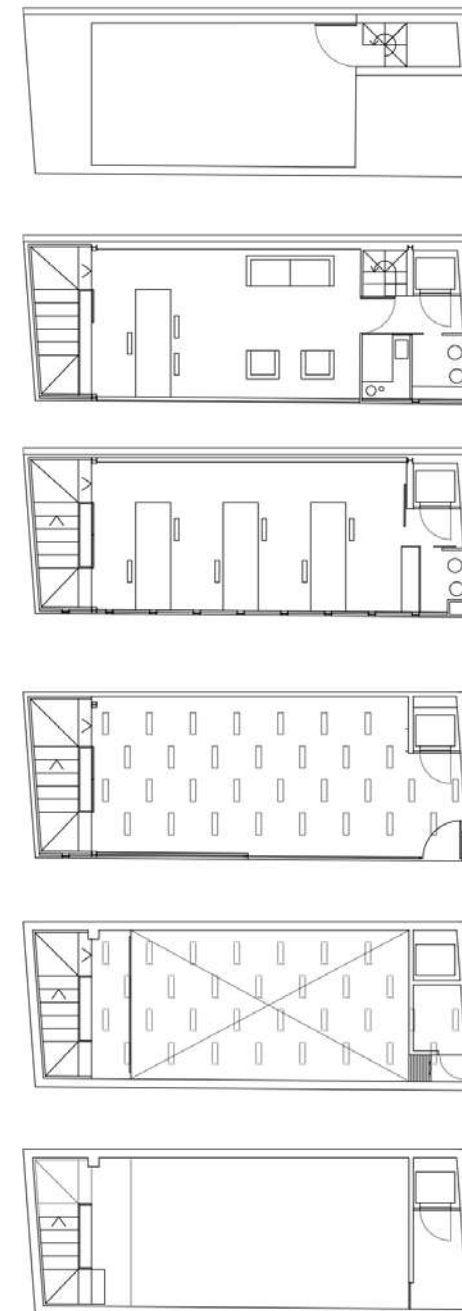
135  
Section of the art gallery  
© Elisa Valero Ramos.





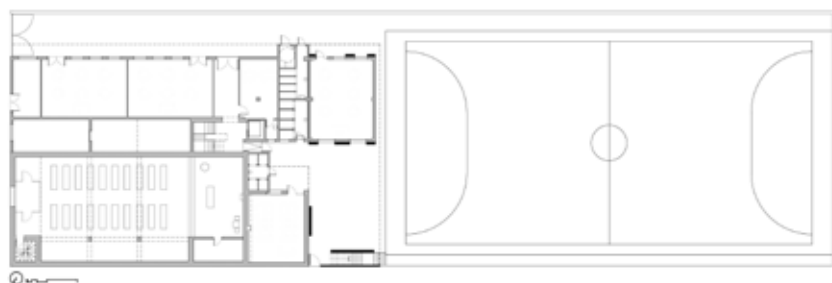
Elisa Valero Ramos, Studio Valero Ramos in *Calle Belén* (Granada, Spain 2009).

**136**  
*Calle Belén*, Granada  
© Elisa Valero Ramos.



**137**  
Plans © Elisa Valero Ramos.



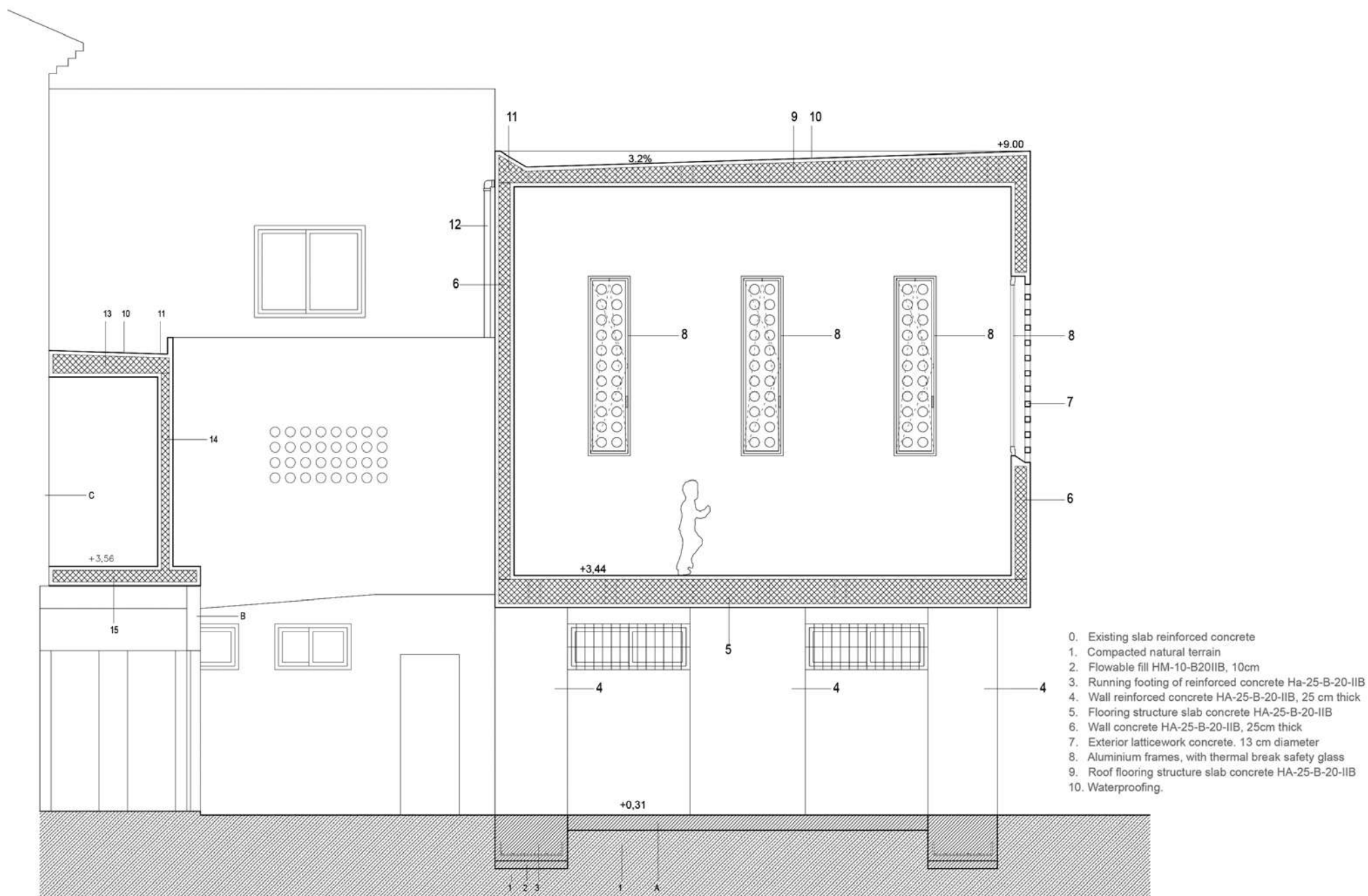


Elisa Valero Ramos,  
Multipurpose Space in the  
*Escuela Cerrillo de Maracena*  
(Granada, Spain 2013-14).

138 139  
Section, first floor and ground  
floor plans © Elisa Valero  
Ramos.



140 141  
The play of light in the interior  
space © Elisa Valero Ramos.



142  
Detail of the cross section  
© Elisa Valero Ramos.

# João Luís Carrilho da Graça. Experimenting with Permanence and Transformation

Barbara Bogoni

Carrilho is indisputably a contemporary architect. His mindset, language and program are unequivocally rooted in the contemporary world. His architectures house the contemporary man, his needs and his complexity. Nevertheless, the contemporary substance, body and material of the new elements he apposes to the ancient ones are intimately classical, and recount his peculiar approach to historical and archaeological pre-existences, based on the patient interpretation of the traces of the past and focused on the reconstruction of their form and meaning.

The investigation of his interventions on stratified contexts — such as important archaeological areas, or old monumental buildings (and especially convents) — highlights the development of a specific design process, which always starts from an historical-critical analysis, that is meant to guarantee the accuracy of the interpretation but also to validate each transformative choice, which become necessary and binding.

This investigative strategy is intertwined with the architect's interest in introverted spaces, in the relationships with light, air and the sky, and in circular dynamics that generate a rigorous typological principle. This principle, which exists *a priori*, organizes an architectural scape that can be acknowledged and recognized as one of the specific features of João Luís Carrilho da Graça's work.

The essay will analyse some of the interventions realized in the period between 1990 and 2010, which particularly witness the special approach the architect adopts when intervening in historical contexts. Although each time it produces different outcomes, this process is developed through the same method — i.e. through a scientific investigation, a sharp interpretation, and a transformation focused on the valorization of the architectural elements that root the building to the land and to its history, as well as on the realization of a contemporary place, where the design of new signs are capable of reinterpreting the ancient spatialities.

To support the reading of the innovative character of this process, the text is complemented by a set of keywords aimed at highlighting the objectives, the strategies and the outcomes that connote Carrilho's design approach.



### *Reenactment Exhibition Commemoration*

An early and yet important milestone in the development of Carrilho's peculiar approach to the transformation of historical and archaeological contexts is the recovery of the ruins of the *Antiga Catedral de São Paulo* in Macau (which are now included in the UNESCO World Heritage List) and their conversion into a museum (1990-93). The few elements that survived the fire which destroyed most of the site in 1835 — a stairway and an imposing Baroque façade — are interpreted as an «archaeological quotation» with an outstanding symbolic value and urban role. Following the excavation works carried out on the anterior side of the oriental front to verify the conditions of the foundations, Carrilho — together with an interdisciplinary team of researchers, designers and technicians — decided to make the traces of ancient structure emerge, to make them readable.

As the investigations confirmed the pre-existence of a Latin cross plan, characterized by three naves, the museumization led to the demolition of the concrete walls surrounding the site and the tower, the elimination of the brick veneer around the windows, and the consolidation of the foundations. Subsequently, the intervention focused on the definition of an adequate layout, that could house the new exhibitive function without altering the original features of the site, and rather allowing for the reading of its historical identity. The ascensional scenography of the new building, spanning from the stairway to the monumental façade, is complemented by a set of different spaces organized on different levels. From the front, on a partially underground floor, visitors move to a higher level walking along an overpass situated on the back of the original façade, where the ancient choir used to be, and from where it is possible to have an overall view of the new intervention and to understand its relationships with the city.

The design principle at the basis of the cultural valorization of the site operates on three levels. It applies specific spatial and museographic criteria to organize a complete visit of the area that allows visitors to understand its history, to see its vestiges and to catch the memory of the old building, through the quotation of the elements that disappeared (or that are only partially preserved) and the exhibition

of the ruins that recall the missing parts, which gain an almost sculptural status and thus resignify the front as an autonomous urban presence. It highlights the structuring elements of the religious building by making their relationship with the liturgic practice visible, in order to interpret and to retrace the original spatialities, their dimensions and proportions, and their volumetric and symbolic strength. It restores the complexity of actions, uses and objectives that characterized these spaces, with the aim to reactivate the physical and cultural flows in the archaeological area.

This approach intends to construct a new model for the interaction among the architectural elements, the site and the people who inhabit it, and in a broader sense between architecture and archaeology, by allowing the latter to evolve through the assimilation of new functions and contemporary experiences. Hence each action carried out within the architectural intervention to commemorate — more or less neutrally — the ancient ruins, should be understood also in its intention to highlight the existence of a new architectural work.

### *Juxtaposition Combination Collaboration*

Rather than on an ideal reenactment, Carrilho's intervention in the *Mosteiro de Santa Maria de Flor da Rosa*<sup>1</sup> in Crato (1995) is based on the recovery of a volumetrically recognizable building, which addresses the ordered juxtaposition of history and contemporaneity. In this monastic complex founded in the 12th century by the monks/knights of the *Ordem do Hospital*<sup>2</sup>, the architect combines old and new by involving them both individually and synergistically in carrying out the accommodation function, assigning specific tasks and features to each one. Old and new elements are not unitarily compound, rather they are drawn near, as to they almost touch, although they never merge; in this way they perform a powerful dialogue, which doesn't gather its strength from their direct contact but rather from the attractive force triggered by their contiguity.

The intervention is built on a rigorous analysis and interpretation of the pre-existing structure, which arises as a real enigma, a complex intertwine of religious, civic and military architectures, resulting from the composition of a gothic castle expanded in the 16th

century, a medieval fortress-church, and several conventual service buildings from the Renaissance, including cloisters, galleries, covered passages, ribbed vaults and granite arches. Acknowledging its remarkable artistic value, Carrilho expresses his point of view on the possibility to intervene on such context by choosing to conserve and enhance the distinctive truth of each historical layer, and thus by defining an explicit distance between past and present, which makes their different identities, their dimensional and material features and their interactions clearly readable.

The project evidently aims at staging an aloud contrast, ensuing from the combination between the modern, plastic, thin surfaces of the new horizontal volume, realized in concrete, and the vertical, monumental, lithic presence of the historical building. The juxtaposition between the new and the old structures generates a patio, characterized by the same proportions than the pre-existing volume but a different scale, and assigning to the open space a special narrative task — i.e. tracing the connections among the landscape and architectural elements.

The reception operates as the hinge between old and new presences; this space ensues from the conversion of the original kitchen, where this dialogue become particularly visible, in the compound of colours and thickness of the walls, in the dimension and in the spatial correspondence of the rooms, in the use of building materials and in the articulation of the distributive layout.

The main objectives of the project refers to the possibility to «intensify of the opportunities to visit the pre-existing building, by occupying and privatizing it as little as possible, although opening it to new interpretations»<sup>3</sup>, and to turn it into a museum, a consistent space for contemplation, lying in a central position in the organization of new accommodation function. The most important areas of the updated functional programme are housed in the historical complex, while the «less interesting» facilities are inserted in the new volume. This strategy allowed Carrilho to consistently preserve the older structures and to use only some of the rooms; in particular the church and the cloister were adapted to include a hall, a dining room, a cafeteria and a restaurant, and some conventual cells were transformed into hotel rooms. Other environments were left empty, hence produ-

cing a large intermediate space, which doesn't have a precise function but rather is meant to allow for the movement across the halls, the corridors and the patios to reach the new *Pousada do Crato* and to testimony the ancient uses and gestures that had taken place there.

The interventions in the pre-existing spaces also build on the use of light, which Carrilho implements in various direct and indirect ways to produce intense reflection effects and a dense contemplative atmosphere, despite the markedly «defensive» nature of some medieval parts. Flowing throughout the historic rooms, the users' path thus naturally encounters the old and the new layers and, although their distinctions remain evident, experience them simultaneously.

#### *Graft Imitation Comparison*

The long intervention designed for the *Convento de Jesus* in Setúbal (1998), coalescing restoration, expansion and remodeling practices<sup>4</sup>, represents a further testing ground for the experimentation with the transformation of a monastic building into an art museum. Although the historical building went through a necessary, major renovation process (which included structural consolidation, the addition of technological systems and the integral substitution of the floors and walls coverings), the intervention still allowed for the reading of the most interesting original features related to the conventual architecture — especially in the cloister, that was only partially restored, the «extraordinary Chapter Room» and the «absolutely astonishing Jesus Church», as Carrilho himself likes to define them.

The project operates in particular on two fronts. On the urban level, it carries out the valorization of the ancient monument which is meant to revive the city center; on the architectural level, it manages the challenges included in the dialogue between old and new elements by orienting it towards an approach that avoids competition and promotes complementation; this task is achieved through the combination of the respectful construction of the new volume next to the historical building, and a mindful restoration processed on the latter, cohering the conservation and enhancement of its original forms and its adaptation to house the new functional programme, complying with a rigorous and sensitive attitude towards historical and archaeological

traces. While the renovation of the pre-existing structure is mainly focused on the reconstruction and reactivation of the ancient traces, the new building performs the authentic contemporaneity of Carrilho's work, that derives proportions, alignments, heights and meanings from the past, and applies them in the design of the overtly modern construction, which gains an unsettling, poetic charm, especially concentrated in the grafting points of stone and plaster, the roughness of the yellow limestone (*Vidraço da Arrábida*) altered by time, and the abstract connotation of the smooth white walls.

So as in Crato, also in Setúbal the intervention mirrors, matches and engrafts the form and the proportions of the ancient cloister into the modern patio, which gathers the spaces dedicated to the exhibitive function and shows the opposition between old and new, connoting the latter with a more pronounced, modern, audacious introversion. The museum is distributed among the two buildings; the collections are exhibited in the wings of the convent, while all the services (i.e. administration offices, storehouses, research center, library and auditorium) are located in the buildings articulated around the new courtyard.

The patio is an important, recurrent theme in Carrilho's architecture. Yet this context offers the architect a refined opportunity to further explore it, and the possibility to make a statement about its efficacy: «The most important lesson we can learn from the convent architecture is its autonomy, which revolves around the geometry of its cloister. The installation of a museum implies two types of interventions: the occupation of the pre-existing building and the construction of a new one», both arranged in relation to the same compositive matrix. Here the lesson Carrilho refers to inevitably raises interesting questions about continuity and rupture, to which he responds with two keywords: symmetry and abstraction.

#### *Reconstruction Reinterpretation Stratification*

Another important milestone in the development of Carrilho's approach in reinventing the past by preserving its memory is the museumization of the archaeological site *Praça Nova do Castelo de São Jorge*<sup>5</sup> (2008-10). In this context the achievement of this task starts from the

realization of a large fence made in corten steel, which perimeters the layers of the historical stratification that had sedimented in different epochs — i.e. pre-historic, Fenix, Roman, medieval Arab, up to the traces of a 16th century palace. The site's refined museumization project orients the archaeological knowledge first by reading and ordering the remains, then by reorganizing, recomposing and/or reconstructing the original spaces, finally by building new elements aimed to contain and protect them (i.e. projecting roofs, open and closed volumes, paths and stairs). These design actions address the preservation of the first human settlement in the Lisbon area, and its valorization as a complex archaeological system.

Carrilho systematizes the spatial, geometrical and dimensional features of the different portions of the historical layers, make them understandable and visitable, connects them, and reconstructs some of the ancient spatialities — in particular those pertaining to the Muslim houses dating back to the 11th century, that are reenacted through abstract volumes fluctuating over the relics, where the light enters through a translucent ceiling made in wood and polycarbonate slabs.

The archaeological site exemplifies the method which characterizes Carrilho's approach to the design of contemporary architecture in historical contexts, which consistently addresses the complexity of the multiple stories embedded in the place, in the critical understanding of which present day society seems particularly interested. The architect was asked to manage a multiform archaeological scenography, composed of historical stratifications characterized by a remarkable complexity in their sequence, in their physical arrangement and in their mutual relationships, also considering the total lack of a connective system that could bind together all these elements. Carrilho tackles this museological complexity with the aim to «shed light» and to make each component readable, and achieves this task through a proposal that is as simple as it is refined.

In the archaeological area, the architect organizes a spiral path which obliges visitors to perform a movement that anticipates, introduces, approaches and orders the remains in relation to their reference to a specific epoch, their material connotation and atmosphere. This project is meant to critically reinterpret the existing traces; to highlight the better conserved elements; to display the plots and the de-



coration of floor mosaics of the palace protected by a mobile roofing; to preserve the remains from the prehistoric age inside a compact, introverted, metal casket, crossed by horizontal slots which guide the approaching ritual of the visitors; to reconstruct some of the lost spatialities, thus reenacting the sensorial experience related to their fruition; and eventually to recompose the articulated relationships between men and the life in these places.

The itinerary of the visit unfolds around various «display cases» that in turn exhibit themselves in the form of architectural structures, including volumes aimed to contain or reconstruct, simple roofs dedicated to protection or signalization, vertical membranes intended to separate and point out, connecting or containing floors. Carrilho chooses and distributes different materials, varying in nature, vocation, colour, consistency and durability, employing a contemporarily ancient sensitivity to arrange their juxtaposition where the tension and concentration of their relationships require it: the corten steel — which is used in the realization of some containing volumes and the fence, that is designed to encompass the remains and to plunge the visitors into the fascination of archaeological discovery, by exhibiting the work of time on the matter, in the past as today — sets a dialogue with other more transient materials, such as the evanescent wood and the ephemeral plasterboard, which perform the soft and reverent approach assumed by Carrilho, and manifest an intervention method that grounds on the surprise and the respect for what the architect himself synthetically calls «revelation», referred to the unfolding of history on the places of its evolution, the value and the contemporary life of which he aims to enhance.

Notwithstanding the scientific, controlled and disciplined approach to the interpretation of the traces and landscapes of the past and the spatial regeneration accomplished through abstraction, the intervention also presents a personal, original and authoritative way to manage history and to shape new environments where past and present develop unprecedented relationships. Thereafter the project turns into an occasion to express a cultural position, and to witness the wealth of a design thinking which elevates and synthesizes the sense and the complexity of the intervention in few, intense, measured elements. This position is particularly explicit in the vigorous and

yet delicate contact between the ancient basement of the Arab house and the modern, abstract, floating volume, which is concentrated in six footholds, selected among the less vulnerable and invasive ones, as well as in the fluid design of drops and paths, that suggest a new, seducing way to look at the city and especially to the river Tejo, the luminous and warm image of which must have been appreciated also in ancient times.

In the architecture designed by Carrilho da Graça, the relationship between old and new is managed through a peculiar methodological as syntactic approach, that draws on the claim of a processual nature as a design strategy, in which the intervention on historical, archaeological and architectural pre-existing elements is dealt with as a complex process, starting from the profound analysis and understanding of each sign and proceeding with the selection of the possible interpretations — not of the past, but rather of the relationships with the past that need to be conserved in contemporaneity. In each project, Carrilho adopts an empirical method based on the research of an internal coherence, which is fulfilled each time by obtaining different outcomes, because the matter, the essence and the program vary in each place. This method can be described with one word, *intuition*, which interprets Carrilho's poetic sensitivity and his capability in recognizing, choosing and re-evoking the right signs and meanings, and to sublimate them.

1 A. Alves Costa, «La Pousada de Santa Marinha o el fluir de la Historia», *DPA: Documents de Projectes d'Arquitectura*, 14, December 1998, pp. 46-53; R. Vieira de Almeida, *Pousada de Santa Maria do Bouro. Recuperação e Remodelação do Convento de Santa Maria do Bouro*, in *Portugal Arquitectura do Século XX*, Portugal-Frankfurt 97, Lisbon 1997, p. 306; J. L. Carrilho da Graça, «Trasformazione in pousada del monastero Santa Maria da Flor da Rosa a Crato, Portogallo», *Casabella*, 633, 1966, pp. 18-25.

2 The *Ordem do Hospital* (today know as Order of Malta) was founded in Portugal in the 12th century with the aim to support pilgrims while migrating towards the Holy Land; during 14th century the main headquarters were moved to Crato, where the prior had a church and a castle built,

and thus laying the foundations for the development of the monastery.

3 J. L. Carrilho da Graça, «Pousada Flor da Rosa», *A Arquitectura*, 1995, p. 31.

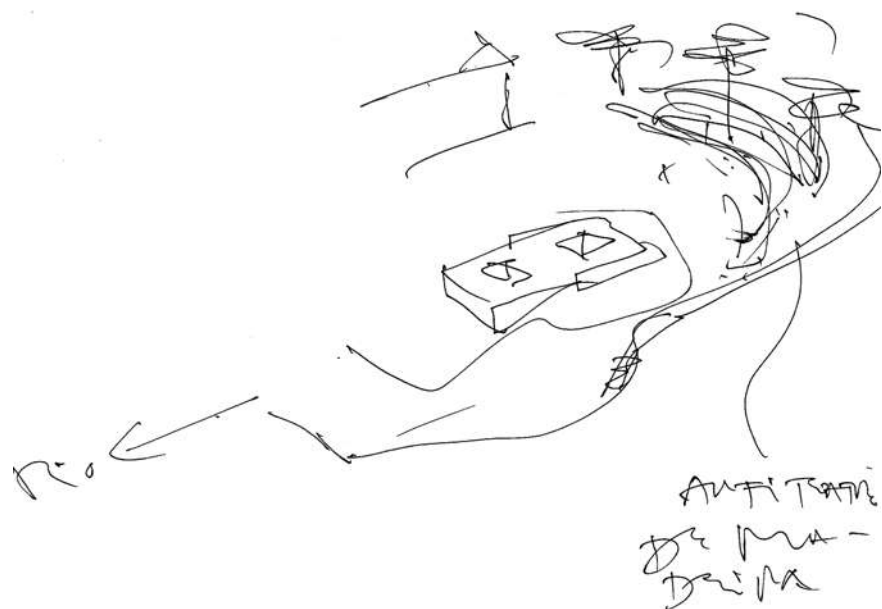
4 M. Graça Dias, «Dos segredos interiores e das obras que duram», *Jornal Gyptec*, 2, May 2, 2016.

5 J. L. Carrilho da Graça, «Musealização da Área Arqueológica da Praça Nova do Castelo de São Jorge, Lisboa», *Arqa. Lisboa: 2010*, 82-83, July-August 2010, pp. 54-61; AA.VV., «João Luís Carrilho da Graça, 2002-2013», *El Croquis*, 170, 2014, pp. 38-250; J. L. Carrilho da Graça, «Musealização da área arqueológica da Praça Nova do Castelo de S. Jorge», *Colecção 1+1 - Carrilho da Graça*, UZINA Books, Lisbon 2010.



João Luís Carrilho da Graça, Museumization of the Archaeological Site of *Praça Nova do Castelo de S. Jorge* (Lisbon, Portugal 2010).

143  
Detail of the Islamic houses area  
© jlbg.

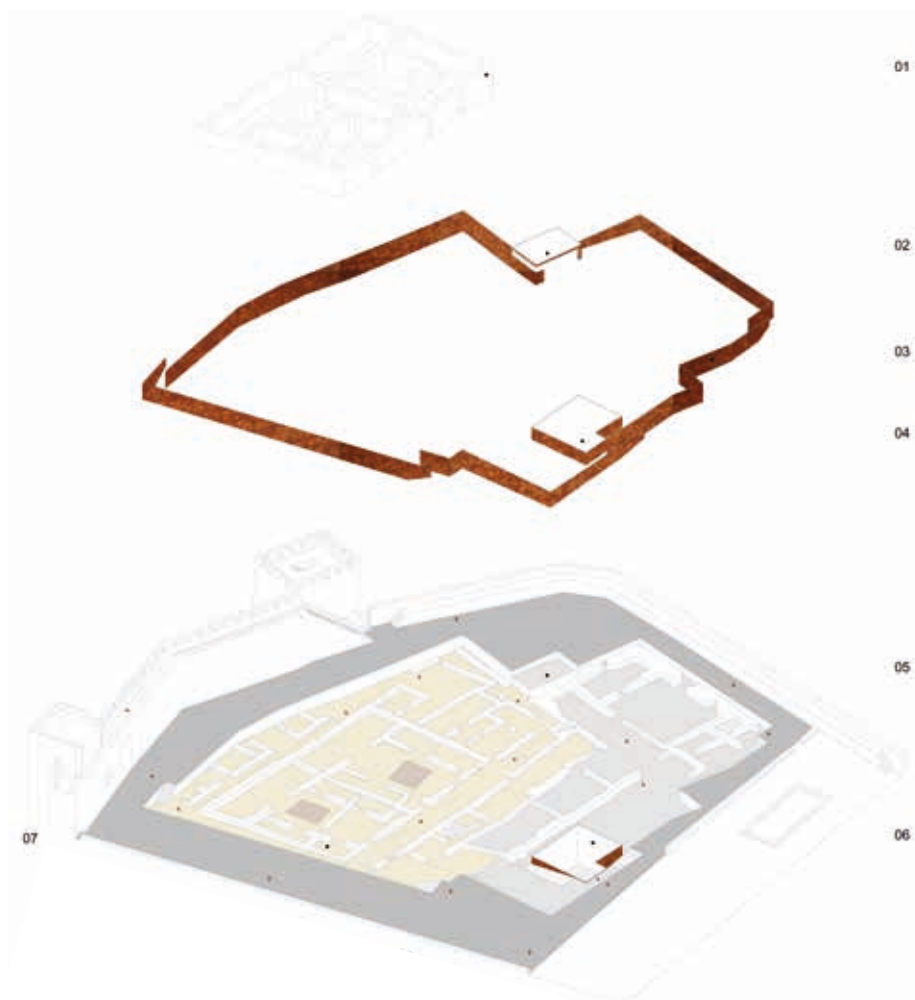


**144**  
The architect's sketch © jlbg.

**145 146**  
Overview of the site, and detail  
of the corten steel fence © jlbg.





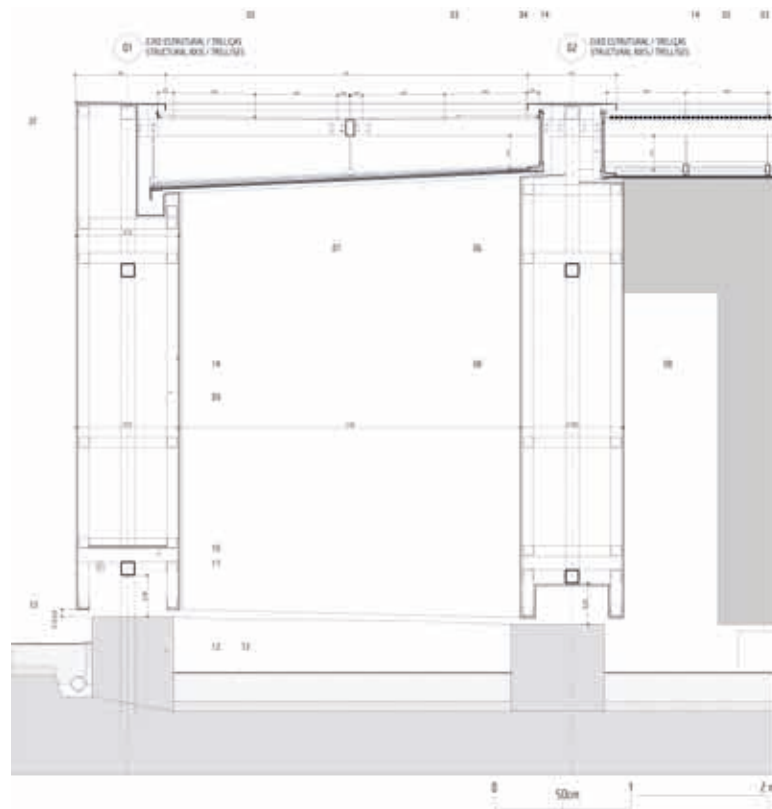


- 01. Protection structure for Islamic houses remains
  - 02. Cover for ancient tiles of the Bishop palace remains
  - 03. Perimeter in corten steel
  - 04. Cover for the Iron Age period remains
  - 05. Platform with ancient tiles of the Bishop palace
  - 06. Iron Age remains
  - 07. Six support points of the protection structure for the Islamic houses
- Islamic period remains
  - Middle Age period remains
  - Basalt stone pavement around the site
  - Corten steel

**147**  
Axonometric layout of the intervention © jlcg.



**148**  
Overview of the site © jlcg.



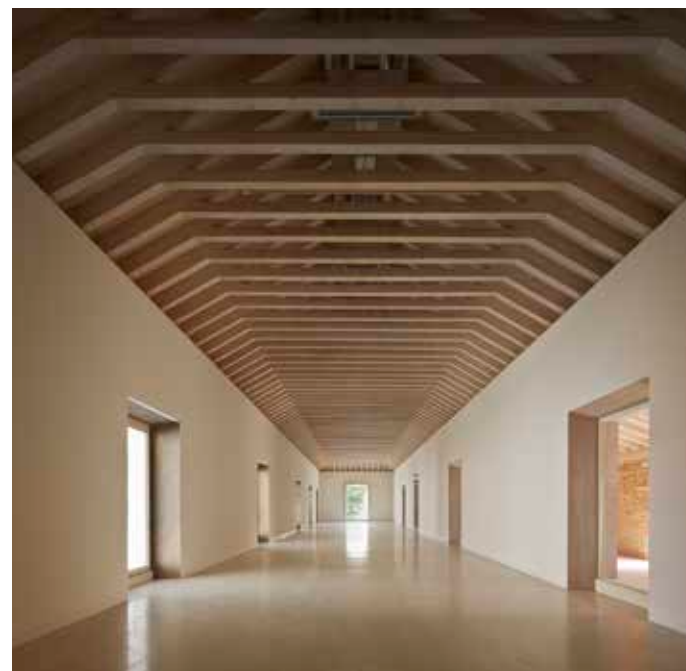
**149 150 151**  
Islamic houses area: the building,  
one of its interior spaces and a  
detailed section © jlcg.





João Luís Carrilho da Graça,  
Recovery and conversion  
of the *Monasterio de Santa  
Maria de Flor da Rosa* (Crato,  
Portugal 1995).

**152**  
The juxtaposition of the old and  
the new volume © jl cg.



João Luís Carrilho da Graça,  
Recovery and conversion of  
*Convento de Jesus de Setúbal*  
(Setúbal, Portugal 1998).

**153 154**  
Renovated interior spaces  
© jl cg, photo by Rita Burmester.





João Luís Carrilho da Graça,  
Recovery and conversion of  
the ruins of the *Igreja de São  
Paulo* (Macau, China 1995).

**155**  
The Broadway installed on the  
interior façade of the Cathedral  
© jlcg.



**156**  
View of the remains from the  
exhibition path © jlcg.

# Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta. Morphology of the Care

Vittorio Longheu

Each story is inevitably conditioned by the way we look and therefore by the particular perspective from which we interpret the events of life, as well as the transformations of the city, of architecture, of history. The distance of observing, or the point of view from which we observe, the further away it is and the more it allows us to see clearly what surrounds us, in a panoramic extension. If we apply this action of observing panoramically to the work of Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta, it appears to us with greater precision.

From this point of view it is clear that any consideration about their work is inevitably conditioned by the Alpine geography in which many of their buildings are realized. A geography that is confused in the altitude of the peaks surrounding Davos or those around the Old Gotthard Refuge in Airolo, and which tells us about an architecture firmly rooted in the place.

Approaching the gaze, their works speak to us through simple and useful forms, designed for use, which never raise the question of style, and were sedimented through a continuous operation.

As already visible in the first interventions in the Basel atelier, the relationship and the awareness of the value of time and memory, investigated during the training years at the ETH in Zurich (following the teachings of Fabio Reinhard and then of Miroslav Sik), immediately become one of the recurrent themes they will continue to clarify and investigate also in their mature works.

Their continuous commitment on few but profound questions, all focused on the meaning of the building practice in relationship with places and with history, highlights their lack of interest in the invention of a modern style. They never show anxiety towards originality at any cost, because — as they seem to suggest — the language of one's time cannot be invented, but rather it has to be carried out. As the two Swiss architects have repeatedly stated, the project finds a specific completeness in giving concrete answers to the needs inherent in the themes addressed by architecture.

The answers to these needs constitute the overall structure of the work which thereafter finds its own formal definition, in the relationship with the place and with the interpretation of those typical forms that have a general scope, and are always able to satisfy and fully represent the *collective memory* of a community. This relationship with

interpretation and the primary space produces the *atmosphere* or the concert among the forms. This intention — the meaning of which goes well beyond that of atmosphere or concert — is described by their work in a broader sense, where space is tuned as an instrument and the building becomes an echo of the surrounding environment.

For Miller and Maranta each project becomes an opportunity to imagine the new building as an integral part of the existing environment, hence rejecting the «architecture of events», the one constituted by buildings isolated from their context; each one of their new building is conceived in dialogue with the surrounding environment, with the characteristics and the identity of a place, with the aim to merge the «old» with the «new» in a vital whole.

Starting from these premises it is possible to understand the fortunate work of this studio, characterized by excellent results and a deep research for qualitative contents, which critics have often referred to as austere but also light, monolithic, abstract, or with a strong plastic presence.

Among the most significant works, I will explore in particular two urban interventions — the Volta School and the residential building in the Schwarzpark, both located in Basel — and two buildings that relate to the alpine landscape — the expansion of the Semperian *Villa Garbald* in Castasegna and the renovation of the old St. Gotthard refuge in Airolo. These choices were also aimed to underline the variety of the themes they have addressed, but above all to highlight the complexity of their research which highlights a particular attitude and capability when they confront historical contexts and consolidated urban fabrics.

This attitude provides a fundamental answer to the question we ask ourselves when we develop a project. What architecture do we interrogate, sediment and still listen to? This is the theme the two Swiss architects investigate with their work. They commit in a rewriting process that combines the awareness of the most authentic sense of doing architecture, in its entwining with technical, anthropological and rational knowledge, with the understanding of the contours of the creative experience.

I'm not referring to self-referential creativity, but rather on that slow sedimentation that is formed over time through observation and description. I think of their works as the result of an action that doesn't

find its meaning in at-any-cost originality, but rather in a reflection on the sense of its origin, developed in almost etymological terms, through the description of the processes of sedimentation and recognition of form. Observing their works from this point of view, it is difficult to ask the question of modernity or originality, because in their works what is understood as form inevitably seems to have already been designed by use over time. Their architectures are capable of finding a link with the history of places or of being in tune with its main references, with the city and with men.

In regard to these reflections, the youth project of the covered bridge for the pedestrian crossing of the Werdenberg parking area in Sevelen (1989-90) along the A13 St. Bernardino-Bellinzona highway is quite emblematic.

In this work, the analogy with the ancient wooden covered bridges is clear, so as its relationship constructive tradition and craftsmanship. The compositional structure is solved in the relationship between the beams of the deck, built in laminated wood like *gerbertrager* and concrete pillars that form the supports with the three spans, of about 30 meters each. In this building, a major part is played by the roof, a long gable structure, typical of historical wooden bridges, which fulfills a dual function: to shelter the pedestrians, and at the same time to protect the load-bearing structures and the deck that can be walked on by bad weather.

On the bridge of the Werdenberg rest area in Sevelen, the main figurative structure is managed through the relationship between the beams of the deck and the concrete pillars of the three spans, harmoniously composed with the main trilithic portal structure that holds the pitched roof protruding beyond the deck and supported by shelves built with struts every 2.5 meters, according to the main scheme. The iteration of these elements shapes the structural framework and the formal overall composition. However, the relationship among the pillars, the deck (which draws the attack on the ground and gives shape to the action of passing by) and the suspended roof (that represents the action of protecting), is not limited to a simple technical representation; rather the dialectic relationship between these two parts is strengthened by the chiaroscuro, which clearly defines the proportions among these elements.



This work relies on a happy and fruitful analogous experience, whose references and elements are drawn both from spontaneous languages, understood in the broadest sense of the expression, and from a sophisticated knowledge of the construction practice. It speaks to us of an architecture that aspires to be as anonymous as possible, but not at all trivial. In this work, which announces the quality of the mature experiences, the form is described through analogies and associations, as if to say that what's more important are not the individual parts but the relationships among them.

The «repertoire» of history — or even more precisely of the Alpine tradition — provides the two architects with fruitful elements for the reconstruction of architecture in the belief that it has always had the ability to produce typical, general-scale forms, capable of supporting and fully representing the collective memory. A vision that claims the need and urgency to regain possession of a professional practice and an indispensable knowledge, to make available again a cultural heritage capable of recovering and returning to a «language» that may be understandable to all. This vision of theirs, based on the awareness that every action on the materials of history makes sense if it is the manifestation of a will of interpretation, allows them to manage the relationship with the past, by finding in the experience the possibility to follow new interpretive paths and new meanings. Within this framework, the point of view from which the past is questioned (and the ability to interpret its multiple meanings) become fundamental.

This issue is particularly important in the project for the *Vecchio Rifugio del San Gottardo* (Airolo, 2010): on this case we could speak of a sort of analogous procedure, where memory becomes the scene within which the game of references and recognitions unfolds.

For Miller and Maranta, this process focuses on the possibility to give things an understandable and clear name, relying on tradition — that is to say on the form in which the words that produce these names were handed down. On the one hand, these set the limits of experience by referring to something that already exists; on the other, they allow the rediscovery of that ability to give a meaning to the archetypal value of greater architectures or to make it manifest.

In the project for the refuge in Airolo, this analogic approach triggers a compositional process where elements are formally prede-

fined. Hence such constructive elements (i.e. the windows, the roof and other parts) echo the words of the greatest Austrian master when he questions the carpenter asking him «what shape is the roof?», with the carpenter simply replying «I don't know, it's shaped like a roof!»<sup>1</sup>.

It is clear that for Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta the meaning of individual elements is fully understandable only at the end of the interpretation that takes place within each project, and therefore the value of each work can only be defined in the compositional relationship between the parts.

It is equally evident that the kind of process implemented by these architects has a logical nature; the peculiarity of their personal experience leads them to the choice of elements and combinations between the parts, and this is what makes this system extraordinarily alive.

In this work, for example, the addition establishes a sort of symbiosis with the preexisting architecture, by developing specific relationships based on continuity. For centuries, the ancient building has been the shelter of the most important pass between Italian and German-speaking Switzerland; it was built around 1237, and it is possible to detect the presence of an oratory or chapel later incorporated in the construction of the old hospice since 1623; this structure is also mentioned by Goethe in his travel diaries in Switzerland between 1775 and 1779. The original factory underwent numerous transformations, the most important of which was carried out after the 1905 fire. The imposing main façade, facing south and rising vertically to become visible even from far away distances, has remained a remarkable presence.

The project developed by Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta focuses on definition of a unitary figure, ensuing from the removal of the incongruous, stratified elements built in the different moments, and the construction of a large roof made of lead plates, which is meant to conjoin the ancient chapel and the hospice (which previously stood as two connected but distinct volumes).

This action combines the peremptory nature of the façade, which is also elevated by one floor, with a unitary volumetric structure which gives the whole composition an impression of great expressive vigor. The imposing façade includes an old wooden door leading to the historical staircase, which connect the first floor and its large common room with an ancient stove made in Ola stone.

On the remaining four floors, the bedrooms are arranged along a corridor, all lit by small windows and characterized by the design of an alcove where the bed is located. The old wooden structure has been completely replaced, except from the first floor, originally built in stone. The new load-bearing framework, built according to traditional dry off-site techniques, allowed the intervention to be carried out during the short summer period. The structure was completely covered by a shell made of fir boards that cover the walls, the floor and the ceiling of the rooms. The intervention results in a strongly unitary image, but at the same time it evokes a comfortable and traditional atmosphere, in harmony with the simplicity of the hospice theme. Even more clearly than the Sevelen bridge, the Gotthard project reveals the complexity of their research on the rewriting of typical elements.

Looking at the old Gotthard refuge it is difficult to unfold the question of modernity or originality: in these works, what is understood as a form inevitably seems to have been already designed by use over time. In the way Miller and Maranta's architecture speaks to us with simple and useful forms, that time has sedimented and which never ask the question of style. The particular geographical dimension they refer to is characterized by a great extension but also by limits, peaks and deep cavities, which I think can be interpreted through a metaphor: to me it recalls those situations when we climb an alpine peak and, looking at the landscape from above, we spontaneously fill our lungs with air and proudly scream, waiting with confidence for the return of an echo. What we hear a few seconds later is no longer our voice but its sound that returns after dialoguing with the morphology of the place, the size of the space and the character of the material.

In the work of rewriting places and spaces, the material confidently translates the creative thought into the reality of construction; it becomes precision but also an experience, that of touching and feeling, and it allows us to recognize a familiar and comfortable atmosphere in many of Miller and Maranta's architectures, where light meets wood and water meets ceramic.

These happy encounters between the different materials constricting the space highlight their primary aim, to present architecture as an expression of continuity. In fact their relationship with history is continuous; the questioning of the operational values that the action

of memory translates into the project is continuous; their relationship with the city and the place is continuous.

But their work on architecture also ensues from the attention to the analogy. The analogy helps to connect, to give continuity to the relationship between construction and materiality. For these reasons the architects' works manifest the search for the spirit of places, for the atmospheres (i.e. that precise feeling that pervades all their spaces), but also for the representation of a functional use, and the relationship of the new elements with a preexisting context.

Their experience highlights that, to be able to translate all these instances, it is necessary to be good craftsmen, skilled builders, careful connoisseurs of materials and construction techniques. Only through these skills the desired atmosphere can be achieved. And this is how a space, through the skillful hand of the architect, acquires a *certain way of being*.

Proportion, materiality, light, are the tools to cohere space and use, to produce a precise atmosphere. To achieve all this, it is not enough to be skilled connoisseurs of construction techniques: one must know how to take care of things and people — just as when climbing the top of a mountain one must take care of the climbing partner.

And the place of the care is the alpine landscape, such as Davos, the place where Quintus Miller spent his youth, where his father's grandfather had built the first sanatorium in reinforced concrete, which later became a hotel, which magically returns to Thomas Mann's pages of *The Magic Mountain*. The great alpine landscapes become the background of this world, where you can still take care of things, people and, therefore, architecture.

The place of the care is up high, in a rarefied landscape suspended in space and time. And the time you experience in this place is the time of the cure, of taking care, which makes Hans Castorp (i.e. the protagonist of Mann's novel) say that «minutes seem hours, that the seven minutes — the time to measure the body temperature of the sick cousin — are very long waiting for time to pass, much more than a month»<sup>2</sup>.

The mountain and the alpine landscape have the strength to refresh our sense of time and thereby to make it even clearer. This is the theme that the two Swiss architects face in the project for the *Mineralbad*, a small thermal complex built in the center of Samedan, a town

in the Engadine. To reach it, it is necessary to cross the Maloja pass, beyond St. Moritz, and turn left at the Bever junction; when in Samedan, the *Mineralbad* is located in the main square, next to the old protestant church.

The *Mineralbad* is a real work of *tuning* of atmospheres, of situations, built through the dialogue among the rooms, e.g. between the room covered with Swiss stone pine and the room covered with larch. This extraordinary harmony of matter and space creates a resonance, a reverberation in which the materials seem to constitute the notes of a score where even the temperature, the scents and the weight of the objects participate in the understanding of the quality of this architectural work. In the *vertical spas* of Samedan, water flows, transported from a depth of 35 meters, drawing from the source which is located directly under the baths. From here, it goes up to 35°, to fill the tanks covered with colorful ceramic tiles, varying in the shades of yellow. During the day, the rooms of the building are illuminated by light coming from the outside through large square windows, from which details of the surrounding landscape appear. The thermal path ends on the upper floor housing a large basin, where the temperature is significantly higher (40°) and the tiles are volcanic red. Here time passes quickly before reaching the staircase that leads up to an external basin, from which you can see the peaks of the mountains that surround Samedan.

This alternation of different temperatures becomes almost a metaphor for the flowing of space and time — the time which is needed for designing and building architecture, and for the definition of the relationships, the techniques, the materials and their combinations. Through their work, Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta show us all the elements that must participate in this process, so as the quantity of time it takes.

Before them, a similar lesson can be found in Adolf Loos' extraordinary alpine architecture in Severing, the *Khuner Chalet*, or in his *Villa Muller* in Prague<sup>3</sup>, where in her small and comfortable studio Mrs. Milada Muller savored the readings, immersed in the perfume released by the lemon wood coating.

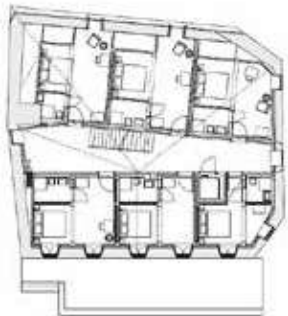
In the work of Quintus Miller and Paola Maranta this intonation becomes the accord of all this in a space, which in German is called *Stimmung*, that I prefer to call the *morphology of the care*.

<sup>1</sup> A. Loos, *Ins Leere Gesprochen, Der Sturm*, Berlin 1921, trans. *Parole nel vuoto*, Adelphi Edizioni, Milan 1972.

<sup>2</sup> T. Mann, *Der Zauberberg*, S. Fischer Verlag, Berlin 1924, trans. *La montagna incantata*, Dall'Oglio, Milan 1930.

<sup>3</sup> B. Gravagnuolo, *Adolf Loos*, Idea Books Edizioni, Milan 1981.





Miller & Maranta, *Altes Hospiz St. Gotthard* (Pass St. Gotthard, Switzerland 2005-10).

**157** Section, ground floor, second floor and fourth floor plans © Miller & Maranta.



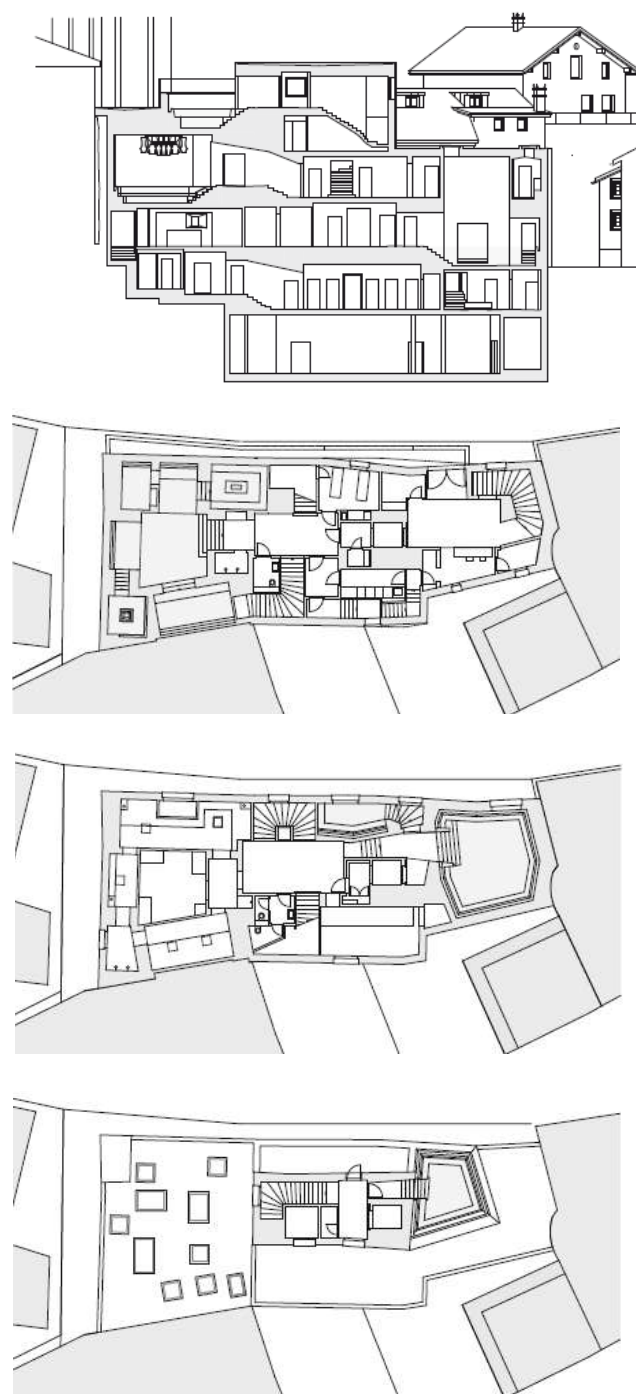
**158** The hospice next to the small chapel from the 16th century © Miller & Maranta, ph. Ruedi Walti.



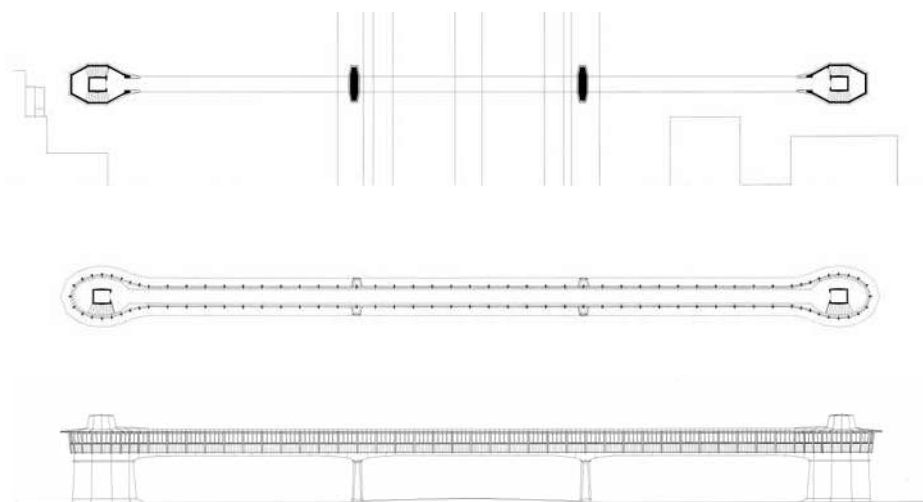


Miller & Maranta, Mineral Bath & Spa (Samedan, Switzerland 2006-09).

**159**  
The intervention within the historical city center © Miller & Maranta, ph. Ralph Feiner.



**160**  
Longitudinal section, underground, ground floor, first floor and third floor plans © Miller & Maranta.



Miller & Maranta, Pedestrian crossing on the Werdenberg parking area (Sevelen, Switzerland 1989-90)

161  
Plans and façade © Miller & Maranta.



162 163  
The pedestrian bridge © Miller & Maranta.



# Ricardo Bak Gordon. Architecture as Inhabited Space Between Past and Future

Christian Campanella

Meeting and working with Ricardo Bak Gordon has been at the same time an enrichment and an incentive. This opportunity materialized in the occasion of an international design competition, which led us to deal with a pre-existing structure connoted by a special importance, not only related to historic or artistic values, but also to the meaning it had once conveyed, the urban footprint of the existing volumes, its position and its lost relationship with the city.

This enrichment resulted from the direct acquaintance, the dialogue and the acknowledgment of a «different» methodological approach, which highlighted commonalities and differences — even though these were never too wide. The incentive ensued from the curiosity to explore new strategies, solutions, architectures and visions, especially those nurtured by and pertaining to historical places — such as the military structure at the core of the competition, which throughout the centuries has shaped the border of the old city of Padova, while at the same time isolating itself from the urban centre.

Ricardo Bak Gordon is part of the latest generation of a distinctive Portuguese community that has had a privileged position within the international architecture scene for years. His formation started at the prestigious School of Porto, under the supervision of Fernando Távora and Álvaro Siza, and afterwards was nurtured by the collaboration with Paulo Mendes da Rocha, the «chromatic» awareness of Luis Barragán, and the spatial and material sensibility of Pedro Cabrita Reis and Anish Kapoor.

Bak Gordon's work results from the coalescence of the personal vision of the architect and the acknowledgment of the international cultural context he interacts with, drawing on a focus on permanence, which «allows man and time to inhabit these spaces, always in different ways»<sup>1</sup>.

Proceeding from the tradition of the School of Porto, in his practice he takes full advantage of the use of drawing, employed as a strategical tool for investigation: the time dedicated to life drawing of the city, the people and the buildings, has taught him to linger and look at the world with a deeper attention, and thus has helped him to develop a special sensibility towards the observation of places and to understand of architectural design as a practice which needs to address a certain level of continuity with the existing context.

«Thinking around the drawing means going to the roots of architecture, to seek the essence rather than the appearance, and to accept its inner, immutable rules»<sup>2</sup>. This is certainly true for the design of a new building, but it is even more valid for the architectural interventions operating on a pre-existing building, if applied to the survey of the form, the materials and the proportions of historical stratification (which is never predictable, and somehow makes it authentic). In my opinion, to deeply understand the value of drawing and of the survey project is the most appropriate way to understand the character of a building, which needs to be recognized within its context, and subsequently pursued in the architectural design practice. A consistent intervention on a pre-existing structure must build on the comprehensive analysis of its identity features, shaped by its construction as well as by time. Such buildings ground their testimonial strength and eloquence on authenticity, ensuing from the merging of the metamorphoses that occurred throughout history.

Mirroring the lesson of the Portuguese School, Bak Gordon's philosophy draws on the capability of the architect to constantly dialogue with the pre-existing context, and in particular with the heritages it contains, without shying away from the responsibility to add his own contribution.

The intervention method is based on the understanding of the project as an opportunity to enhance the site and its meaning, moving away from self-referential and ephemeral architecture. As explained by Ricardo Carvalho commenting on Bak Gordon's approach, this vision is generated by the Portuguese «reality principle», referred to a culture which has evolved far from any utopian tendency, and is expressed by an architectural practice that has local origins but a universal value, and thus interprets everyday places within the framework of the desire to open up to new horizons.

To think about architecture as an inhabited space, choosing the most suitable tools for its representation (as they become instruments fostering analysis, interpretation and thought) is the action at the base of the methodological approach which Bak Gordon consistently pursues: it results in a continuous relation with the place and with history, and facilitates the design of spaces that are able to provide users with a proper comfort, also through some essential elements of the compo-

sition. This comfort is strictly connected with the proportions and the measures of the specific space, and beyond repetitions and standardized stereotypes it participates in the architectural design process and in the search for a peculiar atmosphere.

«I think that those architects who place a certain emphasis on continuity, and on such processes intertwining the addition and the continuation of the meanings of the constructive realm, are well-balanced, in contrast to those who eagerly seek the invention. I am not one of those. I like to sense that continuity and aim to develop this dialogue, by adding small elements that will be gradually integrated in the process of time. That is what I value the most»<sup>3</sup>.

In the design activities focused on the relationship between new and pre-existing architecture, the prominent elements are the compositive and functional tasks (the typology, the footprint and the relationships with the inhabited places); hence the material (the existing one) becomes a secondary matter.

«I trust continuity very much. And continuity ensues from an attentive observation of the context, that lead you to discover which are the questions you need to answer in order to become an active part of the processes that transform the world you are living in, adopting a sensitive approach, one that does not aim at showing off with totally invented proposals. [...] If someone can come up with an “invention” in architecture, capable of enhancing the possibility to answer complex questions, it'll be welcome, but I don't think anyone can do it. So I'd like to address a message to the new generations and tell them that what an architect has to do is to find enthusiasm in being a part of the process of continuity»<sup>4</sup>.

Bak Gordon's works range from a large number of single-family houses — the project of which is focused on the search for the domestic comfort home, such as those in Quelfes, Pousos, and Santa Isabel, Lisbon, and the two that were built in Casa Queimada — to the renovation of few schools in Lisbon and Porto, as well as in Switzerland, to the design of remarkable buildings in Portugal and abroad — such as the oil mill in Oliveira da Serra, the Albarquel Park in Setúbal, the Roman Theatre in Lisbon, the waterfront FACIM in Maputo in Mozambique and the Portuguese Embassy in Brasilia, in cooperation with

Paulo Mendes da Rocha. This is a long time relationship, which continues to nurture their work with inspiration and an ideal strength, to unfold new questions about the role of architecture as a collective instrument for contemporary society, thus to encourage the exploration of various scales (not intended in dimensional, but functional terms) and especially to mediate the passage from private to public, which coalesce the different needs related to dwelling.

In this text I will bring to the attention of the readers three works that specifically focus on the enhancement of pre-existing buildings; although they refer to very different contexts (and they are characterized by different scales, functions, relationships with the surrounding situation) it is possible to find a common matrix, which can be summarized by the recurrent keywords that can be associated to each project: *critical analysis, innovation, dialogue between old and new, continuity*.

I will start from the intervention on the *Escola Secundária Dom Dinis* in Chelas, in Lisbon (2008). This site, realized in the 1970s, had a representative value as it was the prototype of the ten-year program dedicated to the modernization of Portuguese school buildings, aimed at providing them with new spaces that could enhance the quality of teaching activities and boost the cultural development of its users. This issue oriented the renovation project towards the conservation, improvement and integration of the existing assets.

Bak Gordon was responsible for the transformation of three Portuguese schools; in all these cases, although specifically developed, he adopted an approach based on the enhancement of collective spaces. In the Dom Dinis School, this strategy is fulfilled through the creation of new meeting places intended to improve the students' life.

The intervention draws on the insertion of a new volume at the center of a cluster shaped by the pre-existing independent buildings, and precisely within the space of the old courtyard, thus enhancing the connection between the satellite pavilions. Although they had been recently built and were not characterized by high architectural quality, these buildings set the rules of the new project, dictating its height, proportion and the simple style. The volume designed by Bak Gordon is a sort of hinge that takes its shape, colour and alignment from the surrounding structures; at the same time, it is recognizable as a new

insertion, due to its peculiar cladding and the sinuosity of its rounded corners. Its iconic form ensues from the use of concrete walls, covered with a white corrugated sheet. The use of standardized and low-cost components is part of a logic that Bak Gordon constantly implements, based on the appropriateness of the means of expression in relation to the specific circumstances and to the available resources, which in this case included the adequate management of economic assets and a certain speed in the execution. At the same time, the formal layout of this new pavilion — which is designed as if it did not have a starting nor an ending point — generates a contrast with the regular geometry of the pre-existing buildings, which enhances the distinctiveness of the new intervention.

As described by Ricardo Carvalho<sup>5</sup>, walking through this intervention can be compared to a visit to a city, traversing libraries, auditoriums and computer rooms, treading through ramps that follow the topography, between movement and rest areas, under a flat roof that regulates and connects the height of the rooms. Along this «road to learning»<sup>6</sup> — as Bak Gordon himself defined the path crossing the new building — despite its scale, the concept of the centrality of man who needs public spaces reappears in reference to the important role of collective areas where the community can meet and interact, and to the necessity to design them by maximizing their liveable functionality, as a leading aspect of the architectural project.

In the proposal for the requalification of the Roman Theatre in Lisbon (2016), Bak Gordon combines the tasks related to the conservation and valorization of the archaeological remains and the issues pertaining to their relationship with the city. The new protective structure is inserted in the narrow space framed by the surrounding streets and buildings, hence managing a complex urban theme. At the same time, it reorganizes the introverted space dedicated to the exhibition of the traces of the ancient theatre, by improving the quality of this important cultural venue (also through the addition of new facilities) and its compositional, spatial and visual interplay with the context.

Today the remains are only partially visible, as they are embedded in the stratified city. The aim of the project was to redevelop and reconfigure the area, by redefining the relationship between three co-



vered spaces and strengthening their consistency and recognizability, without downgrading their specific identity, position and connection with the place.

The design process initially focused on the management of the pedestrians and vehicular paths that intersect and define the plot, with the aim to maintain the public practicability and the fluidity through the implementation of a solution that would not turn the new volume into a foreign or disturbing presence. The correct solution came from the observation of the place, and in particular from the visual relationship between the higher point of the «central core», in the building along *Rua da Saudade*, and the «southern core», where a direct view of the Tagus river opens up. This alignment suggested the creation of a new public square located above the archaeological remains, in one of the natural panoramic viewpoints that shape the steep topography of the Lisbon hills, also providing shaded spaces for rest. The square adds further information to the local palimpsest: it produces a new layer that overlaps the Roman theatre, as if it was a section of the city surface rising to reveal it.

*The central core.* Bak Gordon proposes to introduce a third museum space in the current context, to be located in the northern core of the area — the Museum of Lisbon - Roman Theater, which intends to establish itself as a multi-polar body organized around the central core and its public square. This peculiar condition allows for a unitary fruition of the complex and heterogeneous urban context, populated by variously characterized buildings, which find a programmatic integration in their use. The new intervention relates with the existing block through a morphologically coherent integration. This design strategy is based on the capability of the central element to control both the urban conditions and the contained functions. The resulting architectural outcome indeed ensues from the necessity to point out the presence of an important content, hence to arise curiosity, but also to avoid the full revelation of the remains. The building thus becomes a surprising urban element, catching the eye of all those who gravitate around it. The access system that allows pedestrians to reach the ruins of the Roman Theater especially enhances the south-east side of the area, at the intersection between *Rua de São Mamede* and *Rua da Saudade*, and it is meant to renovate the most important entran-

ce to the museum (in the point where the main access to the Theatre was). This entryway, leading to a small reception room, is shaped by a large protruding metal door that announces the presence of the exhibition site to the city. The roof of this nucleus embraces the new public square, which can be accessed directly from *Rua da Saudade*, and to the south-east is completed by the cafeteria severing the museum. The metal structure of the building is supported by five stands only; the closure of the vertical margins is realized through braided expanded metal panels, which also allow for air permeability.

*The north core.* Compared to the central core, this building has a completely different nature; it was designed to guarantee a continuity with the surrounding volumes, although it is also intended to provide specific functional uses. Actually it is an open but covered space, where air and light circulate freely throughout the structure. Entering the triple height hall, it is possible to observe the ruins, climb the stairs that give access to the first floor, or enter the auditorium. The building is made in concrete, that was chosen for its structural and plastic properties; it is the only material that remains visible in the public area of the museum, and it appears as a sort of great ruin that contains the real remains.

*The south core.* In this nucleus, the intervention is limited to the architectural reconfiguration of the existing situation, hence maintaining the functional hypotheses. The main transformation consists in the realization of a single translucent cover in alveolar polycarbonate, which allows for the access of natural light in the large archaeological area, and in an opaque metal structure, expanded on the terrace to protect visitors from the rain. The new vertical surface is characterized by the structural rhythm of the metal pillars that support the roof and the metal panels that fill up the interstitial spaces.

Finally, I'd like to reflect on the *Piave Futura* Project, ensuing from the international restricted procedure competition promoted by the University of Padua in 2018 for the construction of the new campus of the Social and Economic Sciences School.

The project site was originally occupied by the St. Augustine Convent, that was built outside the city walls, on the banks of the Bacchiglione river. In the 16th century, the complex was integrated within the

enlarged urban perimeter, and transformed into a military structure. The convent almost disappeared: the church was demolished, and the residential building containing a large cloister was heavily modified due to its adaptation for military uses.

The first condition for the development of the proposal concerned the possibility to reshape the relationship between the area and the historical city, in particular inverting the logic of the closed enclosure, and opening up this space for its future enhancement. This task set the basis for the design of a new place, aim at constructing a morphological continuity with the city centre, and at recreating an *Hortus Magnus*, i.e. a school capable of functioning as catalyst for the enhancement of the aggregation between the scientific community and the citizens.

The intervention draws inspiration from the urban structure of Padua; in particular the design approach is based on the local system of voids, that is assumed as a matrix in the redefinition of this part of the city, not only concerning the new university facilities but also including squares, porches and gardens.

Following the guidelines of the international call, the proposal ensues from the elaboration of the footprint of the existing buildings, and its expansion to connect to a sequence of porches operating as a hinge between the new and the old volumes, at the same time managing the distribution of the plants. This system was inspired by the arcades that characterize the city of Padua, and is intended to accompany, protect and generate the new built and open spaces.

This choice also refers to the idea of fragmenting the area to avoid the densification of the built volumes and the addition of new spaces through superimposition or excavation, rather defining unique places of great urban significance.

The main buildings, both the new and the existing ones, are arranged in a dialogical sequence within the perimeter of the project site, spaced out by squares and gardens, which generate an interesting and somehow ambiguous interplay between «positive» and «negative», that enriches the quality of the urban space. The resulting complex environment — coalescing the kind of uses associated to collective public space and the «slower» ones pertaining to dwelling — aim at reinforcing the bond and the exchanges with the city.

The proposal for the new university campus consists of three specific interventions: the renovation of the existing buildings (including their restoration and adaptation to house different functions), the construction of new buildings (accommodating classrooms, the Auditorium and the Library/Learning center) and the realization of the peculiar spatial system which includes the Portico/Aqueduct.

As previously mentioned, the latter is configured as a technical and technological infrastructure, but also as a thin architecture that joins, accompanies, envelopes and defines various spaces and volumes. It is realized by a set of pre-shaped elements, emptied and opened towards the sky, fixed to a sequence of prefabricated concrete pillars which constitutes, at the same time, the covered porch, the technical gallery that gathers all the infrastructures, and the connective tool binding all the buildings together. The space used by the infrastructure is partially covered by an extension of photovoltaic panels which, thanks to the occupied area, ensure the sustainability and energy autonomy of the campus. The prefabricated concrete elements are meant to be pigmented and «washed» to acquire a finishing compatible with the atmosphere of the historical centre. The geometry of the pre-shaped elements creates a rhythm, based on the sequence of openings which connotes the façade of the new buildings adjoining the Portico and the related sets of rooms and windows.

Among the interventions on the existing buildings, the works on the convent focus on the recovery of the cloister, and in particular on the relationship between the perimetral corridors, previously compromised by heavy structural transformations, and the central courtyard, through the addition of a light, thin crowning, thus recovering a long-lost atmosphere. Partly compromised by the changes carried out when the complex was used as a military barrack, the interior spaces were remodelled to recover the «original» layout, the vaults, the surfaces and the masonry; this redevelopment was carried out also considering the certain level of «freedom» in the reconstruction or transformation of historical elements due to their loss resulting from the major alterations they had gone through over time (especially the floors, ceilings, vertical connections, installation of plants, circulation areas). The same philosophy is adopted in the renovation of the other buildings, i.e. the *Cavallerizza* and the large guesthouse.

As far as concerns the new buildings, the construction system is inspired from that of the external porch, so as the height and configuration of the façades. The roof of the Library/Learning centre consists of a water basin, aimed at improving the thermal control of the interior spaces and at revealing an unusual overview of the campus, as seen from the higher buildings situated along the perimeter. The geometry of the external porch expands towards the inner space through the creation of a suspended roof made in metal mesh, which frames the aerial infrastructures.

Because of its programmatic content as well as its exceptional location in the campus, the Auditorium (*Aula Magna*) extraordinarily develops on two floors: the ground floor is configured as an extension of the porched system, while the upper floor, although prosecuting the geometry of the lower level, is characterized by a lighter materiality. The Auditorium is in fact the symbolic element that materializes the link between the remote past and the future of the new campus; for this reason it takes the shape and the place of the lost church dedicated to St. Agostino — which used to be the core of the community, whose assembly gathered around scientific, artistic and cultural knowledge (once relying on religion) — hence ideally reconstructing it. This building operates as a hinge between the historic city and *Piave Futura*, and a metaphor for the whole project of the new campus.

<sup>1</sup> R. Carvalho, *Un modo di osservare il mondo*, in F. Tranfa (ed.), *Bak Gordon. Architetture abitate / Inhabited Architectures*, Electa, Milan 2015.

<sup>2</sup> F. Tranfa, *Introduzione*, in R. Bak Gordon, *Disegni di case*, Libria, Melfi 2008.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hill, *Past Present Future II: Ricardo Bak Gordon*, July 2, 2019, [https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-](https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-news/film/past-present-future-ii-ricardo-bak-gordon)

[news/film/past-present-future-ii-ricardo-bak-gordon](https://www.world-architects.com/en/architecture-news/film/past-present-future-ii-ricardo-bak-gordon) (last accessed on January 30, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Ivi.

<sup>5</sup> R. Carvalho, «Ruinas invertidas. Notas sobre el aquí y el ahora», 2G, *Bak Gordon*, 64, 2012, p. 13.

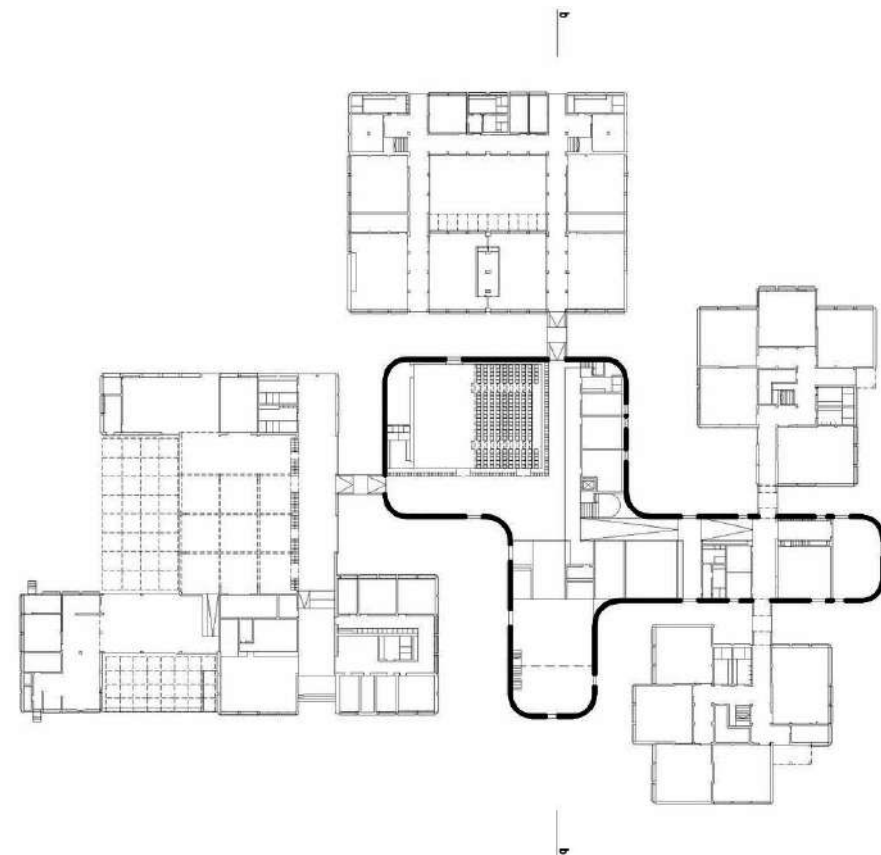
<sup>6</sup> B. Gordon, «Escuela secundaria Dom Dinis, Lisboa», 2G, *Bak Gordon*, 64, 2012, p. 96.





Ricardo Bak Gordon, *Escola Secundária Dom Dinis* (Chelas, Lisbon, Portugal 2008).

**164 165**  
The intervention  
© Bak Gordon Arquitectos, ph-  
Leonardo Finotti.

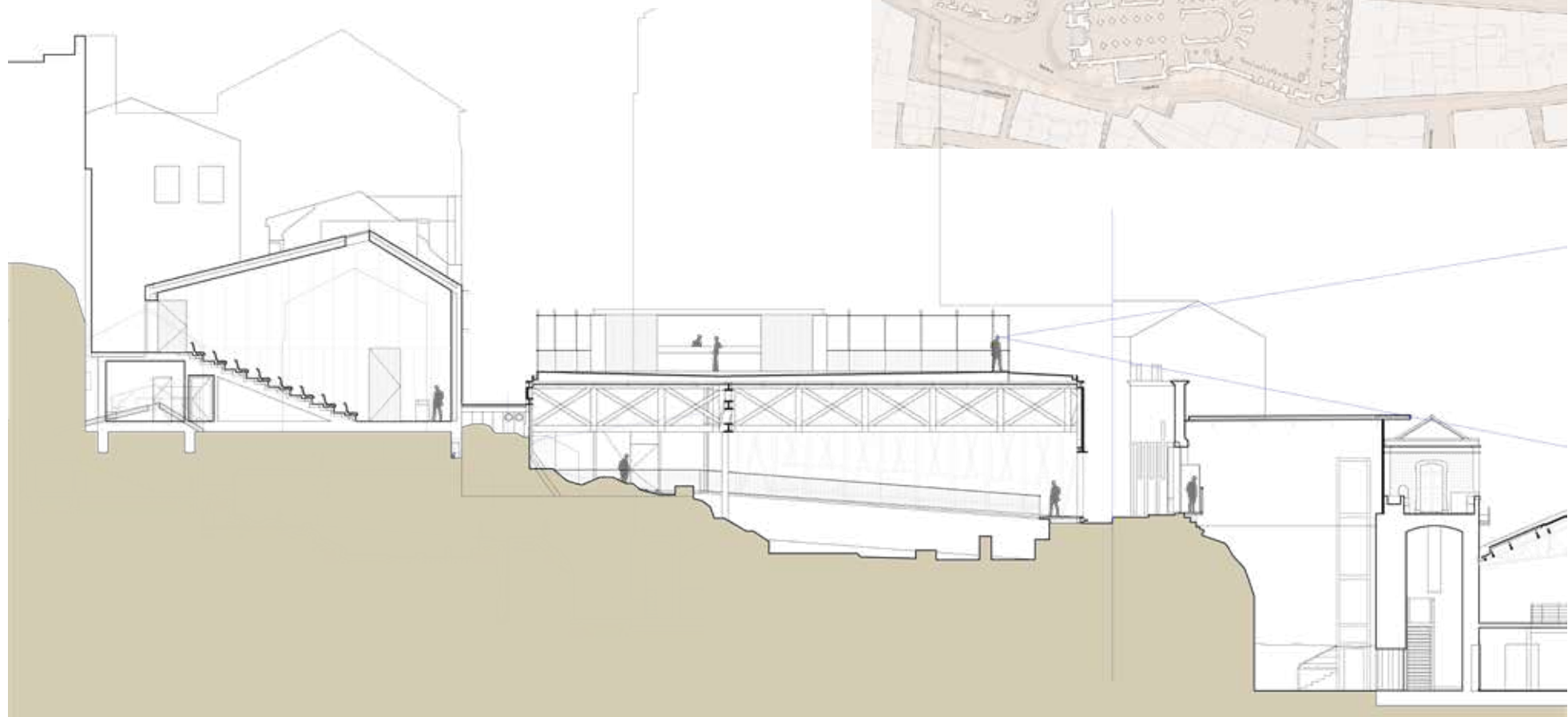
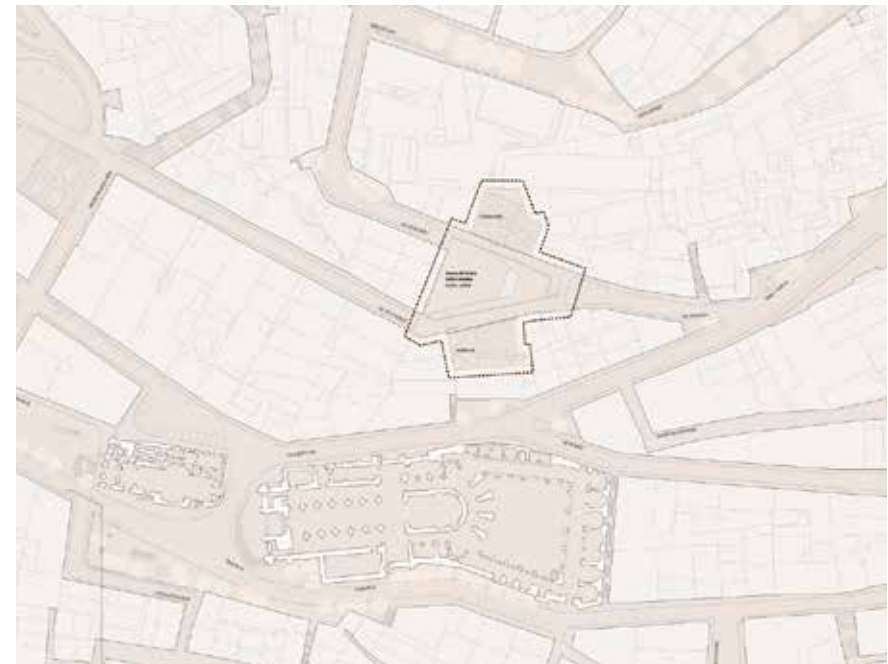
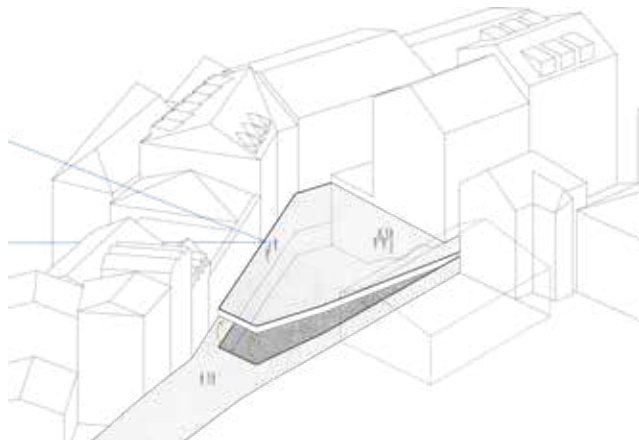


**166**  
Ground floor plan © Bak  
Gordon Arquitectos.



167  
Fronts © Bak Gordon  
Arquitectos.

168 169  
Interior spaces  
© Bak Gordon Arquitectos.



Ricardo Bak Gordon,  
Renovation of the *Roman  
Theatre* area (Lisbon, Portugal  
2016).

170  
Axonometric view and  
longitudinal section © Bak  
Gordon Arquitectos.

171  
Site plan © Bak Gordon  
Arquitectos.





172 173 174  
Exterior and interior views of the site, in its present state © Bak Gordon Arquitectos.



175 176 177  
Provisional views of the site after the intervention © Bak Gordon Arquitectos.



Ricardo Bak Gordon,  
*Competition Piave Futura*  
(Padova, Italy 2019).

178  
General plan and sections  
© Bak Gordon Arquitectos.



179 180 181  
Provisional views of the site  
© Bak Gordon Arquitectos.

**IV.**

## **Memory and Interpretation**



# Fernando Tabuenca and Jesús Leache. Palimpsestic Architecture

Elena Montanari

Critical discourses about interventions in historical contexts are pervaded with a recurrent keyword: *palimpsest*. The works carried out within such field by Pamplona based architects Fernando Tabuenca and Jesús Leache offer a compelling interpretation of this expression, and provide the possibility to grasp the peculiar features of its application to architectural design.

In textual studies, the term palimpsest refers to a manuscript page from a scroll or a book, or a parchment, from which the text has been scraped or washed off so that the page can be reused for another document<sup>1</sup>: been recycled multiple times, it displays the traces of older layers of meaning.

This term has been variously employed in the architecture culture, in relation to different disciplines and scale levels — obviously starting from restoration, then expanding to urban studies<sup>2</sup> and historical studies<sup>3</sup> — though always relating to the concept of a stratification resulting in the simultaneous coexistence of different physical or symbolical layers. In the 1970s it has appeared in architectural design studies<sup>4</sup>, and in the last thirty years it has definitively entered the vocabulary of contemporary architects, who employ it to illustrate the chronological superimposition of the material and immaterial signs of the past that remain embedded — although sometimes hidden — in most urban landscapes and buildings, where a succession of layers seems to bury traces of the past, even though none of these traces are definitely extinguished.

The metaphor has always been used to describe the mingling of the past in the present that was generated by the normal «action» of History in urban contexts (based on an endless process of rewriting through time), but it also consents a valid representation for the special approach that some architects have developed in their interventions in historical contexts, when the transformation they propose is focused on the entwining between the different layers that coexist in surfaces and structures, and on the exhibition of this interplay.

This specific approach is meant to produce a multifold outcome. Not only it writes another «page» in the life of the site: at the same time, by adding this new «layer», it guarantees that the various traces to which it overlaps remain visible and recognizable, thus enhancing the *voicefulness*<sup>5</sup> and the *sense of depth*<sup>6</sup> of historical buildings

as a result of the layering process. This architectural strategy recalls the action of enabling something that has disappeared from sight to resurrect, or a trace to linger — which is the idea grounding the production of a palimpsest: the overimposition of the new layer indeed aims to highlight the preexisting ones (instead of erasing them), and to allow for the multitude of traces that characterize a building's history to coexist in the same space and time.

This process, «providing a balance between the past and the future»<sup>7</sup>, draws on a peculiar position in the understanding of the life of a building in relation to time, one that rejects the synchronic vision — which considers time as reversible, and has allowed such interventions as the reconstruction of the *San Marco* Tower in Venice (after its collapse in 1902) or of the old town of Warsaw (destroyed during WWII) — and rather it embraces a diachronic perspective — one that looks at the past as being linear, unique, always further away, and only existing as memory. Acknowledging the unicity of each moment — hence also of the present one —, the latter vision legitimizes each sign, form and language generated in different moments, and eventually validates their simultaneous conveyance. As layering suggests a superimposition, which refers to a linearity of time, this approach stands at the basis of the application of the metaphor of the palimpsest in architectural design, which refers to the co-existence of the various traces produced in different epochs by functional transformations, expansions, technical interventions or disruptive events.

This concept — which is in line with the modalities through which urban contexts have always been evolving, since «Remodeling an old building that is characterized by formal interventions upon existing form [...] is as old as the practice of architecture itself»<sup>8</sup> — had a central position in the evolution of the restoration theories and practices which arouse at the beginning of the 20th century<sup>9</sup>, drawing on the expansion and «democratization» of the notion of heritage, on the updated acknowledgment of the tangible and intangible values of each phase of the life of an historical building, and on the capability to promote interventions aimed at «listening» and respecting them<sup>10</sup>.

After WWII, the deciphering of the building as a complex document has been subsequently enhanced through the development of a certain architectural culture which has dominated the most intere-

sting experiences during the Reconstruction period, when many European architects were faced with new problems related to the intervention in historical centers. The masters that dealt with this cultural contexts have produced some works that had a paradigmatic value in the development of a «palimpsestic architecture» — one where the structure or the narrative of the building are exposed and then developed as potential generators for the modification process — and delivered outstanding lessons that had a fundamental impact on the education of the following generations, until the present day. Such works as Dimitris Pikionis' ascending path to the Acropolis (Athens, Greece 1954-57), Carlo Scarpa's renovation of *Castelvecchio* (Verona, Italy 1956-74), Fernando Távora's *Casa dos 24* (Porto, Portugal 1995-2003), to mention a few, proved the possibility to use the transformative process of the building as a design tool, and to make this process visible, thus allowing for a contextual coexistence between the different ideas and actions that came to be stratified on the building's structures and spaces.

The lessons delivered by these masters have been widely studied and assimilated by the new generations of architects, who have continued to experiment with this approach; nevertheless, significant transformations have occurred which upgraded the work of the contemporary actors.

Remodeling has become a particularly fertile and «bustling» area, resulting from the development of new urban policies (following the transfer of the focus of political, economic and cultural agendas from «expansion» to «reuse») and the widening of the conception of «heritage», which today is extended to include basically all the traces of the past. The present one is indeed an «epoch of memory», characterized by a «heritage epidemic»<sup>11</sup>, or «inflation»<sup>12</sup>, related to the overall broadening of the scope of historical values (as an ever-wider range of experiences and locations of the past are deemed worthy of counting as heritage<sup>13</sup>) and to the obsessive exhibition of historical traces. In this scenario, the transformation of old buildings has become a major field for architectural research and practice.

The acknowledgment of the value of most of historical documents and sites had various impacts. On the one hand it has triggered the increase of rules, regulations and restrictions that govern these

experiences, hence highly limiting architects' creativity and turning some of the actions that the masters had taken as non-replicable. On the other, it has multiplied academic and professional opportunities, especially resulting from the raise of reuse practices pertaining to non-monumental buildings (e.g. post-industrial sites<sup>14</sup>), which have contributed to the exploration of new intervention options, also benefitting from the experimentations with technical and technological upgrades.

These remarkably changed conditions are challenging the work of contemporary architects, who are faced with wider opportunities as well as major difficulties in approaching the intervention in historical sites.

In this context, most architects have embraced a «palimpsestic approach». Its roots, grafted in the dialogue between the past and the present of a building, are generally considered an adequate and effective orientation for the transformation project — although the assimilation of this vision does not always guarantee the accomplishment of a successful renovation. This type of design process indeed requires great critical capabilities, technical skills as well as cultural awareness, that must be contextually intertwined in order to manage the significant responsibilities involved in this kind of practice.

This is why it is important to throw light on the work of those architects that are mastering this art, and thus provide strategic lessons for architects (and architects to be). In this framework, the experience of *Tabuenca & Leache Arquitectos* stands out for the refined intelligence, strategic sensitivity and critical vision of their proposals, hence giving evidence of the development of a design process that can result in an elegant balance between conservation and transformation — and effectively exemplifying the meaning and values of «palimpsestic architecture».

This leading Spanish practice was established in 1991 by Fernando Tabuenca González and Jesús Leache in Pamplona. In almost three decades it has completed a wide variety of projects, including works for both public and private sectors, ranging amongst different functions (administrative, industrial, sports, educational, cultural and religious) and scales (from town planning to large-scale urban hou-

sing, to interior design). This wide and heterogeneous body of work — most of which was developed from winning public competitions — has been published in international magazines (e.g. *El Croquis*, *A&V*, *Arquitectura Viva*, *Casabella*, *Detail*, *Architektur Aktuell*, *AIT*, *Octogon*, *A+U*) and has received many awards and recognitions in Spain and abroad (e.g. the nominations and prizes in almost every edition of the annual awards issued by the Basque-Navarre School of Architecture, the Hyspalit prize for the best constructed architectural work, the Madrid School of Architecture Prize, the Madrid Municipality Prize, and various awards from the Higher Council of Spanish Architects, the Minister of Culture, FAD and Mies Van de Rohe Foundation, among others).

The architectural firm has often dealt with design challenges situated in historical contexts, and has thus widely experimented with the transformation of spaces connoted by artistic and architectural values. Among the various renovation works — e.g. the requalification of the *Bodega de Sarría* (Señorío de Sarría, 2008)<sup>15</sup> or the interior spaces of the *Bar Subsuelo* (Pamplona, 1991) — one stands out and comprehensively demonstrates the noticeable quality of Tabuenca and Leache's work in heritage places: the renovation of the *Palacio del Condestable*.

This palatial mansion is the last remaining civic building realized in Pamplona in the 16th century, and a pivotal example of the application of the Renaissance model. Strategically situated along one of the main urban arteries in the city center, *Calle Mayor y Jarauta*, in front of the *Iglesia de San Cernín*, the palace was realized starting from 1548 by Luis V de Beaumont<sup>16</sup>, who assumed the title of *IV Condestable*<sup>17</sup>, this is to say the chief of military forces. At the end of the 16th century the manor house was converted into the Bishop's residence. After serving as city hall since the half of the 18th century, hence definitely losing its residential identity, it was gradually modified to eventually accommodate commercial purposes (which led for example to the opening of eye-catching shop windows on the main front), until it entered a state of abandonment and finally started to run down. At the end of the 20th century, following the official acknowledgment of its value through its registration in the list of sites of cultural interest (1997), the structure was acquired by the Municipality which launched an



architectural competition aimed at starting a forward-looking renovation project, focused on the reactivation of the large building (articulating over 5.000 square meters, distributed over 3 floors) and on its adaptation for public use (as a community and cultural center, including exhibition halls, spaces for events, meetings, workshops or other activities, as well as a computer lab, a library and administrative offices).

The realization of the winner project (2001-08) proposed by Tabuenca and Leache started from an extensive cleaning process, focused on the elimination of the clearly inconsistent structures and on the resurface of the building's original appearance, distribution and size. Taking advantage from the collaboration of an interdisciplinary team (including conservators and historians), the initial works permitted the thorough understanding of the original formal and material connotation and organization of the overall complex and of each single space, the discovery of some elements that had been «hidden», and the reconstruction of a precise history of the changes that had altered the structure along its lifespan. This explorative and informative phase has played a fundamental part in the definition of the design strategies, allowing for the possibility to strongly anchor them to a critical narration of the history of the place.

Tabuenca and Leache's intervention is indeed based on a set of choices that cohere different objectives, pertaining to the necessity to give the building new uses and meanings, fitting in the contemporary city, as well as to the intent to restore its original configuration, in a version that acknowledges and integrates the transformations that occurred throughout the centuries (which are now considered as part of its life).

The complex renovation works were carried out by accurately combining restoration and remodeling stances<sup>18</sup>, which specifically pertained to spatial configurations and material stratifications.

The first matter focused on the verification and redefinition of the formal features of interior spaces, addressing their structures, dimensions and organization. This task was not related to the mere refurbishment of the original state — which includes various difficulties, drawing on the definitive loss of various elements, the discussed relationship between reconstruction and falsification, the criticalities

in identifying an «initial state» and rather in acknowledging a progressive understanding of the history of the site, which recognizes the value of the different phases that participated in its transformations, including the present one, hence imposing a critical selection of those features that need to be conserved (and those that can be «erased»), the focus on a material rather than a chronological interpretation and the development of design strategies that allow for a clear as well as fluid relationship between the «layers of times» that overlapped in this space. This conception triggered the search for the remodeling solutions that could revive the spatial memories of the building and, at the same time, adapt it to house new uses, based on a «piecemeal approach» — i.e. on the development of contextual analyses, strategies and interventions specifically designed for each room of the palace: although chorally participating in the shaping of a consistent overall vision, they indeed unfolded specific questions and required specific answers.

In parallel to consolidation works (e.g. the construction of a reinforced concrete structure aimed at bearing the ancient walls), major actions were dedicated to the recovery of the proportions of some spaces and the reframing of the lost relationships among different parts of the building — although the architects did not shy away from evaluating and operating small changes, for example in the update of the circulation (to make the connection among the various areas easier) or in the slight reduction of the heights of some rooms (when the accommodation of environmental control and lighting systems embedded in the floors required it). These interventions involved the whole palace, but some areas underwent special reconfigurations. These include the rooms in the lower level — which now house the dance room (in the oldest part of the complex, where the original dimensions of the space were recovered) and the auditorium (where the grandstand was excavated in a slope to gain the necessary height as well as to connect the pavement with the level of the pre-existing medieval structure) —, the new staircases and elevator, and especially the central patio<sup>19</sup>. This six-meter-tall opened hall used to be the main courtyard of the palace, following the traditional layout of the medieval dwelling structures in the Navarre area (which can be observed today in the nearby *Palacio del Marqués de San Adrián* in Tudela or in the *Palacio de Eguía y de*

*Jaso* in Estella); Tabuenca and Leache's intervention recovered this space from the serious alterations it had suffered throughout the centuries, by returning it to its original configuration through the redefinition of its size and the restoration of its stone arcades and octagonal columns, bearing a second ring of thin pine wood pillars. As the climate of Pamplona made an open patio inadequate for continuous use throughout the year, the room was covered with a glass roof, suspended on a sequence of laminated wood beams supported by the interior walls (hence avoiding the overloading of the stone columns); the beams' section, which is particularly elongated, allows them to operate also as a brise-soleil system reducing the effects of the sun's glare during summertime. This covering structure redefined the relationship with the light and improved the height of the room, hence reinforcing its evocative atmosphere and its vocation as a core space, whose enhancement facilitated the connections and raised the usability of the palace. The rooms distributed around the perimeter of the patio on the various levels retained their aesthetic and formal unity, i.e. they were not compartmentalized; this choice also referred to the need to conserve the original ceiling. Therefore, where a subdivision or the addition of further facilities were needed, they were produced through the reversible insertion of autonomous volumes (e.g. the services of the auditorium on the lower level) or structures (e.g. the panels dividing the workstations in the upper level).

On a second instance, the intervention concerned the material identity of the building. Following the necessary structural consolidation of the slabs (through ligature procedures), the floors were remade, although most of them were realized with recovered materials. Where possible, the original wooden coffered ceilings were restored, restaging the old wood-paneled structures that had been hidden behind false ones. Instead, all the vertical surfaces of the interior spaces were covered with a handmade limestone and chalk mixture, characterized by a distinctive rough texture that was intended to enhance the connotation of the surfaces — as well as, potentially, to conceal the possible formation of fissures due the delicate state of the original walls. Considering the spatial complexity of the palace, the uninterrupted presence of this highly connoted material enhances the continuity among the spaces (that consistently change in size,

proportions and features). This surface thus operates as a backdrop, providing a recurrent bonding presence, and at the same time predisposing the exhibition of the historic stratifications: in fact, although this layer covers the original walls, in some places it is interrupted so to let selected portions of the polychromatic figurative scenes which used to decorate the interiors of the palace emerge, somehow framing and drawing attention on these «windows opened onto the history of the building»<sup>20</sup> — and thus enacting a specific form of palimpsest.

The intertwine of conservative and transformative actions was also implemented in the renovation of the façades of the building, the found state of which underwent a profound change based on the restoration of the plaster and the recovery of the historical layout of the openings — including the closure of the shop-windows and the reframing of the original widows in the ground floor, the reopening of the arched row that had been closed in the higher level, hence also restoring the hierarchy between the different floors that used to connote the Renaissance building. An important part of the update implemented in the exterior appearance was focused on the corner between *Calle Mayor* and *Calle Jarauta*; since historical documents had proven its form had been modified (through a cut which had reshaped its relationship with the streets), the volume was returned to the original layout. While the homogeneous distribution of the new plaster reinforces the unity of the fronts, the base of the building displays the reconstruction of the corner through a strategical use of the materials — i.e. through the juxtaposition between the new cladding stone slabs and the old ones that were preserved on the left side, which recounts the recent changes occurred to the site. On the first level, the reshaping of the façade included the restoration of the original layout of the balcony; this iconic element which had disappeared after the cut of the corner (although reenacted through the application of a wooden structure inspired to the *Serliana*) was returned to its initial form; as the connoting pillar on the edge had gone lost, it was substituted by a thin stone column that was found on the site during the cleaning process.

The use of specific materials (wood, stone, terracotta, lime mortars and plaster) and their strategical interplay have a crucial role in exhibiting the complex, stratified history of the site. Together with the

renewed spatial configurations they participate in the enhancement of the character of the palace, «without yielding to a contemporary aesthetic» but not even reducing the intervention to a restoration of the historical features (most of which had also been irreparably lost). Tabuenca and Leache's work indeed «sustains the natural continuity between the old and the new»<sup>21</sup>, providing the building with a noticeable eloquence that enhances its relevance as a monument, witnessing the memory of the cultural, artistic and architectural values of the city, and as a civic space.

This work has a seminal value, as it remarkably exemplifies the possibility to overcome the obsolete dichotomies (i.e. «old» versus «new», «past» versus «present», «traditional» versus «modern») that seem to still participate in the ongoing discourses about interventions in historical contexts, to avoid the sterile talks about the modern disease of nostalgia or the need to idealize the past<sup>22</sup>, to prevent falsification and to balance the different positions that may be taken towards history (discarding ultra-preservation practices but at the same guaranteeing the conservation of the past), and rather to embrace the complex nature of architecture conceived as a practice which encompasses an endless remaking<sup>23</sup> and an everchanging nature<sup>24</sup>. Such understanding allows for the coexistence of past and present, and promotes a progressive vision of architecture, one that acknowledges it as a process: although it can attain an ideal state in a particular moment in time, its conditions are always changing, like an active palimpsest accursing new properties, qualities and potentialities in time.

Drawing on the intertwine of restorative actions (focused on the reenactment of previous elements and spaces) and additional or subtractive design strategies (based on the technological and functional upgrade of the spaces in relation to the changed conditions, needs and opportunities pertaining to the contemporary context), and by making the transformative process of the building visible, the palimpsestuous approach that Tabuenca and Leache implemented in the *Palacio del Condestable* produces a simultaneous recollection of the past in the forms, uses and meanings of the building, and allows for the creation of memory through the unfolding of time.

In this conception, the architect's role must be interpreted within a wider picture, one that acknowledges the many responsibilities

implied. As frequently recalled by Tabuenca and Leache themselves, especially when operating in such complex historical sites an architect should act like a «facilitator» for the definition of a new relationship between architecture and time. This does not mean he/she must remain neutral: all interventions require critical cognizance and impose to make choices that produce significant consequences, the responsibility for which must always be considered both in short and long terms, and in the variety of their implications, spanning from the conservation of material and immaterial traces that recount the history of the site and thus determine their transmission to future generations, to the design of a new page of this narration, that is outlined through the translation of the architect's vision, resulting from the coalescence of technical competences, cultural awareness and personal sensitivity, as well as from his/her personal conception of heritage, cultural good and collective memory.

The palimpsestuous approach builds on the aware acceptance of the many implications included in this commitment, imposing the architect to take a clear stand about complex technical, cultural and societal issues, and thus orienting the accomplishment of this task within the understanding of his/her intervention as an intermediate step in the life of the building, which therefore needs to coherently respond to the contemporary needs and possibilities and at the same time to dialogue with the preceding conditions and with those that will follow. Focused on the possibility to bridge different epochs and to make the continuity possible among the work of different architects (including that of time), this attitude addresses a special «integrity» which draws on the interpretation of architecture as a service provided to the city as well as to the history of architecture.

This mindset is particularly advantageous in the delicate transformation of public spaces, where usually the inscription of collective memory is more evidently involved. In this regard, it is interesting to highlight that Tabuenca and Leache have been frequently committed also in the renovation of significant urban spaces imbued with important cultural meanings.

Although these bear huge responsibilities in narrating the history of a place, they are often characterized by poor quality, not only reflected in the lack of adequate consistency or functional solutions



(which is a problem many cities are already trying to address), but rather in the little attention to the capability of forms and materials to convey messages and values.

The experiences carried out by Tabuenca and Leache in this realm outline the possibility to combine the upgrade of the inhabitability of open public spaces with the enhancement of the narrative potential of these environments. As recently highlighted by the winning proposal of the competition for the transformation of the area around the Monument to the Fallen in Pamplona, which is currently being realized, this strategy builds on the set up of a dialogue between pre-existing and new elements, i.e. on the development of a dialogic relationship between forms and materials that show up as distinctively pertaining to different epochs, technological conditions and functional programs but, at the same time, relate on to the other through formal and material references, juxtapositions, contrasts and links. This approach can be observed also in the precedent remodeling of the urban spaces surrounding the ancient Cathedral in Vitoria (2013-14), where the architects were faced with the necessity to improve the quality of the medieval core of the city (following its nomination as European Green Capital in 2012) while managing the challenge to facilitate pedestrians' mobility and to eliminate architectural barriers in a context characterized by a particularly sloping topography. These tasks were accomplished by strategically integrating new mechanical devices (a ramp and an elevator) in the renovation of historical stairs and ramps, consistently balancing the juxtaposition between old and new forms and materials — for example by aligning the metal walkway to the adjacent one covered in porphyry stone slabs, or exposing the transparent glass box of the elevator only in its proximity to the apse of the Cathedral while hiding its technical equipment underground, inside the base of the stone wall supporting the new stair.

These projects do not hide the new elements inserted in the historical landscape nor try any sort of camouflage, but rather they strategically modulate their insertion on the complex urban scene through the exploration of creative ways to make the new presences blend or dialogue with the existing ones, hence exhibiting a transformative process as an endemic advancement inscribed into the overall history of the site.

Tabuenca and Leache provide a precious lesson on the management of the complex implications of intervention in historical contexts, and exemplify the application of a design attitude which assumes the responsibility to consistently modify the pre-existing conditions but applies them in the framework of a wider picture, one that allows space and time to coalesce in the coexistence of the different layers of the architectural narrative.

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the word derives from the Latin *palimpsestus*, which refers to Ancient Greek παλινψηστός (*palímpsēstos*, i.e. «scraped again»), a compound word that literally means «scraped clean and ready to be used again». The origin of this term dates back to ancient times — when writing surfaces were rare and thus were often used more than once — and originally described an early form of recycling in which an old document was erased to make room for a new one; because of the particular materials and techniques employed (e.g. Greeks and Romans used parchments made of lamb, calf, or goat kid skin, or wax-coated tablets, where the writing was erased by scraping off or by smoothing the wax surface), the erasing process wasn't completely effective, so the original traces could often be distinguished under the newer writing; this process allowed for the conservation or recovering of many fundamental texts (number of manuscripts only survived as palimpsests, e.g. Cicero's *De Republica* is one of many documents thus recovered from a palimpsest). Nowadays, in colloquial usage the word palimpsest not only refers to such a document, but it is used to denote an object made or worked upon for one purpose and later reused for another, and in general to anything that has multiple layers.

<sup>2</sup> See for example A. Corboz, «Le territoire comme palimpseste», *Diogenes*, 121, January-March 1983, pp. 12-31.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have embraced the conception of history pertaining to a particular model of temporality which indicates a view of history based on the overlaying of competing versions of the same tale, and perhaps erasing one another; this palimpsest version of

the manuscript account of history as an «aggregate of activities» draws on from Thomas Carlyle's essay *On History* (1830).

<sup>4</sup> One of the first authors employing this metaphor (in reference to architectural design practices) was Rodolfo Machado, in his essay «Old Buildings as Palimpsest», *Progressive Architecture*, November 1976, pp. 46-49. In particular he expands the connoting features of the remodeling project, where «the past takes on a greater significance because it, itself, is the material to be altered and reshaped. The past provides the already written, the marked "canvas" on which each successive remodeling will find its own place. Thus the past becomes a "package of sense", of built up meaning to be accepted (maintained), transformed or suppressed (refused)» (p. 47).

<sup>5</sup> «... the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, not in its gold. Its glory is its age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of mysterious sympathy which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of Humanity». J. Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1880), Dover, New York 1989, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> «Layering is used as a deliberate device of aesthetic expression — the visible accumulation of overlapping traces from successive periods, each trace modifying and being modified by the new additions, to produce something like a collage of time. It is the sense of depth in an old city that is so intriguing». K. Lynch, *What Time is this Place?*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1972, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> R. Machado, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> G. Brooker, S. Stone, *Re-Readings, Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodeling Existing buildings*, RIBA, London 2004, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> The vast bibliography on the topic started from such essays as those by Camillo Boito (e.g. *Questioni pratiche di Belle Arti*, Milan 1903) and Gustavo Giovannoni (e.g. *Questioni di Architettura*, Rome 1929), spanning from the *Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments* (1931) and the *Venice Charter* (1964), and further expanding in an exponential way throughout the 20th century.

<sup>10</sup> M. Dezzi Bardeschi, *Restauro: punto e da capo*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 1991, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> M. Y. Bodeman, *In den Wogen der Erinnerung*, dtv, Bodeman Munich 2002, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> S. Hoelscher, *Heritage*, in S. Macdonald (ed.), *Companion to Museum Studies*, Blackwell, Oxford 2006, p. 201.

<sup>13</sup> S. Macdonald, *Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, Routledge, London 2013.

<sup>14</sup> G. Brooker, *Adaptation. Strategies for Interior Architecture and Design*, Bloomsbury, London 2017.

<sup>15</sup> The restoration of the Sarria wine cellar, which was realized by the businessman Félix Huarte in the 1950s, revolves around the elimination of those structures that were added over time, and the enhancement of the original parts (e.g. large cylindrical vats made out of reinforced concrete) that were given a new purpose and utility; this intervention improved the clarity and the simplicity of the original structures and, while giving it a contemporary life, it left the overall appearance of the complex intact, restoring and valorizing the building's industrial character that had been disfigured when the modernization of winemaking processes had turned both the vats and the warehouse obsolete and led to their abandonment.

<sup>16</sup> This Navarrese nobleman, Count of Lerín and Constable of Navarre, was a member of the Beaumont Family, that dominated the area since 14th century.

<sup>17</sup> The term comes from the Latin noun *stabuli*, referred to the person in charge of the stables, and later evolved to become an attribution, used in different contexts to designate the courtly positions related to high military ranks, or to refer to officials or deputy officers.

<sup>18</sup> G. Brooker, S. Stone, *Adaptation. Strategies for Interior Architecture and Design*, RIBA Enterprises, London 2004, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> F. Bucci, «Un vuoto contro le falsificazioni della storia», *Casabella*, 874, June 2017, pp. 43-50.

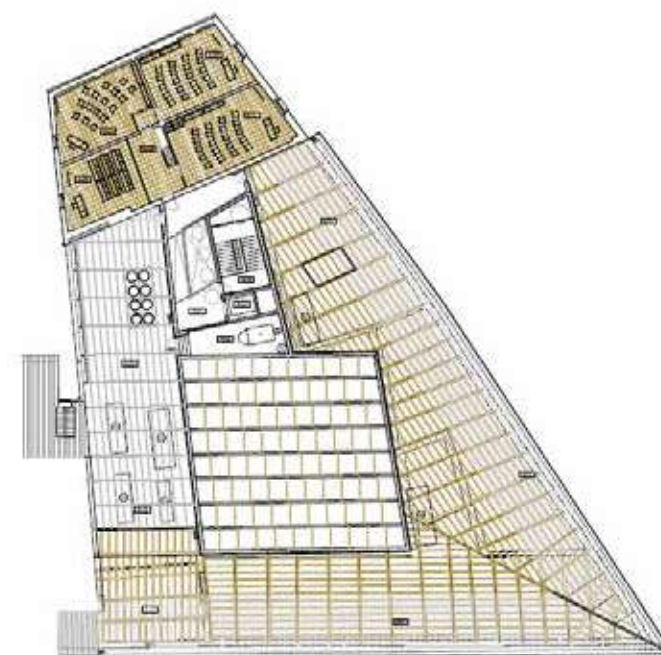
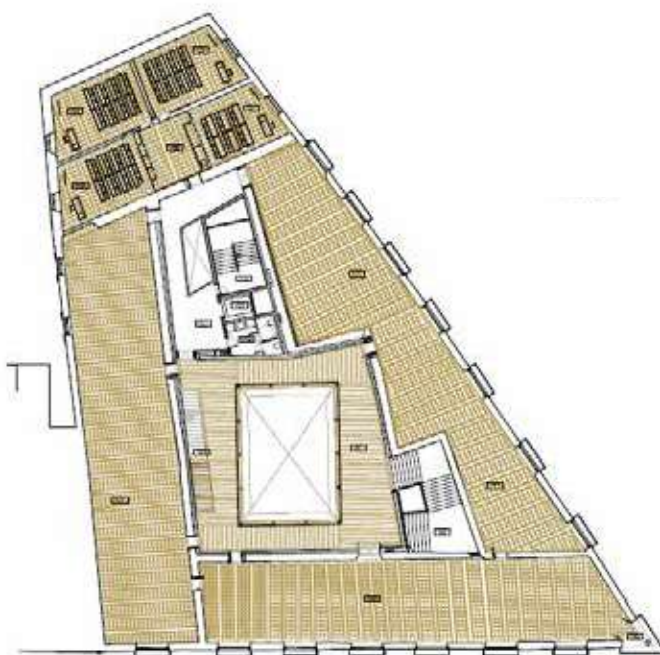
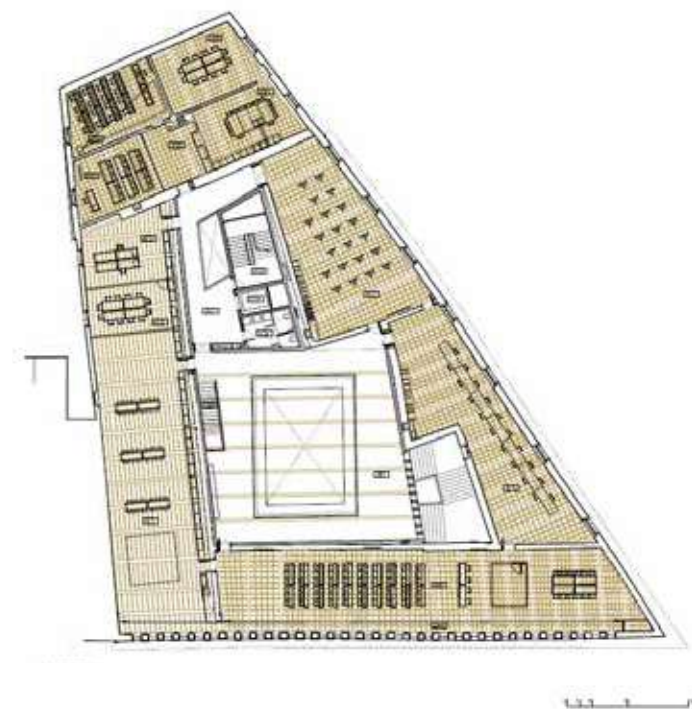
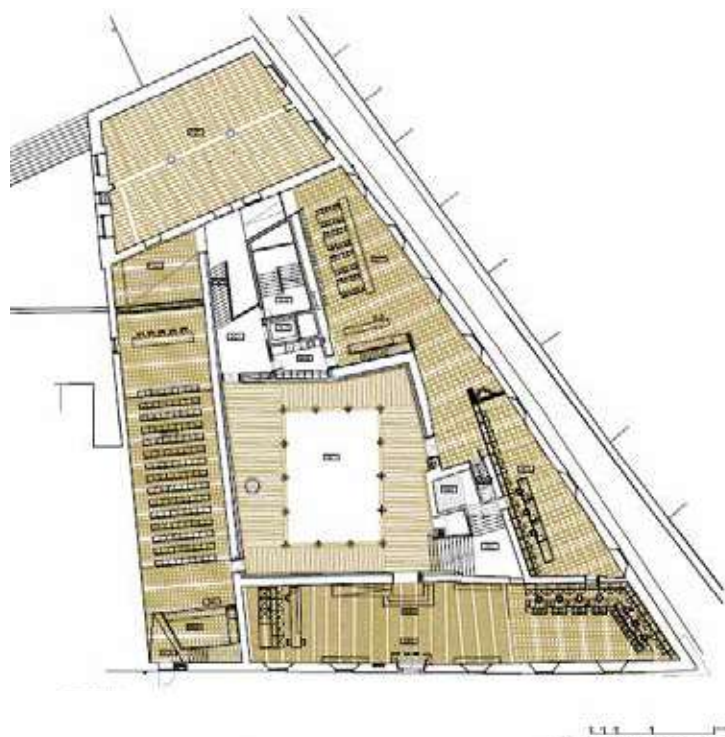
<sup>20</sup> Such words were addressed by Tabuenca and Leache commenting on the building during the lecture they gave within the 2016 edition of *MANTOVARCHITETTURA* (San Cristoforo Urban Center, May 19).

<sup>21</sup> Ivi.

<sup>22</sup> D. Lowenthal, «Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory», *Geographical Review*, 65 (1), January 1975, pp. 1-36.

<sup>23</sup> N. Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1978, p. 6.

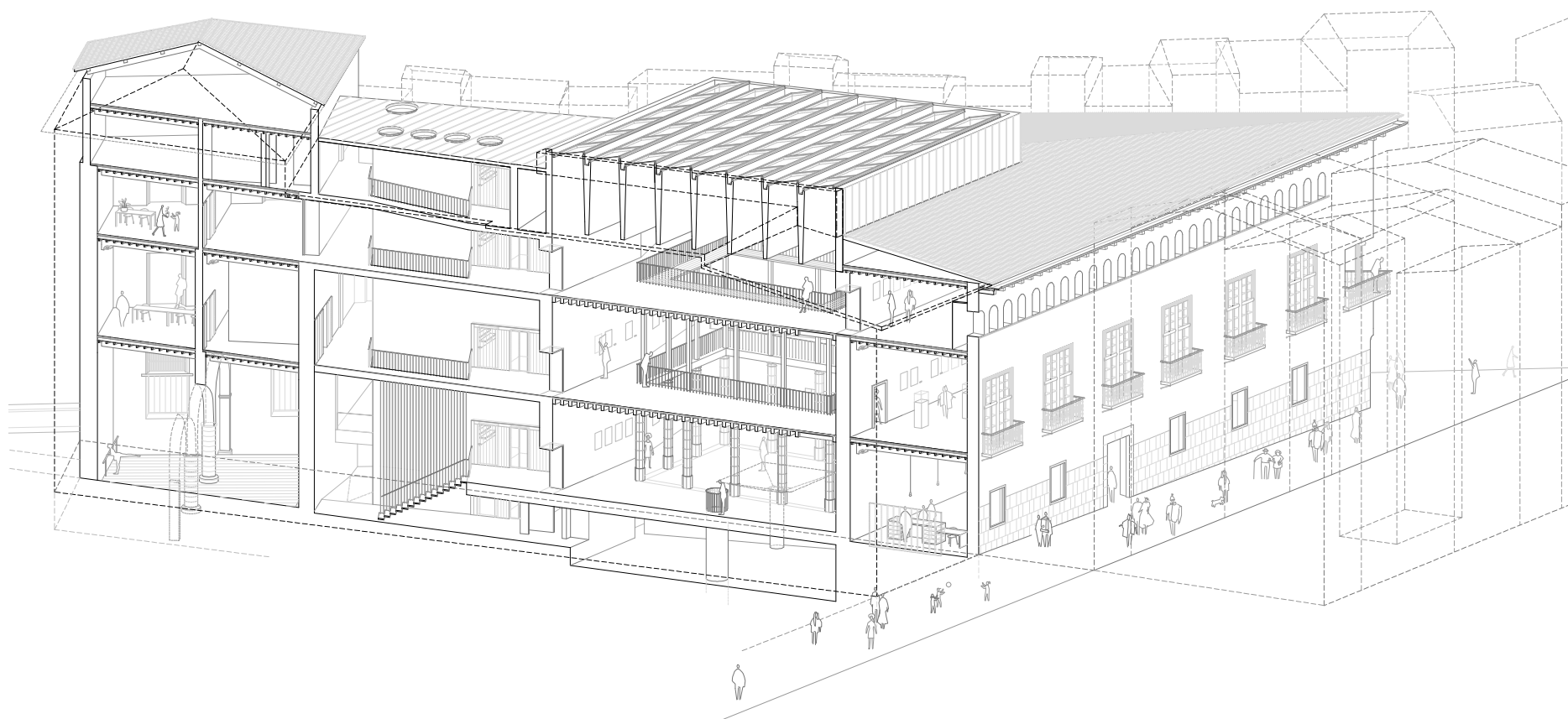
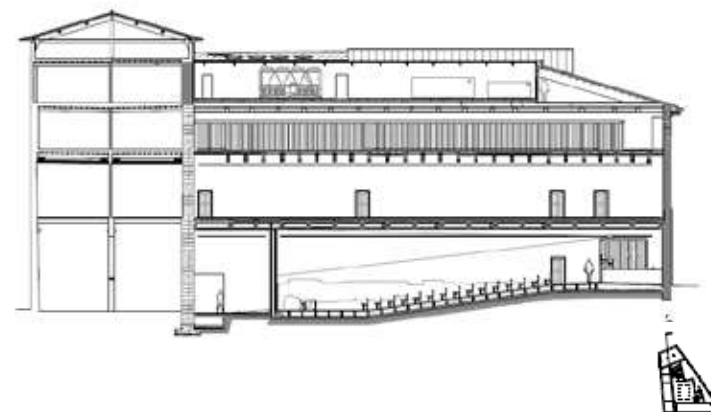
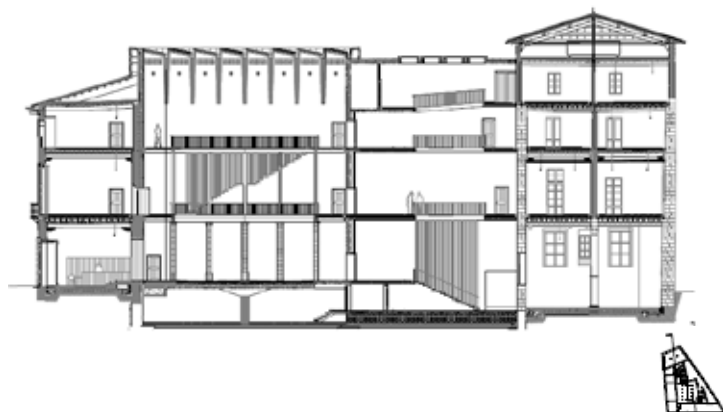
<sup>24</sup> As explained by Eduardo Souto de Moura during *The Kenneth Frampton Endowed Lecture*, that was given at the Columbia University in 2012: «architecture lives to be transformed and therein lies its true calling».



Tabuenca & Leache  
Arquitectos, *Palacio del  
Condestable* (Pamplona,  
Spain 2001-08).

182  
Ground floor, second floor, third  
floor and fourth floor plans  
© Tabuenca & Leache.





**183**  
Courtyard section and  
axonometric section  
© Tabuenca & Leache.

**184**  
Assembly hall section  
© Tabuenca & Leache.



**185 | 186**  
The building before and after  
the intervention © Tabuenca  
& Leache.



**187**  
The central patio © Tabuenca &  
Leache.





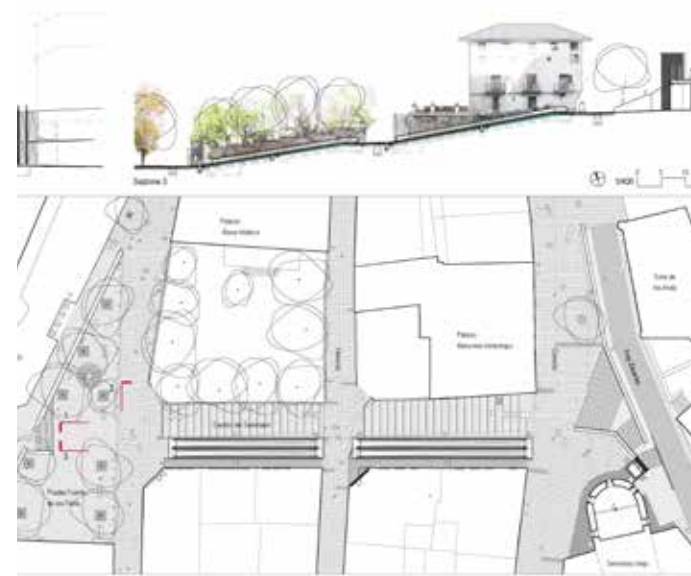
**188**  
One of the rooms on the first  
floor © Tabuenca & Leache.





Tabuenca & Leache  
Arquitectos, Improvement of  
the access to the Cathedral  
(Vitoria, Spain 2013-14).

**189**  
The new stair and the elevator  
© Tabuenca & Leache.



**190 191**  
Site plan and overall view  
© Tabuenca & Leache.

# Tony Fretton. Calculated Ambiguity

Angelo Lorenzi

There is something about Tony Fretton's architecture that is not easy to capture. Something that draws us in and makes it difficult for us to detach ourselves or to forget his work. It's something seemingly simple, that has to do with forms. Sometimes it is the way his buildings hug the ground, as if placed there directly, with no mediating elements. Sometimes it is the way his windows seem to create a natural relationship with the exterior or, more in general, the way his buildings relate with their surroundings, like actors on stage. But at the same time, it is something more complex. It has to do with the character of the forms, their incompleteness, their «calculated ambiguity»<sup>1</sup>. And it involves our own experience, our ability to recognize and give a name to a place, and to discover, in a space, or in a figure, that which already belongs to us and that which we have not yet discovered, that which is familiar and that which is unusual. In Tony Fretton's work there is an intent to communicate, through architecture, content that is not limited to architecture but instead involves our civil and social participation. Based on an ethical and political idea of the profession of architect, his work consists of welcoming buildings that respond to people and to their surroundings, buildings that are open to a multiplicity of uses and interpretations. In part because in his own design practice he restored the ties between architecture, profession, and life, Fretton's refined, solitary works have had a profound and important influence on the international discourse. In London in the early 1990s, a group of young architects formed around Fretton<sup>2</sup>. Contemporary British architecture began to acquire a new identity linked to design as critical thinking and research, and soon it was one of the most interesting developments on the international scene. From his very first works, Tony Fretton had also become an alternate point of reference for many architects in other parts of the world, a Master to look to from afar<sup>3</sup>.

Tony Fretton graduated from the Architectural Association of London at the end of the 1960s, during a time of great cultural ferment. While at the AA, Fretton was particularly struck by the teachings of James Gowan<sup>4</sup>, who designed the Leicester Engineering Building with James Stirling. Based on extraordinary books like *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* by Rudolf Wittkower, Gowan taught about the architecture of the Italian Renaissance and how it has been reworked through successive abstractions by Modern thought. Tony

Fretton's studies of the Modern Movement, in particular the works of certain renowned British architects, like Alison and Peter Smithson, James Stirling, and of course James Gowan, was a decisive part of his formation. Fretton also cultivated an interest from early on in the world of contemporary art and in particular the work of Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd, as well as such performance artists of the late 1970s as Robert Morris, Chris Burden and Dan Graham. In 1982, after a period of working for various large practices, including as Ove Arup, he founded *Tony Fretton Architects*. His firm was limited in size and from the beginning it was characterized by a certain type of project — small-to-medium scale, and often tied to the theme of exposition, such as art galleries, artists' or collectors' homes, and museums — and by the importance he gave to theoretical and critical reflection, in his writing and teaching activities, on the act of doing. Fretton has taught at a number of schools of architecture in the UK and elsewhere. From 1999 to 2013 he was Chair of Architectural Design and Interiors at the Technical University of Delft, the Netherlands. Many of his writings center on the relationships and analogies between teaching, writing, and designing, all activities tied to the act of doing and open to exchange with others<sup>5</sup>. Some of his written works consist of critical reflections on his architectural works and the themes of his research, while others are dedicated to his master and other figures of reference. Among the masters almost contemporary to Fretton is Álvaro Siza, to whom he has dedicated several writings and whose research is in many aspects very close to his own.

In the work of Tony Fretton, the relationship between the exterior space of the city and the interior space of the home is crucially important. The context is assumed to be not just the physical but also the cultural landscape<sup>6</sup> — not in the sense of an abstract idea but as a concrete construction to be interpreted and continued. The time of a city is both the long arc of history and the brief moments of the daily lives of its inhabitants and visitors. The variety of places, scales, and characteristics — open or closed, collective or almost private — is an element of richness of cities that we find in many buildings of the past and something which architects, in every era, must seek. An awareness of the ties between city, life, and architecture gives the works of Tony Fretton a wealth of inventions and spatial variations. It is alternately

sumptuous and formal, abstract and theatrical, familiar and intimate. The language of Tony Fretton's architecture is not easy to define. In some ways it is an abstract language, with simple, elementary shapes, but the forms that make up the buildings, though abstract, evoke the well-known forms that we associate with habitation. The geometry of the plans is never rigid or schematic, and it is always rendered more human by imperfect, leftover spaces and by attention to how people might use and move through the building. «The abstraction is tolerant, not monolithic, and does not exclude additions»<sup>7</sup>. The interiors are often configured as a succession of rooms. The shapes of these rooms are as clear as those in a Palladian house, with spaces defined in terms of form even before function. Their sequence, their transition from one to the other, the different ways in which they face the city, is an important part of the project<sup>8</sup>. In the architecture of Tony Fretton, the combinations of environments and formal sequences often make reference to an idea of classicism. The ability to reinvent classicism using different forms, and without ruling out exceptions or a disregard for the rules, is a typical characteristic of the history of British architecture and art, and one of its most profound features. In this way, a classic language is reinterpreted from a different point of view and by a different land.

«Despite being empty, photographed as it was upon completion and before occupation, I feel I can already imagine ways in which this space may be used. The fireplace and the door, squat against the scale of the window to the outside, suggest a setting for domestic life, but the height of the room, with its folded ceiling and those large windows, indicates a level of luxury and is suggestive of a more formal use — a place to gather large numbers of people. The scale of the room has something to do with its projection outside, raised on the first floor, continuous as it is with a culture of large, light-filled formal spaces within the privileged area of Chelsea, in London. By the details, I know this room to be of contemporary design, but it incorporates an understanding of the culture of tradition, of manners, of decorum, of hierarchy and respect. However, somehow, I can imagine behaving in a number of ways in this room. I do not feel constrained to be polite, but I can simply be»<sup>9</sup>. The room described by Stephen Bates is the large double-height living room of the Red House, built by Tony Fretton in London



(1998-2000). A room worth remembering in the history of contemporary architecture, for the proportions of the space (approximately 9 meters wide, 12 long, and 6 high), for its architectural elements, and for its large windows, suspended somewhere between formal elegance and domestic warmth. On one side the windows put the room in relationship with Tite Street, which it overlooks, and on the other side they put it in relationship with the garden, which is hidden within the lot.

London is a city built in many areas without a unitary design, by an addition of parts. There is considerable discontinuity, with high quality architecture standing alongside ordinary buildings. Fretton looks at the city in all of its parts: the successful, the contradictory, and the accidental. The city is the surroundings with whom the building relates, the street onto which it faces. Tite Street was built at the end of the 1800s, when Chelsea had become a fashionable neighbourhood that attracted artists and writers. The architecture of the buildings along the street are pragmatic and professional in nature, and uneven in terms of quality. The Red House, a three-story building for an art collector, adheres to the façade line of Tite Street. The different alignments of the nearby houses generate the two alignments of which the façade of the house is composed. The elevation follows the tripartite principal, present in much of the surrounding architecture, emphasized by an order of slender lesenes and string courses and by the large central bay window of the double-height living room on the first floor. In his descriptions of the building, Tony Fretton has often made reference to two guiding design concepts: the Dutch canal house and the Venetian palace. In both, the façade is the element that establishes the relationship between the exterior and the interior. This relationship is built on the size and proportions of the windows. The large windows of the canal houses in Amsterdam reveal to passersby the warmth of the interior spaces deep within, while for those inside, they open views onto the city, so that the continuity that ties together the inside with the outside becomes a concrete and physical entity.

Reiterating the tripartite, almost Palladian structure<sup>10</sup> announced by the front elevation, the plan of the Red House is composed of rooms that are carefully controlled in terms of size, shape, and proportions, and sequenced according to a familiar itinerary and idea of

domestic living. Nonetheless, the classic structure of the composition is contradicted by a prosaic scale and by a system of asymmetries, exceptions, and omissions that make the spaces complex and sometimes unpredictable. Fretton interrupted the design path before the work could become a perfectly defined figure. Thus the forms are left open, enigmatic, suspended between familiarity and estrangement.

Tony Fretton has had the opportunity to experiment in a number of urban contexts in Europe, in particular in the Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium. His design for a building on *Tietgens Grund* in *Frederiksstaden* (2005-10) dealt with a long-unresolved point in the center of Copenhagen. *Frederiksstaden* is an area of the city built in the mid-18th century, on an orderly neoclassical layout, to tie the royal palaces and new administrative zone to the ancient city center. Positioned along its main axis is the *Frederiksgade*, a square with the Marble Church at its center. The construction of the square had remained unfinished until the end of the 1800s, when the Danish industrialist, Carl Tietgen, obtained, in exchange for finishing construction of the church, authorization to complete the residential buildings along the perimeter of the square. Nonetheless, the northwest corner, where a few medieval buildings are still present, remained unfinished. Over the centuries this corner ended up with the name of *Tietgens Grund*. Because of the sensitive urban context and the instructions on the part of the municipality to find agreement between the 19th-century *Beaux Arts* portion, the older buildings, and the modern insertion, this project provides a particularly interesting opportunity to understand and appreciate the urbanity of Fretton's architecture and his approach to interpreting a new building in a cultural and architectural context. The 19th-century architecture of the square is unpretentious and conventional in compositional terms, but skillfully executed. Inside, its apartments are spacious and comfortable, while outside the façades present a dignified urban face. Fretton recognized that this type of architecture is capable of building highly inhabitable cities, that it is the type of architecture that has shaped most of Europe's cities, and that a comparison with this tradition was precisely what he was facing. The outcome of this challenge is a sense of measure and a concrete relationship with the alignments and architectural elements of the surrounding buildings.

Tony Fretton articulated his building on *Tietgens Grund* by re-elaborating the *Beaux Arts* architecture of the square into different and abstract forms. Nonetheless, this process of abstraction did not result in the reduction or negation of conventional forms. The large pavilion roofs of the 19th-century buildings became an attic level, stepped back with respect to the façade; the cornices and lesenes of the orders did not disappear entirely, but instead were flattened into an elementary post and lintel system; the windows, which again play a decisive role, were enlarged and simplified. In an excellent piece on the work of Tony Fretton, Martin Steinmann discussed at length the architect's careful design of the window construction<sup>11</sup>. Often they are enclosed at the sides by metal elements with ventilation doors. These elements are neither entirely part of the window nor entirely part of the wall. Here it seems as if Fretton wanted to reinterpret, by abstraction, the relationship which, in the convention of classical architecture, is established between the window and the wall by the moldings, that is the transition elements between opening and wall. Surely one of Tony Fretton's most interesting investigations is this re-elaboration of the figures and forms of traditional architecture, and their reactivation through the application of remnants, transpositions, and slight distortions.

The project for the *Fuglsang Kunstmuseum* (2005-08), on the island of Lolland in Denmark, began as competition submission. The art museum is located in rural surroundings, in the continuous, completely flat landscape of the Danish island<sup>12</sup>. The extraordinary site was once an old agricultural estate and is now used for cultural events. On the south side of the property is the Manor House, a mid-19th century red brick building in classic/romantic style, on the west side is a long agricultural building in white-painted brick with a large double-pitched roof, and on the north side is another agricultural building in light-colored brick. Contrary to suggestions contained in the competition brief, Fretton opted not to position the new building on the east side of the site, which would have enclosed the courtyard/lawn space formed by the existing buildings. Instead he decided to situate the building along the north side, so as to leave the courtyard open on the east, with its views of the delicate rural landscape and, in the background, the sea. The new building is a compact, elongated volume, mainly on one

level. It was designed to house a notable art collection that includes drawings, paintings and statues, from the Danish Golden Age (the first half of the 19th century) to contemporary art. There is also a space for temporary exhibitions.

The new art museum is sited so that it establishes a unique relationship with the Manor House. While it echoes the orderly, symmetrical composition of the Manor House, the link between the two buildings is made more complex and is in part contradicted by the articulation of the parts and by the difference in axis and alignments. The volumes are differentiated to indicate the various museum functions. The large glazed entrance and reception space, which looks onto the courtyard, provides access to the galleries, arranged on either side of a long central corridor. The volume on the south side, designed to house the antique collections, is composed of a row of three square-shaped rooms linked by small vestibules. The sequence ends with two additional rooms, the first for housing drawings and the second for sculpture. Only the latter room opens onto the landscape by means of a large window. On the other side of the corridor are two large galleries for modern and contemporary art and temporary exhibitions.

The various exhibition spaces are arranged according to a standard gallery layout, but their articulation and character are strongly differentiated. Similar to the succession of rooms in the Manor House, each gallery has its own scale and its own architectural character. There are differences in the heights of the rooms, in the ways they are linked to the others, in the design of the ceilings and the wood flooring, and in the configurations of the daylighting, which is provided by skylights in various different shapes inserted into the roof. The volume of the building that houses classical painting is more formal, while the other spaces are more flexible and neutral. The square rooms are illuminated by light cannons in light-colored brick. Emerging just behind the main façade, they give individuality to each of the rooms. The autonomy between the various parts is underscored by their variations in size and by the fact that the entrances to the different volumes are not aligned with each other. In his description of the project, Tony Fretton emphasizes the relationship between the form of the building and its use. The entrance to the museum is an ample space where visitors can gather. The exhibition spaces, arranged along a central corridor, do

not indicate a single itinerary but instead suggest various alternative paths ways of interacting with the artworks: more intimate and personal in the area for antique art, and more open and choral in the area for contemporary art. The museum visitors are invited to spread out, to create their own itineraries. At the end of the central corridor is a small room, almost square, with large picture windows on three sides that open onto the view toward east and the vast expanse of countryside. This room contains no works of art but only a few places to sit. Visitors are immersed in the landscape upon arrival at the Fuglsang estate, they see numerous similar landscapes in the paintings on display, and in this last room they find themselves once again surrounded by the long flat expanses of farmland.

Tony Fretton's work has been recognized on an international scale for many years. He has been awarded numerous prizes and prestigious commissions throughout Europe. Among his more recent projects are the Two Apartments Building in Groningen (2001), the British Embassy in Warsaw (2006-09), the Town Hall and Administrative Centre in Deinze, Belgium (2009-17), the Tower Wharf Restaurant in London (2010-12), and the Residential Towers in Antwerp, Belgium (2016). But I would like to conclude by going back in time to one of his very first buildings, which in many respects was his architectural debut, the Lisson Gallery (1990-92). It was this small art gallery that put the work of Fretton at the center of the international debate. The building is inserted into a compact, densely built street in the London neighbourhood of Marylebone, on a site oriented in the north-south direction. It is laid out on four floors, with the first two devoted to exhibition spaces and the top two for residential use. The ground floor is situated approximately one meter below street level, making the gallery space easily visible to anyone looking in, as if it were a stage. Fretton decided to orient all of the exhibition spaces northward, looking onto the street, and turn the residential spaces toward south, facing the rear of the lot. The front façade is composed of floor-height horizontal strips. Large glazed openings at the two lower floors, open to the public, link the exhibition spaces with the city. The wall surfaces of the two upper floors iterate, in abstract form, the alignments and features of the adjacent houses.

The design of the Lisson Gallery drew on an approach to modern architecture that retains a social, everyday, almost authorless dimension. At the same time, Fretton does not renounce the use of underlying figures that are capable of creating an unexpected and suspended relationship between the building and its context, and between the interior space and the urban multiplicity of people who come into relationship with the building. In his book *Never Modern*, Irenée Scalbert comments with regards to having the Lisson Gallery photographed: «Fretton at first declined to commission the conventional architectural pictures preferred by magazines. Instead he asked Chris Steele-Perkins of *Magnum* to take black-and-white, fly-on-the-wall photographs of the kind seen at newsstands. People were the subject. Fretton's point was clear: architecture must not be separated from everyday experience. Far from suppressing reflections on the glass (like architectural photographers do), Steele-Perkins emphasized them. He showed the building to be modern in its transparency and 'critical' in its reflectivity — like the sculptures of Dan Graham that had been inspirational to Fretton and that were exhibited to celebrate the Lisson Gallery's opening»<sup>13</sup>.



1 T. Fretton, *Calculated Ambiguity*, in *A E I O U. Articles, Essays, Interviews and Out-takes*, Jap Sam Books, Heijningen 2018, pp. 117-120.

2 «In the early 1990s a number of architects, academics and artists came together in a rather fluid manner, meeting regularly in my Bloomsbury apartment. Tony Fretton was older than most of us and had already established a clear critical position. The conversations we had, and sometimes the arguments, were instructive in the emergence of what some refer to as a London architecture. [...] But Tony Fretton, with his anarchist leanings and interest in performance art, was much closer to us. In fact, it would be disingenuous to understate the impact he had on the definition of our individual position». J. Sergison, *Working with Tony Fretton*, in *The Lisson Gallery Sketchbooks: Tony Fretton*, Opening Lines III, Drawing Matter, Somerset 2018. The group included, among others: Tony Fretton, Mark Pimlott, Jonathan Sergison, Stephen Bates, Adam Caruso, Peter St. John, and Jonathan Woolf; F. Tranfa, «Super Normal», *Casabella*, 834, February 2014, pp. 4-25.

3 D. Turnbull, *Tony Fretton*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1995; M. Cousins, K. Frampton, T. Fretton, *Architecture, Experience and Thought. Projects by Tony Fretton Architects*, Architectural Association, London 1998; «Tony Fretton Architects. Abstraction and Familiarity», *A+t*, Barcelona 2001; M. Cousins,

M. Steinmann, T. Fretton, «Tony Fretton Architects», *2G*, 46, 2008; H. Wirz (ed.), *Tony Fretton Architects*, Quart Verlag, Luzern 2010; P. Buxton, C. Neve (eds.), *Tony Fretton Architects. Building and their Territories*, Birkhäuser, Basel 2013.

4 E. Woodman (ed.), *Architecture of James Gowan: Modernity and Reinvention*, Black Dog Publishing, London 2008.

5 T. Fretton, *A E I O U. Articles*, op. cit.

6 *Tony Fretton Architects. Building and their Territories*, Birkhäuser, Basel 2013.

7 P. Vermeulen, *Against alienation*, in H. Wirz (ed.), *Tony Fretton Architects*, Quart Verlag, Luzern 2010, p. 12.

8 M. Cousins, «Drawing Upon: the Work of Tony Fretton», *2G*, 46, 2008, pp. 4-8.

9 S. Bates, *Ten Rooms*, in *Sergison Bates architects*, Paper 2, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 2007, p. 116.

10 R. Maxwell, «Tony Fretton Architects. Casa per un collezionista», *Casabella*, 710, April 2003.

11 M. Steinmann, «Of buildings and people», *2G*, 46, 2008, pp. 9-12.

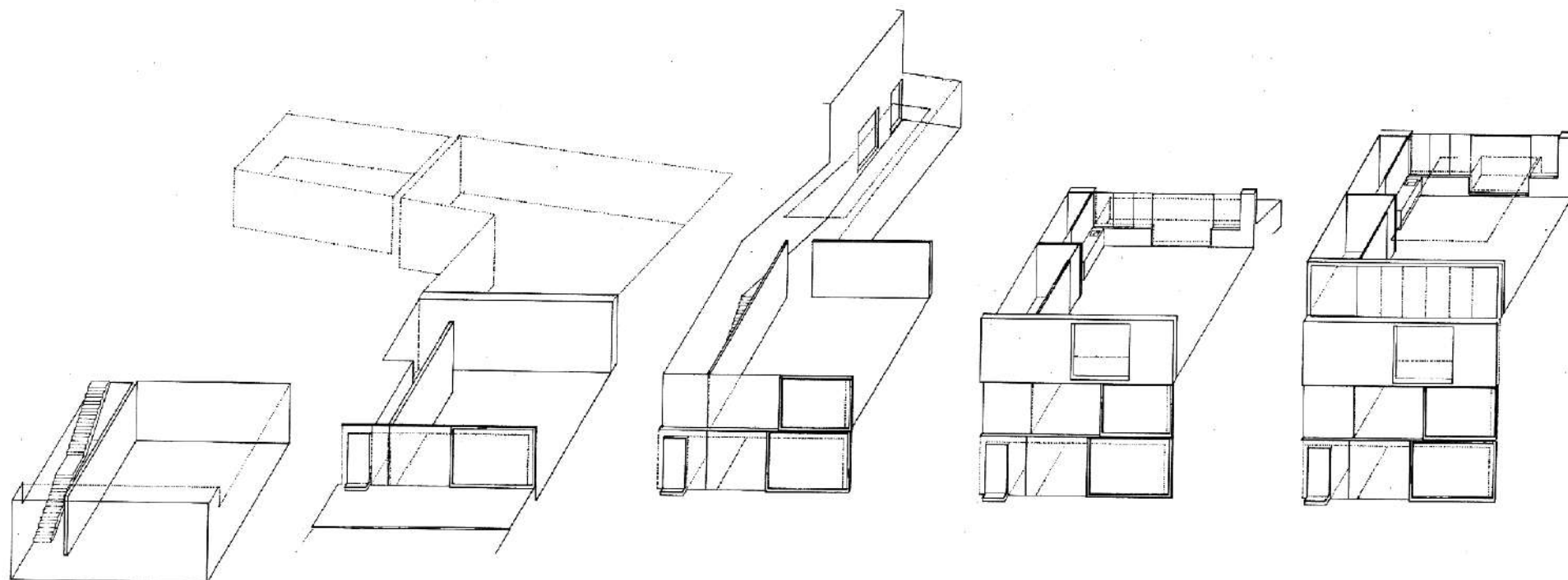
12 T. N. Fabienke, G. Oelsner (eds.), *Our Best Pieces*, Fuglsang Kunstmuseum, Toreby 2008; N. Braghieri, «Tony Fretton, tre opere», *Casabella*, 769, September 2008, pp. 6-31.

13 I. Scalbert, *Never Modern*, Park Books, Zurich 2013, pp. 144-145.



Tony Fretton, *Lisson Gallery* (London, United Kingdom 1990-92).

192 The main front © Tony Fretton Architects.



**193**  
Axonometric views sketched  
by the architect © Tony Fretton  
Architects.



**194 | 195**  
Interior spaces © Tony Fretton  
Architects.



Tony Fretton, *The Red House*  
(London, United Kingdom  
1998-2000).

196 197  
The main front and a detail of  
the covering material  
© Tony Fretton Architects.

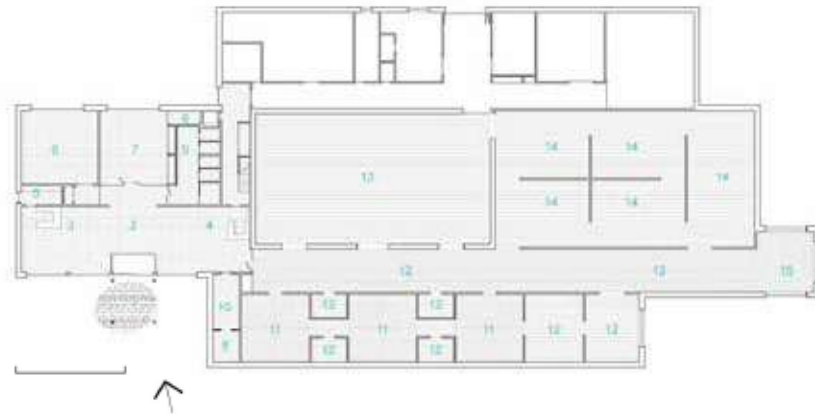
198  
Street elevation © Tony Fretton  
Architects.



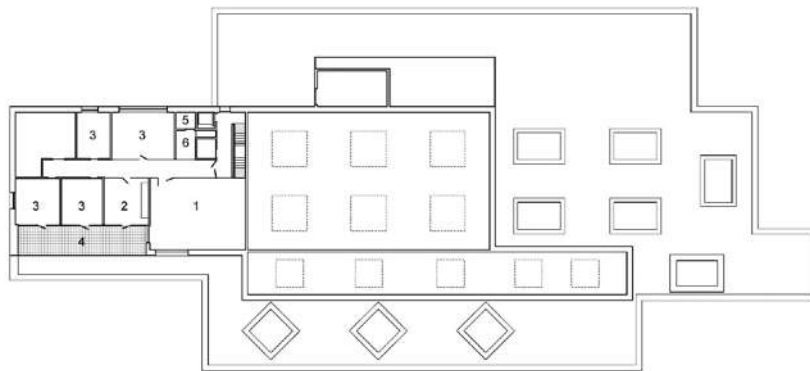


Tony Fretton, *Fuglsang Kunstmuseum* (Fuglsang, Denmark 2005-08).

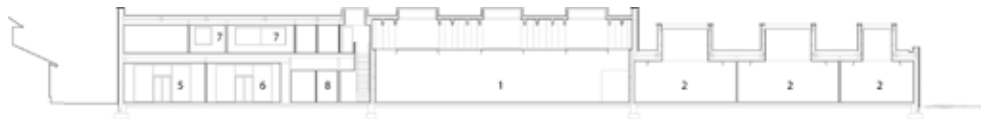
**199**  
The new museum next to the pre-existing building.  
© Tony Fretton Architects.



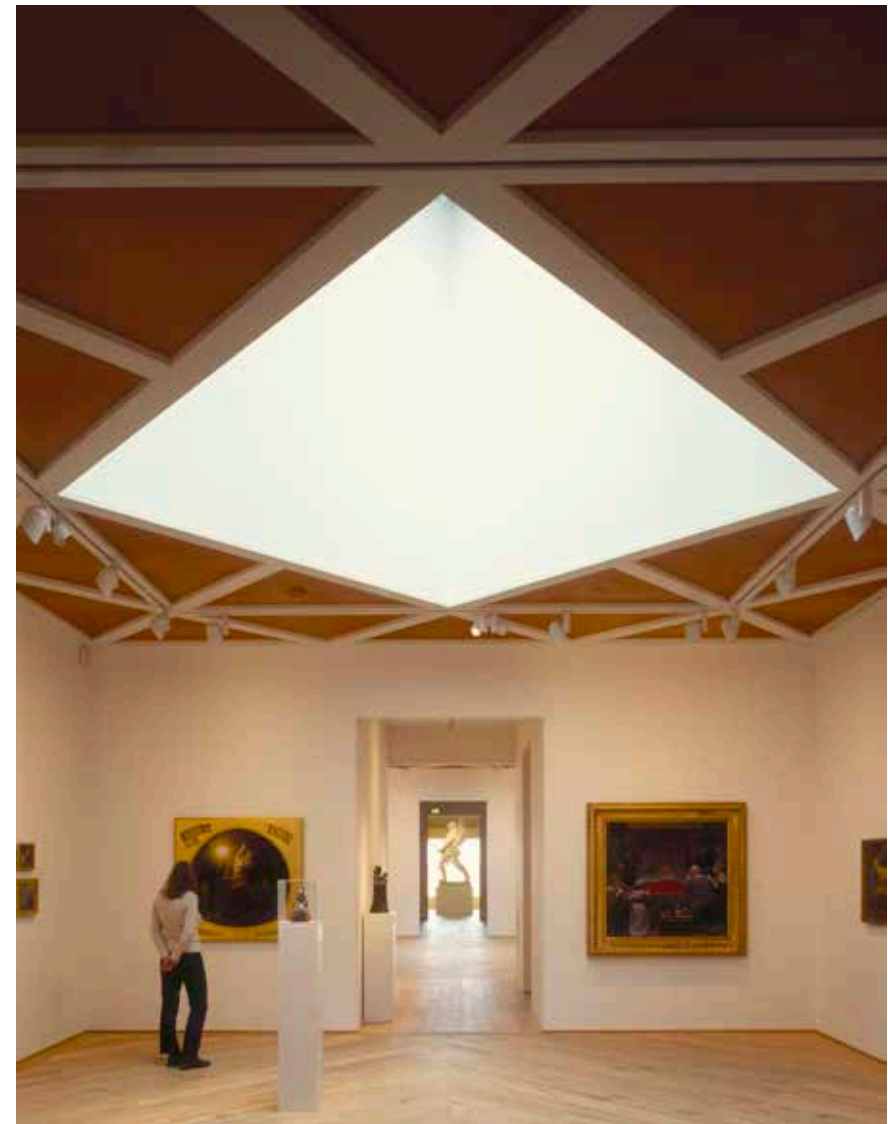
- |                            |                 |                              |
|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Entrance canopy          | 5 Kitchen       | 10 Cloakroom                 |
| 2 Foyer                    | 6 Lecture room  | 11 Exhibition (Older Art)    |
| 3 Café                     | 7 Art classroom | 12 Exhibition space          |
| 4 Ticket desk/<br>Bookshop | 8 Store         | 13 Temporary exhibition room |
|                            | 9 WCs           | 14 Exhibition (Modern Art)   |



- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1 Library    | 4 Terrace   |
| 2 Staff room | 5 WC        |
| 3 Office     | 6 Cloakroom |

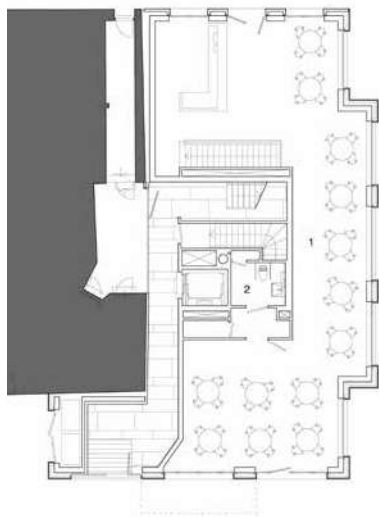


**200**  
Ground floor and first floor  
plans, and longitudinal section  
© Tony Fretton Architects.



**201**  
The museum's galleries  
© Tony Fretton Architects.





Tony Fretton, *Tietgens Grund* in Frederiksstad (Copenhagen, Denmark 2005-10).

**202**  
Fourth floor and ground floor plans © Tony Fretton Architects.



**203**  
The building in its urban context © Tony Fretton Architects.



# Renato Rizzi. «To Be an Architect You Must Be in the Grip of an Obsession»

Claudia Tinazzi

Biographical roots do not always have the ability and depth to remain encompassed, as time passes, in an architect's most mature work; usually, the birthplace highlights only memories taken back up or reconstructed after some time. Often — but now increasingly rarely — the city indicated at the incipit of the most concise biography, followed by the year of birth, has encompassed in a complete set the debut works of young architects realised usually on returning home after university studies. Only in some happy cases do the places where they are born, which were home to their first experiences of vision and thought, fix indelibly and almost unknowingly an architect's life. All without too much noise or emphasis, almost as if it were a natural process. The same at different times in life, would bring back to the fore, with different weights and shades, physical and cultural stratifications that only a territory seems capable of conserving without approximations but with a precision superior to contemporary or chronologically closer experiences.

I believe that the latter is explicatory of the relationship between Renato Rizzi and Rovereto, the city in which he was born in 1951. It is the most honest and profound link between the architect — for many «Venetian forever» — and that physical and cultural landscape positioned at the heart of the Lagarina Valley, in that final stretch of territory included between the mountains and sliced through — in a certain sense separated in two — by the Adige river before its entry into the Po Valley.

Rovereto, *Roboretus*<sup>1</sup> from the Latin — which we like to imagine within its meaning of «oak forest» — was, with no predefined design, the birthplace of some extraordinary artists and 20th century intellectuals<sup>2</sup>, starting with Riccardo Zandonai (1883-1944) to Luciano Baldessari (1896-1982), from Fausto Melotti (1901-1986) to Gino Pollini (1903-1991) to Carlo Belli (1903-1991); Adalberto Libera (1903-1963) himself was born not far away: «I am from Villa Lagarina in Trentino, Pollini is from Rovereto three and a half kilometers away»<sup>3</sup>. But Rovereto has also been home, from as early as the start of the 20th century, to the work and ferment produced around the figure of Fortunato Depero (1892-1960), also from Trento, becoming, in some way, the poster city — defined by precise locations — of Italian Futurism and now the International Study Centre of this important artistic movement. An

artist, art critic and intellectual of the 1930s, Carlo Belli explained, with some pride, that the young people of Rovereto driven by a desire for renewal, wanted «to remake the world in their own way»<sup>4</sup>, avoiding in any case the simple attitude of protest that precisely characterizes youth; also using their *imagination*, they were always seeking *brilliant ideas* that could cause a stir in public opinion.

I do not think that Renato Rizzi ever explicitly referred to this cultural world or ever connected his work to any of these artists-architects. He definitely met them first and then studied their work, in some cases having written about them, such as Adalberto Libera<sup>5</sup>, teacher of the architect Giovanni Leo Salvotti de Bindis, a central figure in Rizzi's early training. Upon returning from his university studies at the IUAV, Salvotti — a former president of the Order of Architects of Trento — perhaps gave rise to the first unexpected spark, together with the Rovereto writer Franco Rella, giving Rizzi, in the curious dialogue between a young architect and a more mature figure, the determined need to continue his studies and investigate both the discipline and the literature and philosophy. Despite this apparent detachment, it seems to me that the biographical coincidence that links these notable figures to these places — in a quick leap from Rosmini (1797-1855) to Rizzi, to the younger Fabrizio Barozzi (1976), also a latest generation Rovereto architect — reveals a sort of capacity underlying the «prime» locations, locations that we have not chosen for ourselves, to build a silent community, synthesis of profound sharing, capable of allowing those born there to breathe with the honesty of the first hour a determinate climate for all future decisions. It is a formation in the field, precious and not taken from granted, which never needs to coincide with a coherence of thought or forms, with a particularly explicit DNA to which to respond or with a tangible link but which, conversely, manifests a certain character, a spirit, an ideal that generates an openness and an extraordinary liberty capable of concealing the common origin when it is not necessary to reveal it. A sense of belonging to places that is difficult to explain, as it is singular in its common being.

For Rizzi, Rovereto and its landscape — which, as a child, he saw from his house in the hills above the city — was also the first real playground of his imagination — «every day I saw the city with the mountains before it and every day I asked myself what it was behind the

crest of those peaks that separated my view. And I thought that those mountain peaks were impassable because I could not walk on the crests of those mountains»<sup>6</sup>.

But if Rovereto belongs to that first formal education which, in the words of Aldo Rossi, is «the observation of things» then «transformed into a memory of these things»<sup>7</sup>, Venice and, even more so, New York in different ways represent for Rizzi the two places of his real training — the former, «a singular city in its absolute mystery» where Rizzi graduated and where he currently teaches and «studies»; the latter, overseas, where at the heart of Manhattan in his early 1930s he began to work in Peter Eisenman's studio, which led him to perform in-depth research into the symbolic value of the work of the US architect<sup>8</sup>, also thanks to his meeting with Jaques Derrida who introduced him deeply into Jewish culture.

His open questions on the relationship with history, with what preceded us — in the awareness that architecture must address everything that came before us — already matured in previous years and the result of a heated debate with the philosopher Emanuele Severino, became even more specific during his ten years working with the US Jewish architect, constructing or, rather, reinforcing that technical apparatus capable of keeping together, in the architecture project, times that are even distant today. That relationship with Eisenman was never made deeply explicit but it can be seen in the paths of subsequent research by the Italian architect, who saw his US experience as a possibility of better «equipping himself» in the knowledge and awareness of architecture only to return to his homeland. It is no coincidence that it was precisely during those years that Eisenman's design for the Futurism museum in Rovereto arose from the opportunity of identifying on behalf of the Trento Municipality the most appropriate location in which to position the future Mart — a design that, in its interpretation, translates into research what is also a precise interpretation of the very city of Rovereto.

I believe that Rizzi belongs to that genre of architects and teachers we admire, as they are still able to sense the urgency to reposition architecture and its teaching at the centre of our culture, with the aim of giving it back its sense and therefore meaning, through the

design. To do this, Rizzi seeks to understand to the core the reasons that govern our discipline even as far as its very etymology; he does so by investigating the places and forms, reasoning «out loud» through composition, refusing any self-reference while recognising that architecture belongs to a humanistic area in an indispensable theoretical sphere; he does so by writing, designing and teaching.

This rationality comes close to technique but clashes with or, rather, confronts singularity with experience, with our interiority, with the «world of the indomitable», in his own words. In his work, he always demonstrates a moral requirement which is almost theological respect for such a difficult and demanding discipline as architecture; it is no coincidence that he often exhorts — and his work and life definitely demonstrate this — that «to be an architect, you must have an obsession».

What is surprising, looking back over the geography of his biography and his meetings linked to these places, is the coherence of a path, at times complex in comprehending the individual episodes, which seems to herald, from one step to the next, a logical concatenation, the maturing of a thought that is actually nothing other than a constant question: What is architecture? Followed by a compelling question about himself.

So, then, in this horizon, the most mature collaboration (still in progress) arises with John Hejduk<sup>9</sup> — a brilliant 20th century architect known and studied, once again, not as a historian or a critic but investigated with concrete arguments focused on his way of being and on his work — so thoroughly that we can imagine almost a subtle and concealed identification with the New York architect which shines through in Rizzi's own words: «Architecture was, for him, a vocation, a moral form, a condition of grace. An expanding universe, all still to be investigated. Like a prophet, he entrusted his solemn vision to poetry, to painting, to design, to investigate these infinite vastness imbued with the pain of man.

With this tension, every one of his works contributes to building the project: the release from insignificance, the hope of redemption. For over forty years, he taught and directed the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York, leaving impressed in the fragility of Architecture the indelible mark of his tenderness»<sup>10</sup>.

Rizzi's architectures are autonomous architectures; they conceal without the need to highlight a coherence to his thought, making us in some sense incapable, from one project to the other, of foreseeing recognizable forms or repeated languages in the author's style, ideally making it impossible to recognise a preconceived form at the basis of the design which always remains free to seek, in the most sincere reasons, the most adequate paths, the possible symbols and abstractions. Only the representation — in reality with a strength almost unmatched in this era — adheres to the difficult choice of entrusting, almost exclusively, to the model the story of the design. Preparatory models, or study models, or «x-rays of the places» or even models of vertical and horizontal sections of the designs give a clear sign of the procedures and arrival points in respect of often complex reasoning, simplifying, clarifying or, rather, abstracting all physical and cultural stratifications involved.

Plaster or wood-board models, expertly portrayed by the light, tell us of a precise stance that decides to bring every criticised sign onto the same level — almost as though it had always been engraved in that matter — be it natural or artificial, be it soil or architecture. Ancient and new, places and contemporary design dialogue in these images apparently without hierarchy.

Through Rizzi's projects, we can interpret the history of the places, in Trento, Cairo, Warsaw, Krakow, Padua, Parma, Naples, Rovereto, Gdansk, Lampedusa and so on and so on; but the design reflections are also always an opportunity to re-interpret architecture; an example in this sense is the work on the Venetian churches or, rather, the *Il Cosmo della Bildung* project introduced into the *Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore*, the chosen location for a desired coincidence between ideal space for learning, didactic and theoretical programme.

Three projects constructed just over five years apart from each other — memories of the author's path narrated to now — are traces of specific important stages in the necessary awareness that «construction is the last step of condensation of a material that is a material which in its original is incandescent, and this incandescence continues to be related to our materials that are cold», and that «the true work needs the architect to be separated and detached from the work produced».



The comparison between the three constructed works is a pre-text for finding one's way in the many projects that Rizzi has dedicated himself to, without any reservation, within that *dépense*<sup>11</sup> that is, as he himself explains, «profligacy» and awareness of the risk within each work. Three projects that — with the due differences, removed from their paternity, made clear almost only in their representation — now dialogue physically with different events, territories and stratifications.

Despite the misadventure of the political-administrative events linked to its creation, the project for the sports centre at Ghiaie<sup>12</sup>, in the outskirts of Trento, tells, as the first important project built, of the stringent and passionate relationship between itself and the landscape. A «melee» capable of finding significant signs for architecture even when the urban quality, at first glance, seems to deny them categorically.

Designed in 1984, just before his lengthy American experience, but built almost twenty years after the international competition that recognised it the winner, the *Palazzetto dello Sport* in Trento stands at the southern end of the consolidated fabric of a city, that precisely in the 1980s seemed incapable of «giving environmental and architectural unity to the serious formal and social degradation of its periphery». As is the case for many architectures constructed in Italy in the more recent past, the temporal distance between the competition proposal and the executive project contains all those laborious compromises that, only partly, appear to have affected the powerful stereometric figure laid on the landscape; that regular sculpture sculpted from a meticulous interpretation of heights, views, relationships and alignments.

«A large territorial tray», as described in the words of the author, «oriented orthogonally with respect to the *Madonna Bianca* district, the old town and the system of the territorial scale of the Etschtal». A jetty that, linking to the path along the river, neatly arranges above it the Ice building together with the large Arena, separable into two thanks to the large central beam on the roof and that, albeit in its mutilated construction, still recounts (through the materials, iron-glass and Grè stone) of a compositional clarity between paths-services and

structures of the great lay cathedral whose tripartite geometry subtly dialogues with the nature of the mountain in the background.

Rizzi's projects always start with a question, almost with a view to removing — if it were still necessary — that total self-reference that still in this era sometimes infers that architectures, like works of art, can be satisfied, to be completed, by an initial perception of the author.

How do you represent a Futurism museum when Futurism has always denied these institutions, defining museums as *cemeteries of thought*? How do you place your hands on an historical building to make it a Futurism museum when Futurism has always denied history? These are the questions underlying the project that Rizzi imagined commencing from 1990 for the restructuring of *Casa Depero* in Rovereto, «an almost irremediable opposition between history and refusal of history».

The dialectic between new forms and ancient traces — both of the place and of thought — thus becomes the ideal but also physical programme of an intervention only apparently philological.

Constructed between 2006 and 2008, the museum combines and composes in a single path two adjacent buildings, the 16th century building of the former *Banco di Pegni* and the adjoining Caden house, purchased during the work by the Municipality, thereby allowing the museum itself to be almost completely separated, in the original spaces imagined by Fortunato Depero and reconstructed by Rizzi, and to maintain by its side the service and lift spaces composed with a single gesture, a sort of box in a box, in the less prestigious property emptied completely of its internal structure.

In both buildings, the new is contained by the old without crossing over it, and the design, almost entirely introverted, chooses to work with measure and proportion in the space included between the two protagonists, in that void which allows for a gradual and silent ascent, up to the second floor, the conclusion of the exhibition programme: a double-height space where Rizzi, «betraying» blindly reconstructive expectations, as an architect, searches for futurist images. The double arch placed on top — in equilibrium in the centre of the space flooded with light by a refined system of overlapping *brise*

*soleil* — becomes almost the setting of a painting of the owner of the house, i.e. *Corte della Gran Bambola* (Fortunato Depero, 1920).

In this sense, there are many references, not over-stated, to the images of the early 20th century visionary artist, starting from the partial roof over the entrance courtyard whose declared reference is sought among the geometries of *Apparizioni Rusticane* (Fortunato Depero, 1952). In a nutshell, this refined and aware dialogue at a distance connotes a project that critics have already defined as *Messa in scena di reperti futuristi*<sup>13</sup>.

Yet another question is at the incipit of the last project presented and constructed in 2014 by Renato Rizzi in Gdansk: «What does it mean today to build an Elizabethan theatre in Gdansk after the last truly great theatre was designed by Aldo Rossi and was called the *Theatre of the World?* A Theatre built and then demolished which was an apparition?».

An insufficient question for the complete drafting of the competition theme but disarming in its instinctive adequacy, capable of framing its profound and difficult cultural horizon that each project should tend towards.

In Gdansk, place and type contribute with no compromises to defining the elongated dark shape that protects, almost like an impassable limit, the tamed historic centre of pointed roofs from the most recent fast road network of the Polish city. A compact and irregular block in the nearest historic centre that preserves, as though it were a precious find, the contemporary interpretation of two theatre types, apparently irreconcilable and brought together here: the Elizabethan theatre — that in past times was open air — with the central stage and the space for spectators wrapping upwards around its defined geography; on the other side, an Italian-style theatre in which, traditionally, the stage and the audience face each other according to precise geometries guided by visual rules.

However, it is the two large wings of the roof hinged on the majestic ribbed walls that define in their movement the most precise nature of this architecture of European flavour. A risky enterprise, won by the architecture which — despite the rapid advancement of the technique we are used to — has left and still leaves us amazed by its imaginative

power and at the same time its quiet classicism. Once again the material follows the choices of the composition, a heap of dark bricks covers and protects the entire building externally, both vertically and horizontally, the metal wings (blue on the outside and black in the internal intersection) tell of their technical necessity which distinguishes them from the underlying volumes; finally the heart of the design, jealously guided inside, is built completely in light wood and appears golden in the colour contrast.

The project won an international competition, despite having consciously transgressed the limits of the area established by the guidelines and therefore constructed after the cancellation of the competition thanks to the determination of the organisers. Together with other works (such as for example the Szczecin Philharmonic by architects Barozzi and Veiga, also built in 2014), today it represents one of the tangible symbols of a reversal of the vision of Poland which, having joined the European Community in 2004, has since then turned to the West after the historic horizon facing East, towards Moscow, had started to laboriously rebuild a contemporary identity, based upon its traditions, and commencing from the places of culture, of entertainment, of music.

Hence, in Gdansk, the solid base — inhabited and inhabitable at its summit and at its perimeter like in the walls of a fortified city — is also an urban element, a privileged observation point of that search which reconstructs by points its own character and which seems to have always housed that silent and introverted architecture.

The wings that open up the Polish theatre or the large golden sphere — that can be imagined moving imperceptibly around the *Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore* in the design for the ideal hall — draw a bridge with the words of Carlo Belli, recalling those *brilliant imaginations* of the Rovereto's young people aiming to *remake the world*. In fact, in a recent interview, perhaps without knowing it, Rizzi said: «if you believe that you can change the world with your work then, in my opinion, you have already got it wrong; you cannot change anything and I don't want to change anything. The only chance you have is not to change things or to make them change but to produce amazement,

because amazement is that force that allows you to change ideas, to change»<sup>14</sup>.

Built in balance between an educated contemporary sensibility and an awareness of places and of history, Rizzi's projects thus demonstrate a possible way of producing amazement; through architecture, without the need for explanations.

Amazement — once more — is at the center of one of Renato Rizzi's many, intense lessons entitled precisely *The Amazement of Thought*, a lesson that quickly leads us back to the duality so dear to the architect from Rovereto, of human events and their deepest ends. Perhaps, in this case, the philosopher and theologian Antonio Rosmini, who was also born in Rovereto in 1797, can better explain this «complicit» duplicity: «What wonder does take me when I discover that, although all move for business, and are pulled by their occupations to various places, however it is ever a single and universal force that in each of us endeavours, one single interest that pulls me to an end, like any other who is far from me in inclinations, age, sex and rank, and all else that differentiates men from one another, only one single remedy that spurs us without us even knowing?»<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> From Latin, *roborētum*, der. di *robur* -*bōris*, i.e. «oak».

<sup>2</sup> On this subject: G. Belli, G. Marzari, *Artisti del '900, protagonisti di Rovereto*, Longo Editore, Ravenna 1991.

<sup>3</sup> A. Libera, *La mia esperienza di architetto*, La Finestra, Lavis 2008.

<sup>4</sup> G. Appella, G. Belli, M. Garberi (eds.), *Il mondo di Carlo Belli. Italia anni Trenta: la cultura artistica*, Electa, Milan 1991.

<sup>5</sup> «Adalberto Libera / Trento», *Arketipo*, 18, March 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Where not otherwise specified, Renato Rizzi's quotes come from a dialogue with the architect in his studio in Venice, held in January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> A. Rossi, *Autobiografia Scientifica*, Pratiche editrice, Parma 1990, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Amongst others: R. Rizzi, *Peter Eisenman. Mistico nulla*, Motta - 24 ore cultura, Milan 1996; R. Rizzi (ed.), *Peter Eisenman, La Fine del Classico*, Mimesis, Milan 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Some important reflections are found in: R. Rizzi, *John Hejduk. Incarnatio*, Marsilio, Venice 2010.

<sup>10</sup> R. Rizzi, *John Hejduk, op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Rizzi refers, in particular, to the meaning of the term attributed by Georges

Bataille: G. Bataille, *La parte maledetta-La nozione di dépense*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2015.

<sup>12</sup> For the complete specifications of the project and a bibliography: <http://architetturecontemporanee.beniculturali.it>.

<sup>13</sup> M. Biagi, F. Bucci, «Renato Rizzi. Casa d'arte futurista Depero, Rovereto. Messa in scena di reperti futuristi», *Casabella*, 783, November 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *Architalks*, by Renato Rizzi (December 2019), lesson-interview in the cycle produced by the online platform ISPLORA.

<sup>15</sup> «Qual meraviglia mi prende allorché vengo a scoprire, che, benchè ciascuno muova per gli proprj affari, e sia tirato dalle proprie occupazioni a varj luoghi, tuttavia altra non è mai sempre che una forza sola ed universale quella che in tutti adopera, un interesse solo che tira me ad un termine, come qualsiasi altro più da me lontano d'inclinazioni, di età, di sesso e di grado, e di tutto ciò che differenzia gli uomini fra di loro, una sola la cura che tutti insieme ci sprona senz'avvedercene?». A. Rosmini, *Apologetica*, in *Opere edite e inedite dell'abate Antonio Rosmini-Serbati: Prose ecclesiastiche*, Tip. e libreria Boniardi-Pogliani, Milan 1840.



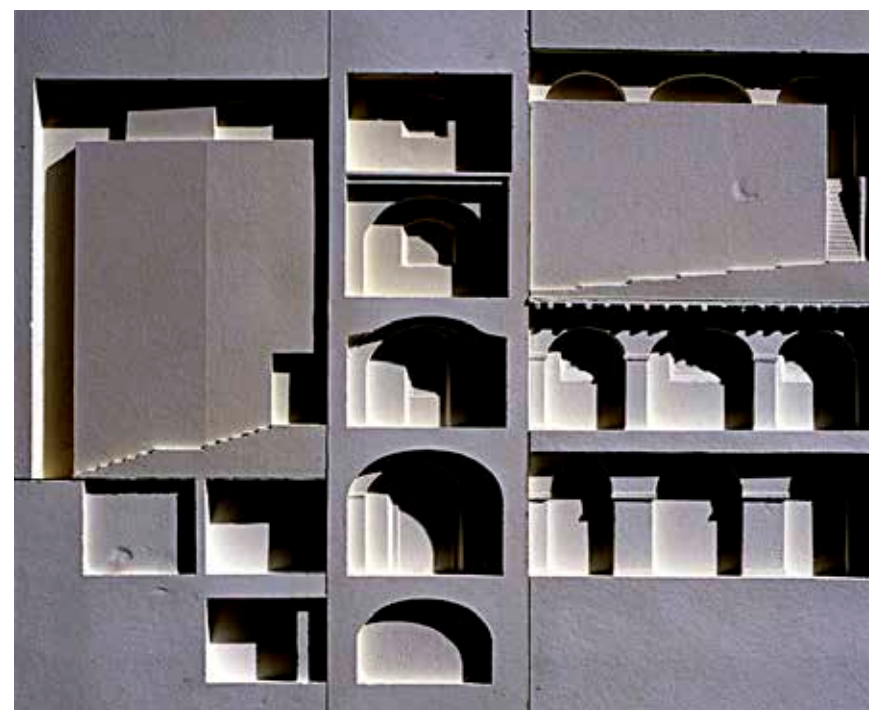
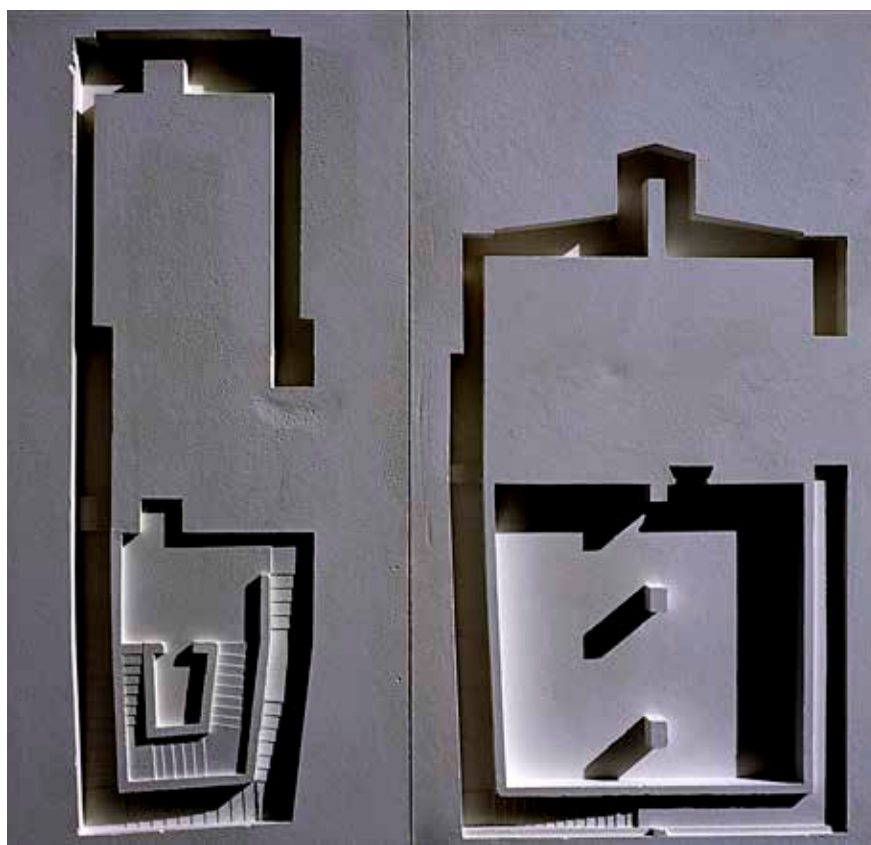


Renato Rizzi, Sport Center  
(Trento, Italy 1984-2002).

**204**  
Model of the plan  
© Renato Rizzi.



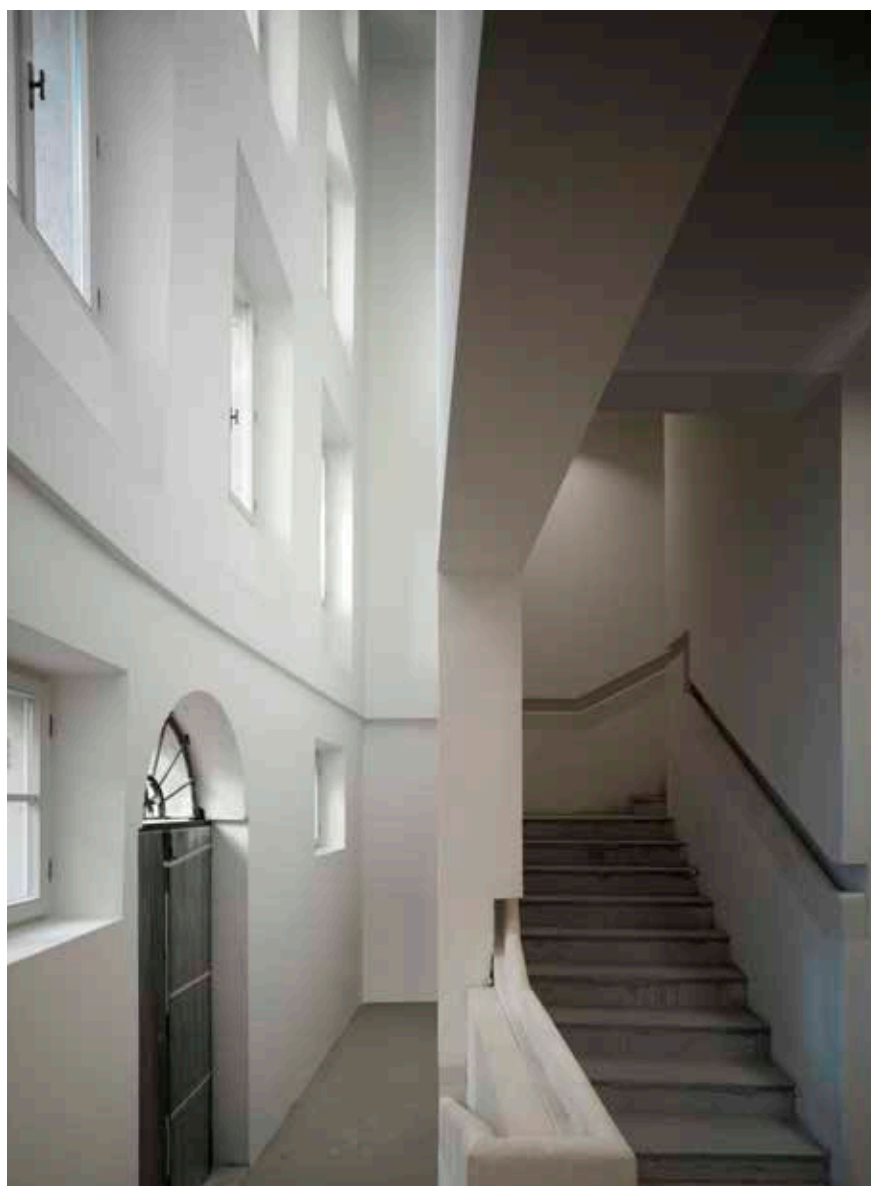
**205 206**  
Views of the intervention  
© Renato Rizzi, ph. Giovanni  
Chiaromonte.



Renato Rizzi, *Casa d'Arte  
Futurista Fortunato Depero*  
(Rovereto, Italy 2006-08).

**207**  
Models of the section and plan  
of the intervention  
© Renato Rizzi.

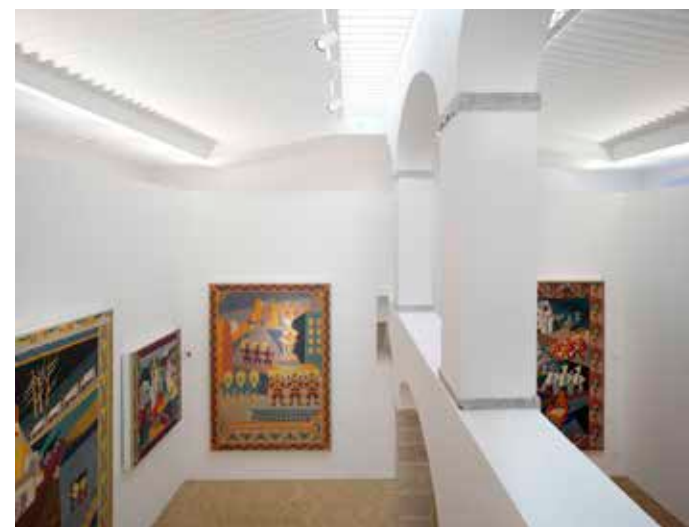




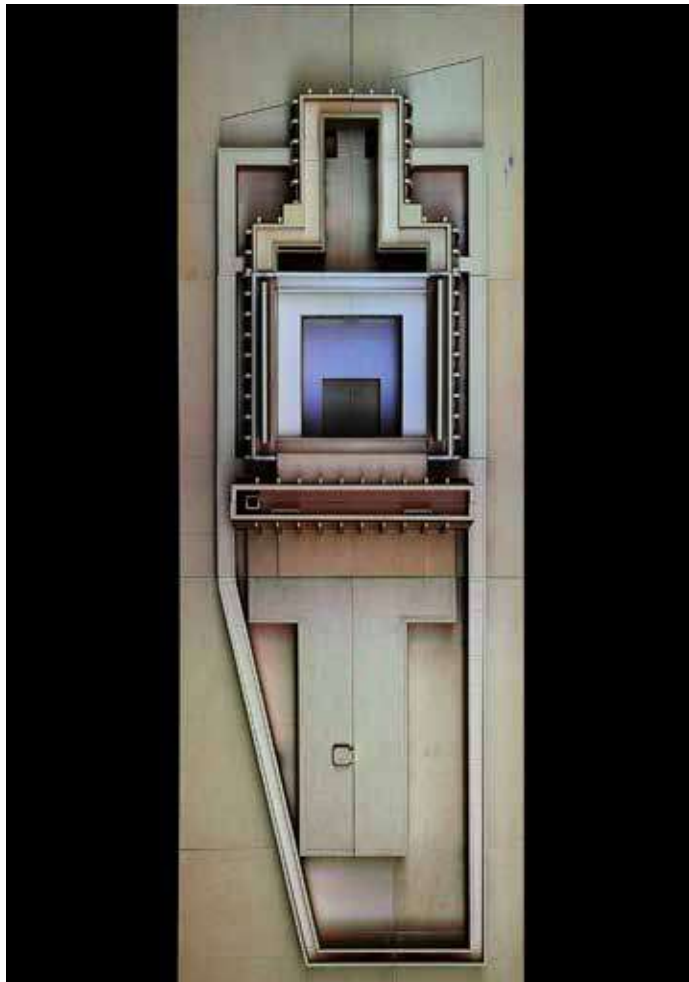
**208**  
The new distribution space  
© Renato Rizzi,  
ph. Pietro Savorelli.



**209 210**  
The central exhibition space on  
the first floor of the museum  
© Renato Rizzi,  
ph. Pietro Savorelli.







Renato Rizzi, Shakespearean Theatre (Gdansk, Poland 2014).

**211** Model of the section and plan of the intervention  
© Renato Rizzi.



**212 213** Overall views of the intervention  
© Renato Rizzi, ph. Matteo Piazza.

# Álvaro Siza Vieira and Eduardo Souto de Moura. A Dialogue on Architecture and Memory

edited by Barbara Bogoni

Porto, *Rua do Aleixo*, first floor, an architectural firm, two of the most influential architects in the world sit facing each other questioning themselves on the way and meaning of *making architecture* in history. It's a Sunday in February, bright sunbeams breach through the large window overlooking the Douro.

The Socratic dialogue, of those who base their knowledge on experimentation and the exercise of doubt, focuses on the project and ideas. It is animated by experience, sharing, continuous dialogue between fellow friends on matters regarding designing in historical and archaeological sites, in commemoration sites, to understand if pre-existences are something to take into account when intervening in an urban fabric already consolidated by time, something to question or respect or, moreover, something to use freely in the design of the new project. It is not a matter of little consequence; it distinguishes a specific method of approach to the transformation of reality and addresses to the evolution of spaces.

An observer, even more Socratically, *knows that he does not know* but believes that the enquiry must be considered as the foundation for any architectural reasoning that professes to be coherent with reality and responsible for the transformations triggered by the design and wanted or planned by its designer.

«When there is nothing I can refer to, I learned to build my own pre-existences, to transform every detail, even of little importance, of what I see around, into a meaningful quote. Maybe I learned it from you, Siza. Does the relation with the pre-existence capture your attention?».

«It is clear, and you know it Eduardo, that I find it interesting and, after all, even if I did not care at all, I would still be forced to take an interest in it, to take it into account. But the question is not so trivial: I am thinking about necessity, not intended as obligation and therefore as an imposition of a methodological practice, but as a personal need. Yes, it is necessary for me to take reference from reality and its events, even minor ones: it gives me measure, actually, it gives the measure to the project which, while taking the right distances defines proportions and relationships with what already exists. The history and its testimonies are important, for me, not for a theoretical desire, but because I am interested in involving them in the project. On the one hand they

embody a constraint, an additional variable to be taken into account, but on the other hand they help me because they do not force me to overthink unnecessarily, but with something, elements, structures, images that, with their own language, speak to me. By doing this I am not making a monologue, but I participate in a dialogue, which is far more interesting, don't you think?».

«You are telling me that this is something to start from in initiating reasoning consciously on the project, an addition to the program that refines it, which does not weigh on the project, but inspires it. Yes, I agree. I find that the limits imposed by reality help to build a sort of continuity, a linearity that is good for the project».

However, several possible strategies are presented on the ways of identifying significant elements and references, traceable in the complexity of the context, on the organization of their relationships and, even earlier, on the investigation method for their interpretation and characterization — never linear or predictable processes. For instance, it is interesting to identify the precise moment in which historical research and the physical-compositional analysis of the elements gets underway, or when direct contact with spatial and objectual reality is necessary.

«Siza, I know that you always do research, for both small and large projects, partly because I have worked with you in many occasions, partly because you have always been my master, but I do not know what your strategy is, if it exists. The analysis begins during the process, in a conceptual way, without knowing where the project will aim to, or halfway through or even at the end, to confirm whether what you designed is in accordance with the historical-technical evolution of the reference context? It is clear that the unexpected appearance of new events forces you to resume the studies and continuously re-evaluate their role with respect to the whole, and therefore to rethink the elements and mutual relationships in combination with every new choice... do you have a method, a pre-established approach?»

«No, I don't have an absolute method, but I do have a method, a relative one, "my" method, which adapts to the places and always depends on the specific case, on the verification of what is important and what is secondary. It is essential for me to visit the place where I have

to work, capture the atmosphere, talking with someone who knows about it, consult books, to give substance to the hypothesis that is taking place abstractly in my mind before even confronting the site. After, these two matters, the landscape, the impression of the place and the research gradually complete each other, and the idea arises. A still limited idea, a suggestion that, while remaining a constant throughout the process, can still change and transform into another idea, more coherent and responsive to what I learned and to my most in-depth perception of the atmosphere of the place where I work. With all of this, the program (and the project) inevitably changes as well».

«Therefore, initially, the atmosphere is more important than the elements».

«In some cases I do start thinking about the project even before carrying out a survey, (you too are not always able to move immediately!), I do it deliberately and consciously, because I think it is important to follow your impressions, the "mythical" idea that you have of the places, particularly of places rich in history and construction traditions. Thus, I enhance my mythical idea of the project, thought for a city, a mythical place. I started my first work in Brazil, which I knew through my father's stories, who had visited it as a child and had fallen in love with the Amazon, with a very energetic, intense, interesting idea of the country. I approached the project from afar, with this image stuck in my mind, which gradually grew more detailed and refined after my encounter with the actual space».

«It means that sometimes memory turns into reality...»

«Yes, but it improves itself over time...».

Because the project is a continuous correction of the initial idea, produced by many decisions on which are or are not the important elements and what role do they have in the context first and then in the project, and moreover, if they represent a limit or a potentiality.

Sometimes the historical, architectural and archaeological pre-existences, traditionally intended as limits to free planning, are transformed into values. In these cases, the pre-existence becomes permanence, a constant presumed as the driving force of a new point of view or a different way of seeing things. In other cases, instead,



the presence of significant elements, such as their essence, are transformed into influences that bound the project, somehow limit it, or even smother it, until its essence is impoverished, entrusting it with self-referencing that has little to do with the attention towards spaces and their history. In these cases, the relationship with the existent can take on a negative value, still preserving its essential role within the project.

For instance in Chiado, in Lisbon, the design strategy has intentionally moved forward from history, permanence and tradition, which have been «revised» and «updated» through the project. Linguistic continuity was applied in combination with typological innovation and the reinterpretation of urban space, through the creation of spaces open to the city with new ways of using public places, distribution areas and urban accessibility, of view and interaction.

«It is evident, Eduardo, that in Chiado the background was very complex and open to various interpretations. There was no particularly binding regulation and, when this is the case, a controversy always arises. Too many voices, too different, too self-referential. For instance, there was a movement that vigorously defended the historic city centre, uncompromising on its overall preservation and reconstruction».

«I recall a group of colleagues that stubbornly opposed to the decision of the Mayor who entrusted you with the job. By all means, the controversy was for its own sake. I believe, however, that your project at Chiado can't be deprived by the exclusive, limitative, reference to the theme of reconstruction, but must be seen as an expression of a strong commitment and involvement on the topic of conservation and protection of permanencies. Perhaps mine is somewhat an enigmatic point of view but if I understand correctly, your project deals with the integration of the new in the ancient morphology, its insertion in a pre-existent construction system, the introduction of details, fixtures, windows, doors, not ancient but an image of the ancient translated into a modern design. And this is very intelligent in my opinion. Smart but highly contested at the time. Now no one says a word in regard anymore, on the contrary, Chiado is a fine example of a valid and effective way of recovering a historic centre. I would like to have your opinion. I'm convinced that when a designer is certain of having

a good idea, although contested, must see it through, facing no one, he must prove that he is right, by all means».

«He can not do it, you know better. There is no method in your foolishness, it would be like crashing blindfolded into a wall! Sure, he must defend his idea, if it is good, and suggest it once, twice, three times, reconsidering it each time and, over time, change it a little, mediate, compromising and discovering, ongoing, that this dialogue, which seemed impossible, it actually enriches his knowledge and clarifies the depth of the problem, improving the initial idea. In Chiado there are many important things to consider in order to comprehend the development of the project, including the political context in which it developed and the unanimous decision of the actors involved to preserve the original image of the neighbourhood restoring what went lost because of the fire».

«By doing this you are losing the extraordinary opportunity of introducing modernity into history. It would have been a colossal mistake. I seem to recall that on one hand they determinedly wanted to preserve the ancient environment, but on the other they wished to introduce a transformation, even if a sensitive one, into the construction process. A thematic, thus, delicate and very important for the contemporary architecture».

«Not introduce. In reality, they did not want to introduce a radical transformation at all, but to base the principles of the transformation of space on a thorough knowledge of the environment and history. That of the Municipality was a very clear position, to which I look with great satisfaction today, beyond the controversy I have been subjected to. With these premises, I began to study the morphological evolution of places and I came to interpret Chiado as a composition that completes the Baixa, like its western extension. With documents, images and drawings of all the roads existing in the different historical periods, I understood that the two districts of Baixa and Chiado were part of the same structure and responded to a unified vision. Chiado was therefore part of a single large urban project consisting of streets, squares and buildings built simultaneously after the 1755 earthquake through a planning that attempted to give a universal response to the theme of urban space, in a phase in which everything had gone completely destroyed. After the 1988 fire, which destroyed a dozen residential

buildings, I found myself deciding how to intervene in these spaces, just as it had been done more than two hundred years ago, and I thought there was no plausible reason to justify a radical transformation or the introduction of new figurative language, I felt instead of having to elaborate only small details to saturate the lacerations, contained and circumscribed, produced in the urban fabric. I thought: let's suppose the button on my shirt falls off, I certainly won't replace it with a different one, maybe red, but I'm going to look for one similar to the others! I didn't think, however, to make a "mimetic" inclusion. I was, in fact, convinced that if on the one hand the project should not deal in the least with the development of a new language, on the other it had to profoundly upset many of the existing relationships and build correct relationships between new and old that would solve the endemic problems of the neighbourhood. The latter had to be given an effective, definite and truly contemporary solution. The obvious problems with which the neighbourhood continued to suffer were all due to the fact that the Pombalina grid, perfect for the flat and regular terrain of the Baixa, had sudden and uncontrolled discards right where, at the edge of the neighbourhood, the topography changed suddenly and continuously, where it began to move and rise. There were very important knots to be resolved, such as the relationship between Chiado and the highest part of the neighbourhood, the Bairro Alto, or the area of the Carmo Church, an exception in the urban fabric of the city that could not be misrepresented or marginalized.

And there was also the important issue of the insertion of the new underground station, to which the team of designers was able to make a contribution in terms of planning and distribution, for example directing the very strong impact that the location of access to the stations triggered in the area transformation process. For example, the *Rua Nova do Almada*, the last road of the Pombalina grid, which closed the Baixa district and opened the Chiado, was originally a service road, without any public role. With the inclusion of the new underground station, this minor street has undergone a surge in value and role: from "last" in position and importance, the road has become the "first" in terms of connectivity and accessibility, becoming an unavoidable hinge in the connection system of the western part of Lisbon. I therefore defended the idea that the transformation of Chiado, inevitable

and necessary at that time, could not and should not be entrusted to the language of architecture, but rather to the relationships between the more consolidated and secondary fabric, frayed and unsolved, relationships that had to be planned and designed with meaning».

«May I issue a challenge Siza? It seems to me that you anticipate that the urban regeneration project is not based on an *a priori* theory, perhaps on "your" personal approach relatively and freely applicable, but instead is a work in progress that is being discovered and elaborated. The theme, then, is to be traced back not so much to how much the architecture of the new "engages" or "detaches" from the ancient, but how much and how it is able to achieve the final goal through approximation phases that incorporate, gradually, exhortations and suggestions taken from the context. It means that there is not a goal given *a priori*, but a process of approaching the final work that is discovered along the way.

Regarding the provocation: on the theme of recovery and design in historical and archaeological contexts there are several critical and operational positions, but let's say, to simplify, that two main strands line up, the one supported by Ruskin, more naturalistic, organic and picturesque, which interprets the ruin as an untouchable presence that portrays the contemporary landscape as the ancient one, and that of Viollet-le-Duc, which urges the architects who deal with recovery to study the theme, the rule, the *modus vivendi* of the building and to draw from these studies the tools to modify it. Do you feel closer to Ruskin or Viollet-le-Duc?».

«I agree with Ruskin's visions, but only as an initial strategy, not in an absolute way. In Chiado I was confronted with homogeneous portion of a complex urban fabric, with a unified project, with detailed documents and ancient maps, but also with a reality in constant evolution. I realized that pure Pombalina architecture no longer existed, altered as it was by the many subsequent interventions, additions and completions not documented in the maps. I had "in my hands" the static nature of historical documents and "between my hands" a dynamic city, in continuous movement, involved in a constantly evolving transformation process. But I kept reading the strength of the formal structure that had been preserved over time and was still clearly recognizable. This was my pre-existence (or permanence), incorporated

into a dynamic process that changed appearances day after day but not the most intimate structure of the neighbourhood.

The theme of the insertion of the underground in the historical fabric well exemplifies what I am telling you: it was a matter of embedding a completely foreign element, new both in content and in form, but constructed by reinterpreting a historical model of “dynamism of the past” which, at the same time, it decoded the contemporary evolutionary character».

«I deduce, then, that on the historical and archaeological pre-existences you prefer not to insert avulsed things, but to study the environment and the context and, where an “ancient piece” is missing, duplicate and replace it. And when there is the opportunity to insert a “new piece”, such as the underground, a system that does not belong to the historical centre, a contemporary intruder, then your project is oriented towards trying to understand how to merge the two themes, old and new, preserving harmony despite being so different from each other».

«Eduardo, there is a beautiful example that explains my point of view. Remember the Parisian Galeries? There was a very strong reason to guide the insertion of these new buildings in the ancient fabric of the city, a reason that had profound repercussions in the language, but that was not so much in the need to revise or renew the style itself, but in the new and disruptive role that the commercial movement within the city has assumed, so strong and pressing, pushing to introduce a new “type” in the consolidated urban network, a type that had to fulfil an urgent contemporary need. For this reason I do not like the “whim” at all, in the transformations, because the city does not need new languages but facts, which are stronger than the language itself, which shuffle around the language, orient it, motivate it and justify it.»

«It means that before come the facts and after architecture, at first problems and themes, and then architecture comes to solve them».

«...Or they occur simultaneously...».

In a convergence of actions and reactions, architecture seems called upon to invent new patterns from time to time and give itself an identity of its own, however never inessential to the urban or environmental landscape in which it is inserted, even when the almost total absence of

elements forces to patiently search for the slightest clues, to rely on the most distant references in time and space, to the limits of invention.

In the Quinta da Malagueira in Evora, the initial inconsistency of the elements *in situ* that could constitute a valid design reference, despite the presence of a valuable historical, archaeological and architectural context, has triggered in Siza a very strong curiosity and a consequent passionate research, able to identify even small signs that could structure the new settlement and simultaneously support both the typological innovation introduced *ex novo* and the housing tradition consolidated over time.

«In Evora I found very different inspiration and various starting points. Some were expected, other I suspected and foreshadowed them, other surprised and overwhelmed me. At the time of the first visit to the project area, I was very worried about finding a completely empty spot, free of references and suggestions: and that’s exactly how it was, a field and noting more! I asked myself what could I do to solve the issue that had been entrusted to me in a place without any strong formal structures. Then I began to “collect clues” and discovered the presence of an ancient path of illegal bootleggers, I found an abandoned water tower, I saw an interesting pattern in the ground, a slightly prominent hill where there was a water basin and right beside it, an olive tree, planted there probably to protect the laundresses from the burning sun of the Alentejo. The slight movement of the terrain, the landscape was topographically too “subtle”. The things I had collected during the search were beginning to be many, delicate but interesting. I thought they could be enough for me: a hill with an olive tree and a basin on top (there the idea of the dome — never built — to protect these two singular and fragile elements), some stones and a sinuous line of water, the bootleggers’ street, with some minimal service structure, the post office, a coffee, small things... and then the people who lived there, and who secretly moved towards Evora. In the project I started using all this and, studying the ancient layout, I learned to be practical and as “comfortable” as possible in the settlement scheme and, subsequently, also in the building type project; I drew the idea of this new neighbourhood and, in the background, the outline of the city of Evora, all white and, in drawing, a very strong image came to my mind: I had the impression of reaching Pompeii. Thus, Malagueira owes its



urban organization to the very strong, I would say radical suggestion, left me by my trip to Pompeii».

«Imagine that, however, when we talk about Malagueira everyone refers to it as the medina of Morocco or to the settlements in the south of Portugal... there was never any mention of Pompeii. Just out of curiosity: was the image of Pompeii an unconscious suggestion, a flash of memory, or a theme that you have deliberately chosen for this project?».

«I had no idea what to study and where to start, but I felt the need to insert the same variation in the structural network that there is also in Pompeii, which I remembered. The too slight topographical variations and the very fragile elements present at the beginning did not support me in the search for reference points. I knew that variations, small or large, which may seem very limiting, actually collaborate necessarily to clarify the initial setting of the project, to provide useful “contacts” and “key to understanding” to start, but there it was really very difficult, there was very little. Thus, Pompeii helped me understand how to dominate the territory, whose most intimate character baffles me».

The temptation is great, when the elements currently on the site are not very evident or insignificant, or in critical conditions such as not to consider their valorisation appropriate, to conceal them, to mask them, to deny their existence blindly, even to cancel them. Sometimes, if these are of little value or even of negative value, the preservation of their memory can even compromise the results of the project. Other times, the quantitative and qualitative excess of these presences can, however, lead to anesthetize the project.

In the important confrontation with archaeology, both troubled and stimulating, the Naples underground project found itself operating within an «enclosure» (physical and ideological) that limited the extent, conditioned the possibility of movement and constrained choices.

«You know very well, Siza, that the city of Naples — all of Italy — is a large complex archaeological area, where to build anew you must dig, discover and confront the rich and complex history that is stratified just below the surface. To insert new buildings is a difficult opera-

tion, let alone an underground station, an infrastructure so articulated and impactful. With the Porto underground, things were different: my problems were of different nature, I was dealing with a granite terrain and a restless, complicated but governable topography. Instead in Naples, in the antithesis between the ancient atmosphere and modern needs, our project had to find the forms and language to make the two realities coexist harmoniously».

«The need to preserve the ruins always represents a challenge for an architect and an obstacle to the development of the evolution of the project; nevertheless, at the same time, it frees it from linguistic and stylistic preconceptions making the evolution of the facts and the elaboration of the proposal very dynamic, forcing him to always question himself, to reprogram and redesign, to adapt from time to time to unexpected discoveries, to the position and character of the new archaeological finds, to the asynchronous rhythms of delays, interruptions and resumes of the construction site. Eduardo, we were there together when they found two wooden ancient Roman ships... but they found a whole lot — we have been working there for 17 years now —, even a Greek port, which you wanted to move... just four meters!»

«I wanted to move it only because it simplified the construction process and the project would become much smarter. It was a few meters that would not have compromised the scientific and methodological rigor of archaeology and certainly would not have altered the value of the find. After all, the final intent of archaeology is to preserve and rearrange a scene, not of wood, not of fabric, but of stone, the scene of stone as it once was».

«You're right, it involves portions of walls that archaeologists find, preserve and fix in space, but which have probably been dismantled and reassembles during and after excavations — and perhaps even several times in history. This “scenic fiction” is inevitable, however, we must be aware of it. And the Greek Port? It is now located on a two-meter-thick slab of the ceiling of the station: a very special technical solution had to be studied to support it where it had always been and where it is now».

«For this reason, I think that the theme of methodological rigor, of truth, in archaeology as in architecture, and, in analogy, also that

of the relationship between archaeology and architecture, everything must be traced back to verifying whether the final quality of the relationship between the new and old whether or not of quality. If it is, the outcome is good, the project is “true”, if it is not, it is worthless».

«In archaeology, as in architecture, lying is a constant, an invariant. Architects are all liars, after all, we know it! When Michelangelo created the guard post of the Vatican terraces, so well-proportioned from the perspective from below, he actually designed a building of abnormal size and proportions, if taken in absolute terms. It is a frighteningly tall, pointless building, but mathematically perfect in its overall composition. So it is: truth is never absolute, but there is always a “certain” measure of truth».

«So let's go back to the issue of the search for truth, which you confirm being relative and architecture not a conceptual fact or, better, a pre-conceived fact, but rather a search to get to the truth, that is, to a good solution, to the best compromise between reality and its transformation, between memory and design. It is a succession of experiences. This image of architecture is very interesting and I think it can translate into a fundamental message for those who practice and those who study our discipline, which is a road that is being discovered, gradually experimenting as you walk along it, which never gives ready-made solutions. Proof of it, Siza, is the description of your discovery in progress of the method you applied to Evora, where there are no prior or abstract design decisions but the continuous practice of field research».

«You know, Eduardo, in the end I think it's the meeting of the two, in the project».



214  
Alvaro Siza Vieira and  
Eduardo Souto de Moura,  
ph. Juan Rodriguez.

**Elisa Boeri** obtained her Ph.D. in History of Architecture at the *Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne* and the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia* in 2016, and is now Post-doc Research Fellow at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. She carries out research on the history of modern and contemporary architecture, and has widely published on the work of Jean-Jacques Lequeu.

**Barbara Bogoni** is Professor in Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano. Together with Eduardo Souto de Moura, she coordinates the *Architectural Design in Historical Context Studio* in the Master Programme in Architectural Design and History at the Mantova Campus, where she sits in the Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Chair in *Architectural Preservation and Planning in World Heritage Cities*, and is delegate for the international relationships with European Countries.

**Marco Borsotti** is Professor in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano, where he is member of the Interior Architecture, Museums, Built Environment research group in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies. He is author of several publications in the field of exhibition design, contemporary dwelling and sacred architecture.

**Federico Bucci** is Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair in *Architectural Preservation and Planning in World Heritage Cities*, and Professor in History of Architecture at Politecnico di Milano, where he also serves as Rector's Delegate for Cultural Policies and Vice-Rector of the Mantova Campus.

**Christian Campanella** is architect and Professor in Conservation and Restoration of Architecture at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. He has widely published in the field of architectural preservation, and participated in various projects focused on architectural heritage, such as *Castello di Masino* (Turin), *Castello della Manta* (Cuneo), *Palazzo Baronale* in Avio Castle (Trento) and *Villa dei Vescovi* in Torreglia (Padua).

**Luca Cardani** obtained a Ph.D. in Architectural Composition at the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia* in 2017, and is now Post-doc Research Fellow at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. He also practices architecture and takes part in international competitions and research projects.

**Emilio Faroldi** is Professor in Architectural Technology at Politecnico di Milano, where he also serves as Vice Rector and Professor of the *International Academy of Architecture*. He is Editor in Chief of the scientific journal *TECHNE\_ Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, and Director of the university Master Programme in *Sport Architecture*.

**Massimo Ferrari** is architect and Professor in Architectural and Urban Design in the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. He is editor of many architecture and art publications, and the curator of several exhibition. Since 2017 he is member of the Executive Board of the Scientific Society Icar 14 PROARCH.

**Vittorio Longheu** is architect and Professor in Architectural Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano. Graduated at the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia*, he started his architectural practice in 1989, combining his professional career with research and teaching activities carried out in various Italian universities.

**Angelo Lorenzi** is Professor in Architectural and Urban Design in the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. He has lectured in various international Universities, such as the São Carlos School at the University of São Paulo (USP) and the Institute without Boundaries of the G. Brown College of Toronto.

**Renata Cristina Mazzantini** is Professor in Preservation Design at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. In parallel to academic research, she has carried out several professional activities on the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage, and has worked for the Presidency of the Italian Republic, the Chamber of Deputies, FAI and Regione Siciliana.

**Elena Montanari** is Professor in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano. Since 2008 she has participated in international research projects investigating the ongoing transformation of museums and memorials, and currently is involved in various activities organized within the UNESCO Chair in *Architectural Preservation and Planning in World Heritage Cities* at the Mantova Campus.

**Luigi Spinelli** is Professor in Architectural Design in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano, where he also is member of the Academic Board of the Ph.D. Programme in Architectural, Urban and Interior Design, and Coordinator of the Master of Science in Architectural Design and History at the Mantova Campus. From 1986 to 2013 he served in the editorial staff of the *Domus* magazine; since 2010 he is an editor of *Territorio*, of which he became deputy editor in 2019.

**Claudia Tinazzi** obtained a Ph.D. in Architectural Composition at the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia*, and is now Professor in Architectural and Urban Design in the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering of Politecnico di Milano. Her research activities mainly focused on the figure of Aldo Rossi, and since 2015 on the topic of the architecture of schools.