

Enrico Prandi The Museum as School (of Architecture)

Abstract

The museum as architecture, as the central theme around which this entire monographic issue rotates, derived from a call for papers that also left the field open for reflections on virtual museums and on the dematerialisation of the exhibited object. The theses developed in the articles that arrived (generally) and in those that were selected (specifically) confirm the importance of the museum as architecture. “Presence” won out over “absence”, a position that does not displease us: reality over virtuality. The thesis of surplus value of the real museum compared to the virtual museum is corroborated by such definitions as “space of grace” (Clemente), “apparatus of the soul” (Piscella), and “palimpsest of the place” (Lomurno): perceptual characteristics of the real that could not easily be transferred to virtuality as a way of making museums become authentic “acts of resistance” (De Matteis). In this introduction we critically analyse the papers making up the monograph.

Keyword

Museum — Architectural composition — Museo as School

After the monographic issue dedicated to the architect Luigi Vietti (no. 49/2019), this new issue of FAMagazine addresses the theme of the museum space. Via a call for papers, to which many Italian and international scholars responded, we present a variegated reflection whose only structure and limit is contained within the space of the twelve (which then became eleven) essays making up the issue.

Followers of the magazine will have noticed that compared to the call for papers, the title of this issue underwent a small but significant change, imposed by the theoretical positions of the participants and the reflections that flowed from them. From *World Wide Web Museum. The museum between remembrance and rationalisation of the real* the definitive title has become *The Museum despite the World Wide Web: between remembrance and the rationalisation of reality*. Although the call for papers left the field open to reflections on virtual museums and on the dematerialisation of the exhibited object, The theses developed in the articles that arrived (generally) and in those that were selected (specifically) confirm the importance of the museum as architecture. “Presence” won out over “absence”¹, a position that does not displease us: reality over virtuality. Indeed, in the papers where the problems of virtuality are taken into consideration they do so in metaphorical, allegorical, and fantastical terms – as in the case of the Artaudian double adopted by Lisini and Pireddu for the Stazione dell’Arte in Sardinia, or the filmic narrative construction of Peter Greenaway cited by Federica Visconti – as a pretext for underscoring a still fundamental role of the museum in the mechanism of conservation and memorisation and to which we can also add, in all of its effects, the pedagogical, cognitive aspect. On the other hand, since its genesis the museum has always had a

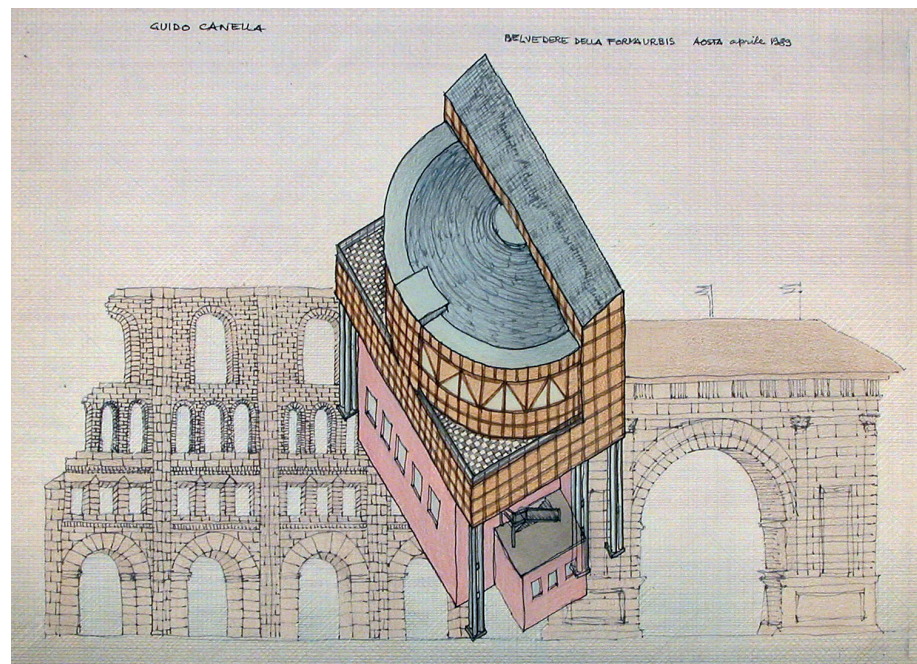


Fig. 1
Guido Canella, Teatro-museo
della forma urbis, Aosta, 1988.
Archivio Eredi Canella.

kind of versatility, in some historical phases even transforming itself into a workshop in the service of training; an operational site, an analytical laboratory, and so on.

A comparison with the positions expressed by the proponents of the virtual museum would, moreover, have been interesting; but as compared to constructing issues of the magazine designed *a priori*, the downside here is that we can only solicit a response via the text of the call for papers and hope for the widest possible participation, also including contrary positions such as would make possible a *concordia discors*.

So to try again, when we are proposing starting points for future reflections, we could ask ourselves as architects how the positive aspects of virtuality can characterise the project of the contemporary museum from the standpoint of integration and not substitution.

But in fact – and some might say that FAMagazine is a journal that reflects a trend – the position that emerges from this issue is that the museum as architecture, a bearer of meanings, a space produced by the reaction between container and content, is more alive than ever. Those who thought the museum was in crisis and was being gradually supplanted by other ways of enjoying the different forms of art (multimedia, augmented reality, virtual visits, etc.) will be disappointed. Moreover, corroborating the thesis of surplus value of the real museum compared to the virtual museum, there are definitions such as “space of grace” (Clemente), “apparatus of the soul” (Piscella), and “palimpsest of place” (Lomurno): perceptual characteristics of the real that could not easily be transferred to virtuality to make museums become authentic “acts of resistance” (De Matteis). In practice, if indeed we can talk about a crisis it is referable rather to distorted cultural policies, as Jean Clair wrote in *Malaise dans les musées*.

The main essay by Ildebrando Clemente, the creator and curator of the call for papers, is joined by others that deal with museal multiplicity in some of its possible facets: the extension of the museum to the city and territory, which also includes the museumisation of archaeological sites; the museum project traditionally understood; and museum vs. museum, i.e. the comparison between the museum and its extension.



Fig. 2-3
The covers of “Hinterland”
nos. 4/1978 and 21-22/1982,
dedicated to museums.

Museum, City, Territory

The first group of articles offers a reflection on the museum that departs from the conventional spaces dedicated to it, discussing “other places” such as those of infrastructure (transport stations) or the specific places of archaeological finds, until it merges with the landscape and with art, which itself is imagined as a device of the museum.

In the first case Filippo Lambertucci – author of both the essay and the project for the museum display at the San Giovanni Station on Metro Line C in Rome – highlights “possible frontiers for museum statutes outside the museum and the potential of infrastructure as a museum, located outside in the city as a sort of City Wide Web Museum, thanks to having overcome its merely decorative role and having involved artistic operations and archaeological finds”.

If at San Giovanni Station the space of the infrastructure meets the archaeology by chance (in this specific case, in the excavations) transforming it opportunistically into a museum, the case of “building museums on ruins” is different, where the “in situ” archaeological museumisation avoids the need to intercept continuous flows of potential visitors, distracted as they are by the haste of moving, to concentrate on other museum derivatives as exemplified in the article by Flavia Zelli.

The examples of new museum facilities in the area of archaeology – the museumisation of the archaeological excavations of the Domus dell’Ortaglia in Brescia by Tortelli Frassoni Architetti Associati, the museum of the Punic-Roman necropolis by Pill’e Matta, in Quartucciu, Peter Zumthor’s Schutzbau Areal Ackerman at Coirà, in Switzerland – are no longer containers of artefacts recovered in the field and taken away, but integral parts of the very place of that archaeology, generating a series of questions that correlate to permeability, the concept of exterior/interior, and the perception of spatial relationships.

The project by ABDR for the Mausoleum of Augustus and Piazza Augusto Imperatore in Rome, described by Rachele Lomurno, belongs to the same typology. It finds a new order among the various stratifications recorded by the monument, making them resurface and become readable; the archaeological ruin re-acquires a contemporary meaning, becoming itself a museum of the complex palimpsest of the place. Thus “a relationship of reciprocal mutuality is established between the new and the ancient: its layered palimpsest becomes a source of suggestions for design decisions; in its turn the project suggests a correct interpretation of the partial ancient forms”.

The Stazione dell’Arte at Ulassai in Sardinia, described by Caterina Lisini and Alberto Pireddu as a rearguard experiment in relation to the current tendency, is an extensive museumisation that not only exits from the canonical space of the museum but also from the other spaces of the city, invading the surrounding territory and constructing a complex relationship with art (in particular with the work of Maria Lai). “If the traditional typological depiction in contemporary global museum design is tending to fade, almost to the point of disappearing in favour of a dominant invention of the spectacular device of perception, the museum at Ulassai, in its tenacious conservation of simple types of service that are familiar to a community and are converted into abstraction, can be the paradigm for a museum of a particular type in which the architectonic device loses its dimensional consistency and functional configuration but not its semantic meaningfulness, branching out into the surrounding territory and the landscape, blending into it and becoming its interpreter”.

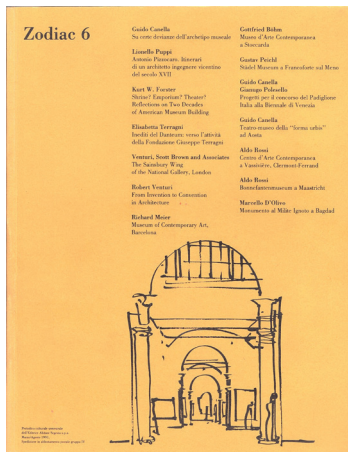


Fig. 4
The cover of “Zodiac” no. 6/1988
dedicated to museums.

The museum project

Some of the essays describe traditional museum buildings and how they are developed within the history, order and rules of architecture, as in the case of the Museo del Mare in Palermo by Cesare Ajroldi, or that interpret types or experiences that have become consolidated in the history of contemporary architecture, as in Renato Capozzi’s analyses of the Zumthor/Mies example; and in Susanna Piscella’s descriptions of more wide-ranging experimentations with the museum typology in a number of projects by Renato Rizzi. In her first case, the Arsenale in Palermo, she addresses the theme of the contemporary re-construction of part of an ancient building of high architectural value. Alongside that basic theme she also discusses the rules of architecture which, not incorrectly, she considers fundamental in this present historical moment of abandonment of the fundamentals of the discipline, particularly in relation to making an “addition” to an important building and to designing in the city of stone, the Mediterranean city. The Arsenale project derives the rules of its constitution from the pre-existing building and is characterised by the order and quality of the light: a project constituted as a defence of the authenticity of the Mediterranean city and its architecture against the instrumentalisation that certain administrators make of architecture (including museum architecture).

In her second case she investigates the concept of the museum as it was developed by Mies – beginning from his project for the German Pavilion at the Brussels International Exposition of 1935, continuing with his Museum for a Small City of 1943, and concluding with the 1968 Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin – demonstrating how his typological and spatial principle has influenced the contemporary conception of the museum as a free and adaptable “space for works/space for work”, a place of encounter and communication as a “workshop/factory of doing” embodied in Peter Zumthor’s 2013 Werkraum in Andelsbuch, which she defines as an “admissible variation” of the original configuration by Mies.

In her third case she analyses a number of museum projects by Renato Rizzi – the Grand Egyptian Museum for Cairo, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and the Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah in Ferrara (plus a fourth project, the Fortunato Depero Museum of Futurism in Rovereto, the only one to be built) as attempts to regenerate the original cognitive relationship via the restitution of three singularities: the work, the person, and the inner landscape, which incorporates the first two. Thus in her conception the museum becomes an “apparatus for experience, for the expansion of the soul”.

Museum vs Museum: museum extensions

Two of the essays investigate the relationship between the architecture of an existing museum and that of its extension: between historical pre-existence and new architecture that is functionally and figuratively connected to the existing. In the first essay Federico De Matteis reflects on the concept of extension understood not as “the mere addition of spaces to a pre-existing building, but the accommodation of the multiple forms of expression of contemporary art”, “a widening of the role of the museum as a building in contemporary society, and secondly the exponential growth of the aesthetic spectrum during the development of twentieth-century art”. He bases his essay on two museum extension projects by Christ & Gantenbein – their new building for the Basel Art Museum and the new wing of the Zurich National Museum – in which, despite their different appearance, functional

programme, and size, both buildings interpret these cultural changes in their architectural structure and in the quality of the exhibition spaces created.

In the second essay Gennaro Di Costanzo takes as his pretext Luigi Cosenza's extension to the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome in which, far from monumental ambitions, the conception of a museum becomes a fertile premise for the realisation of a new idea of a museum – Cosenza defines it as a museum without a monument – where typological innovation articulates a spatial sequence that finds in repetition and variation the formal themes with which to construct a “temporal figuration”: a “classic” museum in the sense given to the term by Cacciari and referred to what is currently not the fashion.

Finally, a reflection by Federica Visconti on what the museum can be today. Beginning from Kahn's idea of a museum-as-depository that he developed in several projects (his two buildings at New Haven for Yale University and, chronologically between his Yale Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art, the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas) and that remained incomplete, Visconti uses his ‘interrupted’ idea of the museum as storage/casket to arrive at a further refinement, offered by the interpretation of Maurizio Ferraris, of storage as a device for memorising and recording large quantities of information in digital format, but still going back to the English meaning of the word, which once again is synonymous with conservation and memory.

Those who keep track of the magazine will know the commitment and attention it gives to the teaching of architectural design. In the vast literature on the architecture of the museum, which is a classic theme for the learning of design culture because of its wealth of meanings and the vast number of historical examples, the interpretation of Giulio Carlo Argan – the Museum as School² – has always seemed to me the most interesting. So we hope that yet another contribution made by our magazine, which with this issue reaches the goal of no. 50, may serve as a stimulus by opening up new experiences and new architectural experimentations.

Notes

¹ The two terms cited are a reference to a text by Renato Barilli entitled *Tra presenza e assenza. Due ipotesi per l'età postmoderna* (Bompiani 1974) in which he anticipates many of the characteristics and contradictions of the present time.

² Giulio Carlo Argan, *Il Museo come Scuola*, in “Comunità”, no. 3, 1949, pp. 64-66. On the educational function of museums in Argan's thought, see Carlo De Carli, *Argan: L'arte di educare*, in *Rileggere Argan. L'uomo. Lo storico dell'arte. Il didatta. Il politico*, Moretti & Vitali, Bergamo 2003, pp. 94-110. On the different roles and historical meanings of the museum, see the monographic issues of the magazines “Hinterland” (no. 4/1978, *Per un museo metropolitano*; no. 21-22/1982, *La diffusione museale*) and “Zodiac” (no. 6/1988 dedicated to the museum) in particular the essays by Guido Canella, *Inventio translatio depositio* (Hinterland no. 4, op.cit., pp. 17-29), *Memorie di funzione e frammenti di rappresentazione* (Hinterland 21-22, op.cit., pp. 2-3), *Su certe devianze dell'archetipo museale* (Zodiac, op.cit., pp. 4-11).

Enrico Prandi (Mantua, 1969), architect, graduated with honours from the Faculty of Architecture in Milan under his tutor Guido Canella, with whom he then carried out teaching and research activities. In 2003 he took a PhD in Architectural and Urban Composition from the IUAV in Venice. Currently he is Associate Professor (since 2017 with disciplinary qualification to Full Professor) in Architectural and Urban Composition at the Department of Engineering and Architecture of the University of Parma, and is the Director of FAMagazine. His publications include: *Il progetto del Polo d'Infanzia. Sperimentazioni architettoniche tra didattica e ricerca* (AION, Florence, 2018); *L'architettura della città lineare* (FrancoAngeli, Milan 2016); *Il progetto di architettura nelle scuole europee* (in *European City Architecture*, FAEdizioni, Parma 2012); and *Mantova. Saggio sull'architettura* (FAEdizioni, Parma 2005).