3. THE CULTURE OF DISPLAY IN ITALY BETWEEN 1945–1961

3.1 Introduction

With the end of Fascism and the proclamation of the Democratic Republic in 1946, a new historical scenario opened up in Italy. At the end of the war, the three elements explored in the previous chapter as responsible for the establishment of the thematic exhibition – the questioning of museum culture, the desire for the unity of the arts and the acknowledgment of exhibition design as an architectural genre in its own right – underwent a series of metamorphoses. I believe that these developments provide a critical mass through which it is possible to rethink how and why the contemporary profession of the curator emerged; it should be stressed, however, that I do not aim to explain where or when this happened, since an examination of the broader conditions of possibility is more pertinent than establishing a foundational myth.

After the war, there was a pressing need in Italy to refurbish museums, since many buildings had been either damaged or emptied of their contents, which had been hidden in order to protect the country's heritage in wartime. Being located in historic buildings, these museum projects required contemporary architects to take on board issues around restoration and to collaborate with other specialists, such as directors and art historians. The exhibition design experiments of the 1930s certainly provided architects with a solid platform of solutions, ideas and reflections from which to start, as well as confidence in the role and status of exhibition design. Snubbed by the regime, the question of the museum's traditional relationship with history and art history was again brought to the forefront after 1945, due to the interventions of architects, although with one notable difference.

As seen in the previous chapter, the Fascists generally ignored museums, leaving them untouched, and counterbalanced their modus operandi through the staging of mass exhibitions. Post-war architects instead, in recognising their educational role, fully understood the essentially democratic value of museums and were interested in further exploring their potential. On each construction site, architects collaborated in a positive way with directors and art historians, but also subverted the very premises of their (historical) position. Art historians preached the existence of the museum strictly in the service of their academic discipline and its needs: preservation, research, education. Architects instead recognised the museum as an institution related to a physical and social

context. They began subtly but relentlessly to question and dismantle the role created for the museum by the discipline of art history. In this way, they offered visitors a unique experience of art and, in the case of some, an occasion to test modernist tradition after the war.

In the 1930s, the debate on the synthesis of the arts was interpreted as a way to achieve a Fascist art through the co-operation of artists and architects; after the war this underwent a process of diversification according to the contexts employed: the realm of public commissions and the Milan Triennial. Due to the dominance of figuration under Fascism, the project of the synthesis of the arts re-surfaced after the Second World War, but with a rigorously abstract theme both in the arena of public commissions and on the private market (especially where the rising middle class was involved). In the Milan Triennial – a politicised arena as much in the 1930s as after 1948 – the synthesis of the arts became a means of avoiding any particular political stance. This was one of the many backlashes caused by the general elections that consigned the majority of the Parliament to the DC (Democrazia Cristiana, Christian Democracy), the centrist Catholic party, relegating to the opposition the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano, Italian Communist party), which was nevertheless still very powerful due to its millions of members. Subscribing to socialist realism, the PCI supported artists working in a figurative style able on some occasions to find their place in the Triennial, alongside more abstract themes which were considered an expression of the Western democracies. Later, this infamous habit of sharing the *res publica* among the political parties in equal terms would be termed, much more honestly, *lottizzazione*.[1] The Milan Triennial, though, managed to develop the debate on the synthesis of the arts in a new direction, linking it to the rise of industrial design in Italy.

Exhibition design as an architectural discipline had a twofold development. On the one hand, as prefigured by Albini's 1941 Scipione exhibition, it opened up a new area of activity through the creation of installation design for fine art exhibitions. On the other hand, paradoxically, in the 1950s it became the inescapable prerequisite for any thematic exhibition. During the Fascist regime, it was the combination of the three elements discussed – exhibition design, questioning of the museum, synthesis of the arts – that allowed for the emergence of exhibitions such as the *Sala della Coerenza*: a thematic exhibition, organised within the sixth Milan Triennial (1936), outside the imposed

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[1] Literally, 'lottizzazione' means allotment or allocation, referring to the practice by the major political parties of dividing up public companies by areas of influence.

propagandist framework. In the aftermath of the war, however, the relationship between exhibition design and thematic exhibitions developed to such a degree that it would have been unthinkable to organise a thematic exhibition without commissioning a dedicated exhibition design, to the extent that architects became the target of severe criticism for their increasingly spectacular excesses.

There is another reason why, alongside the critical mass provided by the three elements here discussed, Italy comprises a central case study in readdressing the question of the rise of the curator. The Milan Triennial and the Venice Biennial constituted international platforms for an artistic community, the geography of which, at least in Europe, had been completely redrawn by recent history.[2] With many key figures from the avant-garde having emigrated to the U.S. and the 'brutal peace' (as historian Mark Mazower defined the post-war period) affecting the European continent, these two international institutions granted platforms for discussion and encounter in places where exhibitions were being staged and the experience of a new kind of art was possible.[3]

3.2 Display Culture between the Reconstruction and the Economic Boom

Three dates mark the period of Reconstruction in Italian history: 25 April 1945, Liberation day, the official end of the Second World War for Italy; 2 June 1946, the proclamation of the democratic republic after a referendum that abolished the monarchy; and 18 April 1948, when the Christian Democratic party (DC) won the elections with the Socialists (PSI – Partito Socialista Italiano) and Communists (PCI), amongst others, relegated to the opposition. From Liberation Day until the 1948 election, the three parties

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[2] As confirmed by Thomas Grochowiak, director at the time of the Kunsthalle Rechlinghausen, Germany, in his conversation with Walter Grasskamp published in Walter Grasskamp (ed), *Thomas Grochowiak*, Köln: Verlag Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009, pp.59–66. Grasskamp further developed this point in his paper *To Be Continued, Periodic Exhibitions (Documenta, for example)* delivered at the conference *Landmark Exhibitions. Contemporary Art Shows since 1968,* a collaboration between Tate Modern, London, Jan van Eyck Academie with the Royal College of Art and the London Consortium, in October 2008 and republished in *Tate Papers*, issue 12, available as an online resource at http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/be-continued-periodic-exhibitions-documenta-example, (accessed 6 October 2012).

[3] On the notion of 'brutal peace' please refer to Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, London: Allen Lane, 1998, in particular chapter seven. The presence of multiple exhibitions at the Venice Biennial and the Milan Triennial distinguished them from other perennial international meetings organised in the post-Second World War period, such as the CIAM and the AICA. The *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* or CIAM, organised irregularly from 1928 to 1959, was dedicated to issues on urbanism from the perspective of functionalist architecture, with the main figure being Le Corbusier. In 1933, the CIAM meeting in Athens produced the 'Athens Charter', an influential document about the urbanisation of modern cities. An NGO founded in 1950, The *Association Internationale des critique d'art* or AICA, gathered together the most acclaimed international critics, art historians and museum directors in annual meetings conceived to update and circulate information on the most innovative research and experimentations in the field of art.

governed together with the CLN – the National Liberation Committee, formed by partisans – ensuring for three years a general climate of cultural *laissez-faire* and experimentation (as licentious satire demonstrated), which was immediately repressed after 1948.

The 1948 election represented the first tangible consequence of Communist paranoia, which caused a shift in the government's stance from an anti-fascist to an anti-communist position. Among the effects of this shift were the alliance between the DC and the MSI, (the Italian Social Movement party constituted by ex-fascists) and the tendency by government forces to capitalise on institutions and habits inherited by the dictatorship (with the excuse of protecting Italian Democracy from a possible Communist coup).[4] These two factors stood alongside the effects of the 'brutal peace' that fell over Europe after the war. Extensively discussed by historians, this situation gave rise to what Guido Crainz summarised as the coexistence of a substantial 'continuity' in the way of managing the country and a 'double state', referring to those means and institutions inherited by Fascism and employed by the government to restrict and suspend civil rights in response to the needs of the main ally in the Cold War.[5] This framework added to the already conservative climate inflicted on the whole of Europe by the Cold War. Furthermore, it helped the persistent reluctance of Italian political parties to consider the State as something at their disposal, perpetrating the violation of citizens' rights for the benefit of the state and turning democracy into a *particracy*. This resulted in a lack of a vision in relation to the inherent possibilities of culture as a force through which to mould society, with governments from 1948 on being more concerned with censoring cinema (and, from 1954, television) than with promoting any kind of cultural policy.

This 'continuity' of the state was instead matched by the detachment with which the large part of intellectuals treated Fascism, treating it as a closed chapter in the country's history. The so-called 'year zero' in Italy was marked by the end of the *ventennio* and the start of the dictatorship. It was the philosopher Benedetto Croce, who had openly taken up

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[4] For example, the *Casellario Politico* [Political Record], employed by Fascism to collect information on citizens' private lives and political inclinations, continued to be an instrument of state control of society, in order to identify supporters of communist ideology despite the violation that this represented of those rights to freedom inscribed within the Constitution.

[5] Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta*, Roma: Donzelli editore, 2005, pp.3–31. On Post-war Italy see also: Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana. L'economia, la politica, la cultura, la società dal dopoguerra agli anni '90*, Marsilio: Venezia, 1992; Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943–1988*, Torino: Einaudi, 1989; Luca Gorlini, *L'Italia in Movimento. Storia sociale degli anni Cinquanta*, Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2013.

an anti-fascist position since 1925, who described Fascism as a 'parenthesis' in Italian history, a detour inflicted on the country by Mussolini from its liberal and democratic spirit.[6] It is notable how many cultural institutions embraced this perspective, in an attempt both to redeem their own very recent pasts but also to supersede the personal histories of those now in charge, who had themselves often been involved with the regime although to different extents.

The need to root democracy in the values of a nation reborn can be seen both in the burgeoning number of exhibitions with an art historical approach in the decade after 1945 and in the refurbishment of the country's museums. As historian Silvio Lanaro pointed out, war profoundly affected and disrupted the lives of millions of Italians, with the conflict shattering their worlds physically, psychologically and symbolically (with losses ranging from personal belongings to the destruction of entire communities and villages).[7] As a consequence, population mobility rose sharply, with massive migration towards the North-west of Italy and from the countryside to the cities, thus radically changing the established mindset of millions of Italians. The economic boom of the late 1950s further complicated the country's already fragile ecosystem.

Given the tragic losses caused by the war, tradition and heritage became landmarks through which the coming society would emerge. Since 1945, the burgeoning number of art historical exhibitions and the commitment to refurbishing museums offered the possibility of revisiting local heritage and fostering a sense of belonging to a place or a community. This is one of the reasons why, between 1945 and 1959, Italy witnessed the organisation of more than three hundred art exhibitions (in comparison with the roughly forty organised during the Fascist dictatorship), and between 1945 and 1953, the refurbishment of more than 150 museums.[8] In his article on post-war exhibitions, 'Bilancio di mostre del dopoguerra', Roberto Longhi identifies two main typologies of art exhibitions: the so-called 'one man show' – dedicated to one artist from the past (usually a local master) – and the group show, giving an account of historic local art movements.

Some of these events involved architects such as Carlo Scarpa, Luciano Baldessari, the Castiglioni brothers, Gian Carlo Menichetti, Piero Portaluppi and minor figures such as

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[6] Benedetto Croce, *Scritti e discorsi politici*, Bari: Laterza, 1973, pp.7–16 and pp.156–7.

[7] Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana*. p.13.

[8] As reported by Roberto Longhi, 'Bilancio di mostre del dopoguerra', in *Paragone*, n.23, 1951, republished in R. Longhi, *Critica d'arte e buongoverno 1938–1969*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1985, pp.305–9.

Eugenio Carmi and Fernando Reggiori, who conceived ingenious installations to create a memorable experience of the works of art presented. In a recently published book, Anna Chiara Cimoli provides an in-depth analysis of post-war Italian exhibitions between 1949–1963, with extensive photographic documentation of these events.[9] It is thanks to Cimoli's research that it has been possible to enrich this chapter with examples of fine art exhibitions (such as the monographic shows of Giovanni Bellini, Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondrian discussed later), historical exhibitions (such as the one dedicated to the Etruscans at the Palazzo Reale in Milan), and thematic exhibitions (such as those organised for the ninth and tenth Milan Triennials). In providing an overview of the different types of exhibition design realised by Italian architects after the Second World War, however, it is not Cimoli's aim to identify different typologies (thus the division into the three categories above is my own), or to trace their progeny. It is therefore partly the remit of this dissertation to expand further the potential of this material.

Nevertheless, Cimoli's overview does not encompass the myriad of exhibitions organised in Italy after the Second World War in its entirety. In fact, not all exhibitions, especially those organised in small towns, benefited from the involvement of distinguished architects, yet these exhibitions not only strengthened the feeling of belonging to a community, but also offered three possibilities to art historians. Firstly, to update their knowledge of local heritage (since the war forced the removal of many art works from their museums and stores for reasons of security, with the result that after the war many collections needed to be re-catalogued); secondly to proceed with the restoration of damaged art works; and thirdly to tackle critical themes in greater depth.[10] The unexpected high visitor numbers surprised the critics, since in the past only scholars and connoisseurs had been in the habit of attending art exhibitions. From this point of view, the post-war period highlighted a transformation in the public's appetite for attending cultural events, showing new needs among society cultivated by Fascism. The desire to see highly praised cultural events (such as the exhibitions organised at the Palazzo Reale in Milan, dedicated to Caravaggio and the Caravaggeschi in 1951, to Van Gogh in 1952, or to Picasso in 1953) attracted people from very different social backgrounds. At the same time, it could be argued that the Fascist strategy of disengaging cultural consumption from the monopoly of an elitist audience via temporary exhibitions, had eventually succeeded.

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[9] Anna Chiara Cimoli, *Musei effimeri. Allestimenti di mostre in Italia, 1949–1963*, Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2007.
[10] Ibid., p.21.

Certainly, the 1941 exhibition by Albini had set a precedent, with fine art exhibitions finally adopting more experimental exhibition design that up to that point had only been used for mass exhibitions or at the Milan Triennial events. After 1945, many architects devoted themselves to the creation of spectacular and influential exhibition design. Particularly notable is the collaboration between Rodolfo Pallucchini, already general secretary of the Fine Art sector of the Venice Biennial, and Scarpa, which expressed itself not only in the memorable 1948 edition of the Biennial, discussed below, but also in the presentation of Giovanni Bellini's painting at the Palazzo Ducale of Venice.[11] Scarpa devised a narrative that unfolded through the rooms of this unusual venue (not previously used for such exhibitions), and employed panels not only as simple supports for Bellini's paintings, but as 'real architectonic elements' ordering the space and directing the flow of visitors through the exhibition.[12] As discussed later, Scarpa also used this approach for the Paul Klee exhibition at the 1948 Venice Biennial, for the Piet Mondrian exhibition in Rome in 1956 and in 1959 in *Vitalità nell'arte*, the exhibition that inaugurated the *Cycle of Vitality* series at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, that forms one of the case studies of this research.

Another key exhibition of the time was the Milan version of a presentation of works by Picasso previously held in Rome.[13] This exhibition was a huge success in terms of visitor numbers (164,000 visitors compared with 40,000 in Rome), thanks partly to the extraordinary setting offered by the Palazzo Reale and the skilful exhibition design by Menichetti supervised by Portaluppi, with the participation of graphic designer Attilio Rossi. Especially notable were the freestanding partitions (reminiscent of Albini's work and used the same year by Rossi in the pavilion for the Sidercomit fair) and the spectacular installation of *Guernica* in the war-damaged room, the Sala delle Cariatidi (figs.25–6).[14] The latter, according to Grasskamp, inspired Documenta director Arnold Bode in using the Kassel Palace of the Fridericianum, half destroyed by bombing, as the exhibition venue for his landmark event of 1955 (fig.27).[15]

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[11] In fact, Pallucchini's field of expertise was modern art; the Bellini exhibition was part of a series dedicated to the Venetian Renaissance Masters such as Tintoretto, Titian, Veronese, as well as the group shows *Cinque secoli di pittura veneziana* and *Capolavori dei musei veneti*, all testifying to the need for a community to rediscover its own roots. The success of these exhibitions granted Pallucchini the cultural and intellectual stature to take part in the Venice Biennial.
[12] More information on the *Mostra di Giovanni Bellini* can be found in Anna Chiara Cimoli, op. cit., pp.36–49.
[13] *Pablo Picasso* was organised at Palazzo Reale, Milan from 23 September–31 December 1953.
[14] Anna Chiara Cimoli presents an extensive survey of the exhibition *Pablo Picasso* in her book, Anna Chiara Cimoli, op. cit., pp.108–19.
[15] As inferred from installation views, at the first Documenta Bode used similar free standing panels to display paintings. This seems to reinvigorate Grasskamp's thesis about the centrality of the Milan exhibition

In 1955, the Palazzo Reale in Milan organised the exhibition *Arte e Civiltà Etrusca,* dedicated to Etruscan civilization. On this occasion, the Cariatidi room was the setting for the dramatic installation of six Etruscan sarcophagi, positioned along a white diagonal crossing the space, marking the highpoint of an exhibition designed by Baldessari, largely based on lighting effects (fig.28). [16] With its subject of Etruscan art and culture, the exhibition gave the critic Roberto Longhi the chance to further denigrate the post-war Italian trend of making exhibitions about every kind of subject matter, including very fragile and ancient artefacts (fig.29). As an art critic concerned with the preservation of art works, Longhi criticized the high number of exhibitions organised in Italy, since they exposed works of art to far too many dangers. For this reason, although he recognised the relevance of the occasional exhibition to enhancing art historical research, he pleaded with museums to stop lending works out and to transform their own displays in order to attract the new audience for exhibitions. [17] Pallucchini shared the same concern regarding museums, although his solution was that they look to exhibition design to find inspiration for their refurbishment because of their high degree of experimentation, due in part to the temporary nature of exhibitions.[18] Alongside Pallucchini, another Italian critic, Giulio Carlo Argan expressed in 1955 his thoughts on the relationships between exhibitions and museums, and it is to his opinions that I now turn. Argan's point of view is crucial not only because he articulated on various occasions the role that museums played in contemporary society, but also because his position influenced the debate on the refurbishment of museums, as highlighted by the historian of architecture Manfredo Tafuri.[19]

in the making of Documenta. See Walter Grasskamp, 'Degenerate Art and Documenta I', in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, (eds.), *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.163. Charlotte Klonk, instead, in her publication *Spaces of Experience* seems to undermine the influence on Bode of the Picasso show (and in general the entire post-war Italian display culture), confining it to a footnote. Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience. Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009, p.264, n.39.

[16] Information on the exhibition *Arte e Civiltà Etrusca* is in Anna Chiara Cimoli, op. cit., pp.120–135.

[17] Roberto Longhi, 'Mostre e musei (un avvertimento del 1959)', in *L'approdo letterario*, n.8, October–December 1959, p.73, republished in R. Longhi, *Critica d'arte e buongoverno.*

[18] Rodolfo Pallucchini, 'La presentazione della mostra del Bellini', in *Bollettino d'arte*, gennaio–marzo 1949, n.1, reproduced in Anna Chiara Cimoli, *Musei Effimeri*, p.47.

[19] Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, 1944–1985, Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1982, p.64.

Fig.25: *Pablo Picasso*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1953, Sala delle Cariatidi, exhibition design by Gian Carlo Menichetti supervised by Piero Portaluppi.

Fig.26: *Pablo Picasso*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1953, exhibition design, by Gian Carlo Menichetti supervised by Piero Portaluppi
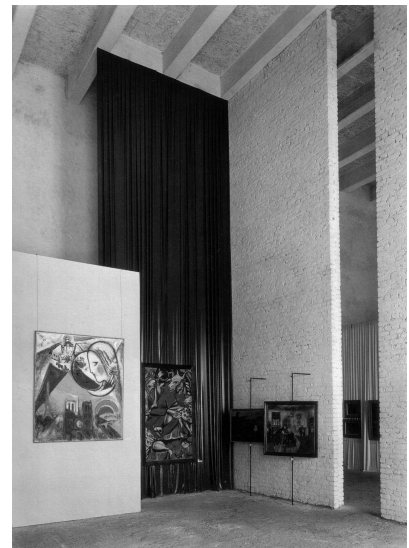

Fig.27: *Documenta*, 1955, Fridericianum, Kassel exhibition design by Arnold Bode

Fig.28: *Arte e Civiltà Etrusca*, Palazzo Reale, Milano, 1955, Sala delle Cariatidi, exhibition design by Luciano Baldessari.

Fig. 29: *Arte e Civiltà Etrusca*, Palazzo Reale, Milano, 1955, exhibition design by Luciano Baldessarri.

3.3 The Conundrum of History in Italian Museums in the 1950s

In his article 'Problemi di museografia', published in 1955, Argan underlines how museums could actually benefit from adopting some of the strategies of exhibition making in their own displays, such as eye-catching installation design, more engaging combinations of items and a more specific focus on the presentation of critical problems.[20] For example, museums could continually present different installations, each time focusing on specific research themes, prepared to reshuffle their collections constantly according to different needs. In order to achieve this ambitious programme, Argan claimed that architects working on installation design should be employed as permanent members of a museum's staff, so as to assist the director in presenting the final results of his academic research in the museum's spaces:

> The display of a work of art is a critical comment in action, is equivalent to the interpretation and revelation of those that are, according to our judgement, its own aesthetic values, it is a way to demonstrate and communicate our judgement: and as such, it competes, without any doubt, with the art historian; but since this is manifested through architectural placement, its expression is a duty of the architect, who therefore is the direct collaborator of the museum director.[21]

This statement reveals the twofold nature of Argan's position: on the one hand, recognising the key role played by the experience of a work of art, able to convey its aesthetic values as identified by an art historian, and on the other hand, the essential role of the architect in a museum, despite being secondary to the art historian.

Argan believed that everything must be in the service of the person whose role it is to judge and reveal the aesthetic values of what is exhibited, especially the 'how' and the 'where.'[22] In this way, he understood the museum as an institution in contact with the city and the community to which it belongs, while always reinforcing its basic premise as a function of art history: 'The educational activity that a museum presents (or that it should present) cannot in any case be separated from the rigorously academic function that

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[20] Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Problemi di museografia', in *Casabella-continuità*, n.207, 1955, pp.66–7.
[21] Ibid., p.67. My translation.
[22] In one passage he states: 'nowhere more than in a museum, it is the inhabitant that makes the architecture; nowhere more than in a museum, architecture has to subordinate itself, and even be almost invisible so as to highlight, meaning to put in an adequate dimension and light, the art.' Giulio Carlo Argan, *Problemi di museografia*, p.66.

consists of the technical and historical analyses in the identification and cataloguing…'[23] Education is for Argan the essential function of a museum. In 1949 he published in *Comunità*, the in-house magazine of the Olivetti company, the article 'Il museo come scuola', in which he declared that, 'art is experience in action and therefore education. And if art is education, the Museum then must be a school.'[24] Only history allows us to grasp the true nature of man's aesthetic experience as inscribed in works of art and expressed through their formal values. For Argan, the museum plays a central role in repositioning works of art in the public realm, available for the education of society and, more specifically, of artists. Those employed in the production of crafts should learn from art those values – aesthetics – able to enhance the quality of their own production. Argan obviously had in mind the theorisation of Gropius and earlier thinkers such as Morris, Ruskin and Riegl, but also the growing interest of the manufacturing world in involving artists in designing objects.

The end of the war and the new democratic regime gave rise to a striking combination of intellectual energies rarely seen in Italy after the 1950s. An 'anxiety to make future plans' imbued the country with the intellectual impetus to lay the foundations of the new republic on completely new terrain.[25] The history of the refurbishment of Italian museums, as noted by art historian Marisa Dalai Emiliani, shared the same impulse, inspiring an in-depth reform of those institutions that the regime had not itself bothered to update according to the modern standards followed by international museography since the 1920s.[26] As a result, the debate on restoration concerned not only those buildings actually damaged by the war, but more generally any historical institution that maintained its nineteenth century style. Ignored by Fascism, these museums became for post-war museum directors, art historians and architects, the symbol of cultural myopia and the reactionary nature of the regime.[27]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Il Museo come scuola', in *Comunità*, n.3, May–June 1949, p.65. My translation. As Argan recognises, his reconceptualization of the museum was influenced by the theories of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, who published in 1934 his landmark book *Art as Experience,* New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1934. Founded as a voice for the *Comunità* movement led by Adriano Olivetti, the magazine of the same name had a particular inclination toward issues on education; for this reason it dedicated several articles to the topic of the museum, such as Licisco Magagnato, 'Il museo attivo', in *Comunità*, year 7, n.17, February 1953, pp.56–9.

[25] Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, p.XIII. My translation.

[26] Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia. Il 'saper mostrare' di Carlo Scarpa*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2008, p.78.

[27] As aptly noted by Dalai Emiliani: "There was no other possible solution other than to break with that past…to make it 'new'…and this paradoxically…at the expense of erasing within the museum – archive and laboratory of history – the signs of 'its own' story. It is in this way that during the years of fervent national reconstruction…there came about the adaptation to the needs of the present of *all*, or almost all, of the

In particular, architects Franco Albini, Carlo Scarpa and the BBPR studio accomplished their achievements in museum design thanks to the collaboration of directors who trusted their vision. Albini worked with Caterina Marcenaro in Genoa at the Palazzo Bianco (1949–51) and Palazzo Rosso (1952–62), as well as on the commission for the museum of the Tesoro di San Lorenzo (1952–6), unanimously considered by the critics to be his masterpieces. Scarpa collaborated with Giorgio Vigni at the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo (1953–4) and with Licisco Magagnato at the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona (1958–64). Finally, the BBPR studio partnered with Costantino Baroni for the refurbishment of the Museo del Castello Sforzesco in Milan (1945–56; 1962–3).

The Italian post-war museum had to confront not only the rethinking of its educational mission within a community and the updating of its own standards according to modern museography (lighting conditions, conditions of preservation etc.). It had also to deal with the issue of restoration, since the large part of the country's museums were sited in historical buildings not originally designed for that purpose. Antonella Huber's publication *Il Museo Italiano. La Trasformazione di spazi storici in spazi espositivi. Attualità dell'esperienza museografica degli anni '50* reconstructs the European debate on the restoration of monuments, ongoing since the Renaissance.[28] In relation to the Italian museums of the 1950s, Huber develops the notion of the 'internal museum', highlighting how the physical and conceptual constraints imposed on architects by the pre-existing architectural conditions of a building influenced the design of their displays. As a result, the collaboration between academics and architects developed between the two extremes of how to deal with the collection and its display and how to respond to the building. In both cases, history constituted a central concern, and with that the relationship between the museum and the discipline of art history.

As Dalai Emiliani explains, the debate on how to address the relationship between architecture and the display of a collection was contested ground even for those in charge of directing the institutions. She takes Milan as a case in point, where two directors – Fernanda Wittgens, regional conservator of the Lombardia galleries, and Costantino

museum infrastructure in the country. At different times and in different ways, each and every refurbishment project revealed the defeat of philology, and the application of history as the right of historical critique (with the inevitable consequences for conservation), the widespread resistance to an idea of history as the layering of documents and signs, none of which could be altered or negated without suffering the consequence of losing the very value of historical knowledge." Ibid., pp.79–80. My translation.

[28] Antonella Huber (ed.), *Il Museo Italiano. La Trasformazione degli spazi storici in spazi espositivi*, Milano: Lybra Immagine, 1997.

Baroni, director of the collections of Milan – epitomised the two opposing ways of looking at museums. On the one hand, Wittgens claimed that 'the difficult subordination of the architecture to the painting, is the theme of the museum', while on the other hand, Baroni was convinced that the museum 'has to realise itself as a proper work of art, as one of the most striking ideas for the new architectural design.'[29] While the former refers to a 'museography of reinstatement', in which minor modernising adjustments were made to the existing form of a museum, the latter, in the case of Baroni, coincided with an 'interpretative museography.'

Certainly, the three architects analysed here sided with those directors who were closer to Baroni's vision, especially because interpretative museography seems to consider the culture of display as a valid area for architecture. As pointed out by Argan, in Italy museums were invested with a mission to educate society through art. This, as noted by Dalai Emiliani, implied a need on the behalf of directors to lay down a rigorous modus operandi for the refurbishment of museums. The previously popular period rooms were abandoned (although not with some misgivings, as in the case of the BBPR studio), the number of items on display was reduced (giving priority to the masterpieces of each collection), new storage was provided, and architects and directors took care to ensure the best lighting conditions and an attractive route through the museum that would ensure a memorable experience for visitors. Albini's refurbishment of the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa stood out as an example of such rigour. He created a rarefied atmosphere in the museum's rooms by removing all the non-original frames from the seventeenth and eighteenth century paintings (fig.29). Moreover, as discussed later, he carefully hung some of the works on free-standing poles, granting to each one the best lighting conditions (whether through natural or artificial means).

Although each case of museum refurbishment requires individual consideration and analysis, it is possible to detect some shared principles among the architects. Firstly, they thoroughly studied each exhibit so as to achieve the best design for its installation, and secondly, they prioritised display over the consistency of the art historical narrative. Formal reading of the exhibits played a central role for both art historians and architects. As noted by Argan in his 1949 article, the pure-visibility approach had, since the late nineteenth

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[29] Fernanda Wittgens, 'La ricostruzione della pinacoteca di Brera', in *Bollettino d'Arte*, n.IV, 1950, pp.359–64; Costantino Baroni, 'Interesse del museo', in the monographic issue dedicated to the Museo d'Arte Antica al Castello Sforzesco, in *Città di Milano*, year 73, n.3, March 1956, pp.168–86. Both quotes from Fernanda Wittgens and Costantino Baroni are taken from Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia*, p.91. My translation.

century, deeply influenced artists in the production of their works, and for this reason he urged a renewed interest in this art historical method.[30] In order to make their selection of what should be put on public display, museum directors based their judgement about each exhibit on both its aesthetic and historical values, creating a comprehensive art historical narrative able to expose the method of selection alongside the work of art. Nevertheless, they were fully aware of the temporality of their decision – and of their narrative – as being influenced by contemporary taste, as pointed out by art historian Lionello Venturi.[31]

In contrast to the directors, the architects adopted an alternate process by which to decide the positioning of each item on display. Their main concern centred entirely around the relationship between the exhibit and the physical space it occupied within the museum. It was the architecture that highlighted (and in the case of Albini and Scarpa drew out) the value of each exhibit. From this perspective it is possible to fully appreciate the consequences of treating exhibition design as an autonomous area of architectural practice. By carefully studying each exhibit selected by the directors to go on view, the architects developed the necessary knowledge to determine in each case what was the best design solution to adopt for its display. Thus the critical judgement and knowledge developed by art historical research constituted a means for the design process, rather than being its final aim. In so doing, architects began to dismantle the idea that a museum must be mainly a function of an art historical narrative (whether chronological, geographical or arranged by medium).

For example, at the Museum of Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, Scarpa decided that the best position for the six metre-long painting *Il trionfo della morte* was a room on the ground floor that had previously been used as a chapel. Today this space still provides perfect top-lit conditions for the work and, moreover, is equipped with a loggia that allows visitors on the first floor of the museum to view the painting again from above and from a greater distance, allowing for a different perspective (fig.31). The museum – organised according to medium by its director Luigi Vigna – had all the paintings hung on the first floor, while sculptures were installed on the ground floor, partly for practical reasons. Initially, Vigna insisted that Scarpa position the *Trionfo della Morte*, one of the masterpieces

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[30] Giulio Carlo Argan, 'Il Museo come scuola', p.65.
[31] Lionello Venturi argued that art history depends on the history of criticism, which enables one to understand how at any given time taste regulates artistic production and its appreciation. Venturi defined taste as 'the set of preferences about the art world of an artist or of a group of artists.' This perspective allowed him to argue that the judgement of the quality of a work of art depends on the prevailing taste of the day. The notion of taste was central to Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1972, p.14. My translation.

of the collection, on the first floor in the largest room of the museum; however, given that the work did not really fit the space due to its dimensions, he finally acknowledged that it would be best experienced in its ground floor location despite being less grandiose.[32]

Although they approached the exhibits from a formal point of view, architects nevertheless had great respect for the integrity of both the works of art and the museum. The internal architecture of the museum, with its immersive and unique character, required the active participation of the visitor, who was physically affected by the display solutions conceived. It was the visitor who had to commit him/herself to engage with the exhibit and to develop his/her own critical judgement in front of the work. This is demonstrated by the display of the three sculptures – the fragments of *Margherita di Brabante* in Genoa, the *Pietà Rondanini* in Milan and *Cangrande della Scala* in Verona (all discussed below) – that, according to Dalai Emiliani, symbolise the rebirth of the Italian museum after the Fascist dictatorship.

Finally, as highlighted by the historian of architecture Orietta Lanzarini, by transforming the temporal-spatial conditions of the museum through their designs, architects created an environment suspended in time in which visitors could quietly immerse themselves.[33] The museum as an institution of the community, and for the community, came to offer another dimension set aside from the frenetic pace of everyday life experienced during the Italian economic boom of the 1950s and so well described by writer Luciano Bianciardi in his novel *La vita agra*.[34]

In organising their installations around the works of art and their conditions of display, architects attempted to create an intensely personal experience for the visitor on their route through the museum. As Dalai Emiliani notes, however, this approach constituted a paradox, since it presupposed that visitors could have a one-to-one relationship with the exhibits, dispensing with the need for the museum to provide historical information about what was in front of them. She states:

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[32] Scarpa relayed this anecdote about the initial friction with the museum director in one of his lessons at the IUAV (Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia), now published in Franca Semi (ed.), *A lezione con Carlo Scarpa*, Venezia: Cicero editore, 2010, pp.176–7. On the museum of Palazzo Abatellis, see Sergio Polano, *Carlo Scarpa, Palazzo Abatellis, la galleria della Sicilia, Palermo (1953–1954)*, Milano: Electa, 1989.
[33] Orietta Lanzarini, 'Carlo Scarpa and the Art of Display', unpublished article, p.17.
[34] Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra*, Milano: Rizzoli, 1962.

Without doubt … that very new form of the museum that came into being in the 1930s in Europe and in the 1950s in Italy, resulted in less conducive conditions for the appreciation of works of art by a public that was unprepared and already potentially excluded from the aesthetic experience. Indeed, this is one of the … fundamental contradictions on which we should reflect: the realisation of an essentially democratic museum, able to achieve its social function through effective *visual* (but not *historical*) education – this progressive ideology being common to international projects as much as to Italian ones, although the latter delayed by twenty years – was based on the principles of an aesthetic and historiography of pure-visibility (one should consider the importance of Focillon and his *Vie des Formes*, 1934, for the museographic reform of the 1930s), with its neo-idealistic variations in our country, which in effect negated the possibility of any mediation between art and visitor, of any connection between a work of art and its historical and territorial context, giving museum architecture the task of creating the conditions for a direct and silent dialogue, for an *ineffable* experience.[35]

Dalai Emiliani's position is constructed from a similar perspective to that of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel in their 1969 enquiry into the public audience for European museums, which highlights how the museum is a place of social selection, with access to it dependant on cultural background, itself heavily influenced by social class.[36] Dalai Emiliani's argument relies on a museological and ideological perspective that posed history as its interpretative key (that is, only if someone, e.g. the institution, provides a clear historical narrative can the visitor fully access both the work of art and its meanings, painstakingly elucidated through art historical research). By abandoning this premise and taking the reverse point of view, it is possible to spot in the very nerve exposed by Dalai Emiliani the thing that was transforming Italian museums from within. That is to say, the way in which architecture took on the role of creating the meaning of what was exhibited in an institution by newly empowering the visitor in his/her relationship with the work of art, in the attempt to reconnect art and life (a trope of the European artistic avant-gardes), rather than this role being fulfilled by art history, as wished for by Argan (and Dalai Emiliani too).

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[35] Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia*, p.117. My translation.
[36] Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, with Dominique Schnapper (eds.), *Amour de l'art. Les musées d'art européens et leur public*, Paris : Les Éditions de minuit, 1969.

Dalai Emiliani also highlights another paradox of Italian museography worthy of mention.[37] With the value of a work of art depending on historical judgement, installation design needed to be conceived so as to be easily changeable in line with new interpretations. This was something that architects took into consideration in their different display designs, but ultimately also prevented from happening. In fact, although architects equipped their museums with the ability to modify their installation designs, this never happened for a series of historical reasons (such as the later transformation of the function of the museum, the substantial failure of the mission of these museums to attract a new public, the politicisation of culture that occurred in Italy and the dwindling interest of architects in dealing with installation design). What happened instead was that, as early as the 1970s, these refined installation designs began to be tampered with in an ad hoc fashion, gradually rendering them almost unreadable.

Architects came to museums in the post-war period with a series of issues related to their own discipline that they wanted to test through installation design: How should the heritage of the modernist movement be read in the aftermath of the war? How could one negate the role of tradition in the present age and what was the best way to convey in the present the meaning of a past form? What was the place of the museum in respect to its social, political and geographical context, given that it was usually situated in the centre of a historical city?

The three architects addressed in this chapter had very different answers to these questions and various ways of dealing with them, from Scarpa's non-ideological position, to the incorruptible discipline of Albini, to the articulated defence of tradition by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, one of the BBPR studio members and editor of *Domus* (between 1947 and 1948) and *Casabella-Continuità* (from 1953–1967). All of them profited from their pre-war experience in exhibition design, each having participated at the Milan Triennial on different occasions (even Scarpa with the installation design of a Venini stall in several editions of the generic exhibition dedicated to introducing various examples of Italian industrial art). Furthermore, they took inspiration from the work of international architects and artists whose work they saw exhibited at the Milan Triennial or reproduced in various architectural publications of the 1930s.[38] This said, as noted by Lanzarini, despite the fact

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[37] Ibid., p.103.
[38] The three were in contact with each other thanks also to Venice where, since 1946, Giuseppe Samonà as the new director of the IUAV – Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, the university dedicated to architecture – had invited them all to contribute to its teaching activities in different ways. Albini started

that they started from very similar beginnings, they ended up with very different outcomes in their projects.[39]

It is thanks to the most recent research conducted by Lanzarini on the relationship between history and the exhibition design practice of Italian architects in the 1950s that we now have a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which these displays came into being and actually worked. Of course, Lanzarini's research relies on a substantial body of literature that has continued to expand since these architects were practicing. What has never been done so far is to understand the kinds of pressures, and the exposure of its internal workings, that these architects imposed on a historical institution such as the museum, not only entrusted with preserving history, but also reliant on a set of historical disciplines to justify its own existence. It is in between the fault-lines revealed by architects' displays that it is possible to detect a cultural shift that asked questions of those institutions of display and their relationship with history.

Moreover, as mentioned above, they all considered their museums in relation to the community and the urban context, taking into account these variables as essential elements in their projects. In particular, it is Albini who, in one of his rare writings, expressed this vision clearly.[40] He recognises three phases in the life of a museum, the first referring to the foundation of the institution of the museum after the French Revolution, mainly devoted to storing art and artefacts for the purposes of preservation and research. The second phase coincides with the acknowledgement of the autonomy of the art work that through contemplation can lead to enjoyment. For this reason 'period rooms' were set up, but still priority was given to the relationship between the architecture and the items on display. It was in the last, third, phase, which happened after the war, that the focus finally moved from siting the work within an architectural setting to foregrounding how the public experienced the architecture and the space, highlighting the educational role of the museum and its anti-elitist stand.

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teaching 'Architettura degli interni, arredamento e decorazione' in 1949, while Scarpa had taught 'Decorazione' since before the war. Rogers was involved indirectly via different activities organised by the university, among which the CIAM summer meeting in Venice. The other two members of the BBPR began to teach in Venice in the 1950s, Belgiojoso in 1954 and Peressutti in 1957.

[39] Orietta Lanzarini, 'Per restare *Civitatis Ornamentum*. Il progetto storico di Ernesto Nathan Rogers nel Museo d'Arte antica del Castello Sforzesco di Milano (1947–1956)', in *Arte Lombarda*, 161–2, 2011, p.109.

[40] Franco Albini, 'Funzioni e architettura del museo', reproduced in Luca Basso Peressut (ed.), *I luoghi del museo. Tipo e forma fra tradizione e innovazione*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1985, pp.105–8.

While siding with Argan in his vision of the museum as an educational institution, Albini proposes two approaches to interpreting what he calls the 'living museum', each of them leading to a different urban problem: the first tends to maintain the traditional character of the museum, aiming to create connections with other cultural institutions such as schools, and to participate in a series of activities coordinated with the life of a city. The second considers the museum as an autonomous organism 'bringing inside it other supplemental activities and new attractions, besides maintaining its links with universities of art history, fine art academies and with other kinds of teaching.'[41] Of the two solutions, it is interesting to note that both reflect on the meaning of the museum in respect to its role as an institution inserted in a broader context, almost mirroring Gropius' mantra (followed in those years by architects and repeated by Rogers himself), 'from the spoon to the city,' meaning that the goal of the architect through his/her work was to have an impact on everything in the everyday life of a community, from the smallest object – the spoon – to the greater scale of the city and its urban plan.[42]

Although architects realised their idea of an educational museum in different ways, each employing a different set of strategies, all of them shared the Crocean belief that 'every true history is a contemporary history,' meaning that history is made in a continuum seen through the mirror of the present.[43] At the same time, their questions remained tied to the actual experience of the space enhanced by their installation design, rather than slavishly following an art historical approach. Even when the sequence of the rooms was determined by an art historical chronology, as in the Palazzo Bianco refurbished by Albini, the rigorousness of the installation design managed to obliterate, or at least relegate to the background, that very chronology. Albini, Scarpa and the BBPR all resolved the educational role of the museum in very different ways. Albini and Scarpa applied the lessons learnt by the avant-gardes of the first half of the century, using abstraction as a tool to grasp the essence of an exhibit, the context for which was by definition irremediably lost. Individually they found two different ways to situate museum collections in the present: Albini by focusing on technique and Scarpa on history.[44] The BBPR studio, instead, concentrated on creating a visitor experience, elevating a vision of the past made present through the design of the display.

[41] Ibid., p.108.

[42] Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'Ricostruzione: dall'oggetto d'uso alla città', in *Domus*, n.215, November 1946.

[43] Benedetto Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, Bari: Laterza, 1917, reprinted by Milano: Gli Adelphi, 2001, p.14. My translation.

[44] Orietta Lanzarini, Marco Mulazzani, 'L'esperienza del porgere. I musei di Franco Albini e Carlo Scarpa', in Federico Bucci e Fulvio Irace (eds.), *Zero Gravity. Franco Albini construire le modernità*, exh. cat., Milano: Electa, 2006, pp.149–64.

Fig.30: Museo di Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, 1949–51, exhibition design by Franco Albini.

Fig.31: Galleria di Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo, 1953–4, exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa. View from above of *Il trionfo della morte*.

3.3.i The Technique of Franco Albini in Genoa

In 1949, Caterina Marcenaro invited Franco Albini to refurbish the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa. It was the first time that he had taken on a museum project. The Palazzo Bianco opened in 1951, immediately becoming one of the pivotal examples of museography at an international level.[45] Following their successful collaboration, Marcenaro invited Albini to refurbish the Palazzo Rosso and the museum of the Tesoro di San Lorenzo. While the two Palazzi – both severely damaged during the war (especially the Bianco) – belonged to the city council and contained some of the best historical collections of art in the city, the Tesoro di San Lorenzo was built from scratch to house the treasure of the metropolitan cathedral of Genoa. The three museums illustrate a set of different solutions employed by Albini and his team (joined in 1953 by architect Franca Helg).

For the Palazzo Bianco, Albini conceived a neat and minimal installation design, where the selected works of art almost seemed to float against pristine white backgrounds. Rather than highlight the nature of the building as a historical Palazzo, to further foster the educational role of the museum, Albini decided to focus on its new museological function.[46] In order to best accommodate the works of art, he based his design on both natural and artificial lighting effects. Venetian blinds screened out the daylight, giving it a warm shimmering effect, while a cold white artificial light was used in the rooms without windows (fig.30). He then proceeded to remove any furniture and decoration that could divert the attention of the visitors from the collection on display, leaving only portable leather seats of his design, called Tripolina, to introduce a touch of colour.

Albini aimed to give plenty of space to each piece in the collection, and removed the frames from the paintings in order to underline the essential nature of each work. Many paintings, rather than being hung on the walls, were displayed in the middle of the rooms, sharing the space with the visitors. As previously mentioned, Albini employed modern

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[45] The ICOM, the international council on museums, organised in Italy in 1953, held its sessions between Milan and Genoa and produced the prestigious publication 'Museums', on the subject of the Palazzo Bianco with an article written by Marcenaro herself. Caterina Marcenaro, 'Le concept de muse et la reorganisation du Palazzo Bianco à Gènes / The Museum Concept and the Rearrangement of the Palazzo Bianco, Genoa', in *Museum*, VII, n.4, 1954, pp.250–67.

[46] Marcenaro states: 'In the interests of education, the palace concept was abandoned and the museum criterion strictly adhered to. In other words, the works of art were treated not as the decorative part of a given setting, but as a world in themselves, sufficient to absorb the visitor's full attention. To avoid distracting that attention, care was taken when arranging the rooms so far as possible to dispense with all embellishments either in material, form or colour – the intention being to provide the tranquil visual background that is desirable, if not essential, for the contemplation of a work of representational art.', Ibid., p.266.

materials and techniques to forge a link between the visitor and the art works on display (and therefore bypassing the historicist approach). The use of contemporary materials was designed to stress the relevance of an exhibit from the past in the present day, betraying Albini's debt to Croce's idea of the need to know the past and to read it from the position of the present.[47]

Through these means the paintings populated the exhibition space sometimes, as noted by Lanzarini, adopting an almost surreal touch when Albini inserted the metal poles holding the works in ancient-style column capitals resting on the floor (fig.32). In this way, he reversed their position in respect to their original function at the top of a column, supported the paintings hung at eye level. With the poles slightly offset at an angle, almost mimicking a bow, Albini created an installation device that invited the viewer into a more intimate relationship with the painting, which itself no longer towered over the viewer or dominated the room with its presence.[48] This approach characterised Albini's style, giving pre-eminence to the object on display rather than the means of its presentation.[49] Placed in the space, avoiding visual interference, the paintings formed part of the play of light-and-shadow set up by the Palazzo, taking on a direct relationship with the movements of visitors.

The highpoint of Albini's installation in the Palazzo Bianco was the display of the fragments of the *Elevatio Animae*, Margherita di Brabante's funeral monument, part of a group of sculptures by the medieval master Giovanni Pisano, who lived around 1248–1315 (fig.33). Since there are no original sources extant about Pisano's project, Albini invented an elegant electric movable apparatus that visitors could control in order to experience the sculptural works at different heights and with different backgrounds. One of these backgrounds consisted of a slate-grey wall, recalling the walls of ancient churches, while another used Venetian blinds to modulate the light coming from the windows (figs.34–5). Clearly inspired by avant-garde precedents such as Fredrick Kiesler's exhibitions in Vienna in 1923 or in New York in 1942, or El Lissiztky's *Abstract Cabinet* at the Landesmuseum of

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[47] This, like the above quoted passage from Dalai Emiliani (on p.98 of this chapter), summed up the ambiguity of the Italian architects of the post-war period, who were on the one hand extremely sophisticated in their historical knowledge and reference, and on the other hand interested in prioritizing the aesthetic experience without making explicit the historical background that helped them to conceived the installation design, leaving visitors to enjoy their 'ineffable experience' with the exhibits.

[48] Orietta Lanzarini, Marco Mulazzani, 'L'esperienza del porgere', 2006, p.150.

[49] As claimed by Antonio Monestiroli in his essay 'Un caposcuola dell'architettura razionale', in Federico Bucci e Augusto Rossari (eds.), *I musei e gli allestimenti di Franco Albini*, Milano: Electa, 2005, p.12.

Hanover, Albini wanted to engage the visitor directly with the work of art, inviting him/her to understand and experience it through the actual mechanics of the display.[50]

Albini returned to this interaction between visitor and work of art in a much broader way in the installation design of the Palazzo Rosso (conceived together with Franca Helg). In this case the opulent baroque decorations and the refined articulation of the spaces had survived the war, thereby maintaining the building's ancient residential character (fig.36). In the Palazzo Rosso, Albini and Helg's use of a range of warm tones and colours provided a welcoming ambience for visitors, with light once again used as an architectural tool. The exhibition design apparatus, minimal and almost unnoticeable in the Palazzo Bianco, here became more present and physically immediate to visitors.[51] Viewers could move some of the paintings that were positioned alongside the windows, according to the light conditions, thanks to an elegant handle that formed part of the supporting structure of the work (fig.37). Albini employed furniture from the palace, drapery and glass panes to enhance the baroque architecture of the building, generating a mesmerizing experience for the viewer.

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[50] As noticed also in Orietta Lanzarini and Marco Mulazzani, 'L'esperienza del porgere', pp.153–4. In 1923, Kiesler invented a cheap standardised system to install exhibits based upon the principle that visitors could interact with them. On the occasion of the installation of the *Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik* at the Konzerthaus in Vienna, prohibited from using the walls of the exhibition venue for reasons of conservation, Kiesler came up with the idea of installing the exhibits and works of art on a series of structures formed by the so-called system of 'T- and L-beams', positioned at the centre of the exhibition space. This allowed visitors to push or pull some of its elements in order to adjust the placing of the exhibits to suit their needs. Furthermore, organising the space according to the principle of the grid (as suggested by the photographs of the installation), Kiesler launched a system of spatial organisation that would become extremely popular in exhibition design of the following decade. He adopted the same interactive logic, although not the grid principle, on the occasion of the installation of Peggy Guggenheim's collection at her *Art of This Century* Gallery in 1942 in New York. Lissitzky visited the Konzerthaus in Vienna in 1923, being one of the exhibitors, and he quickly became acquainted with Kiesler. In 1926, he was invited by Alexander Dorner, director of the Landesmuseum of Hanover, to create a room dedicated to abstract art. Lissitzky painted the walls grey and installed a series of aluminium slats painted white on one side and black on the other; in this way, visitors moving around the room gained a sense of the dynamism of the walls, which provoked a feeling of instability and dizziness. Moreover, he created a series of sliding cases in order to show only some of the works of art at any one time. The entire installation changed each time someone moved in the room or interacted with its elements. As part of an ongoing negotiation, the Abstract Cabinet invited the participant to confront the other members of the public, the entire experience depending on the actions and movements of those in the room at any given moment. On the installation design of Frederick Kiesler, the main reference is still the exhibition catalogue of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Lisa Philips (ed.), *Frederick Kiesler*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989. A critical analysis of the Abstract Cabinet by El Lissitzky is carried out by Maria Gough, 'Constructivism Disoriented: El Lissitzky's Dresden and Hannover Demonstrationsräume', in Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (eds.), *Situating El Lissitzky, Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2003, pp.77–128.
[51] From 1951, Franca Helg joined Albini's studio, influencing the final versions of the design of the exhibition devices for Palazzo Rosso; Augusto Rossari, 'Leggerezza e consistenza: i musei genovesi', in Federico Bucci, Augusto Rossari (eds.), *I musei e gli allestimenti di Franco Albini*, p.51.

By contrast, as highlighted by architectural historian Marco Mulazzani, the architecture of the Tesoro di San Lorenzo [San Lorenzo's Treasure] presents a completely different approach – one that could be defined as anti-museological.[52] In his previous projects, Albini worked to adapt the idea of an 'active' and modern museum to fit an already existing palazzo; in the case of the Tesoro, he had to build from scratch, opting for a timeless installation in close dialogue with the collection. The treasure, belonging to the Cathedral of San Lorenzo, comprised different types of precious items, some of them still used for church rituals and worship at certain times of the year (fig.38).[53] Located in the underground of the courtyard of the Bishop's palace, the museum can be accessed only from within the cathedral. The hexagonal perimeter, recalling the shape of the Sacro Catino, one of the most precious pieces in the collection, allowed Albini to shape the space of the museum to achieve a perfect balance between its different parts (fig.39).

Enclosed in the perimeter, three round chambers distantly recall the shape of Mycenaean *tholoi*, or of the Christian *martiria* from the Palaeo-Christian age (fig.40). Different items, such as the life-size silvered Madonna, the magnificent chest used for the Corpus Domini procession and ancient copes, welcome visitors into the central area of the museum. The whole experience was designed to transport the visitor into an a-temporal dimension; after walking down the aisle of the Cathedral, one then descended below ground, entering another world. Recalling the rhythms of Baroque architecture, mixed with the modern organic approach of Frank Lloyd Wright, the Tesoro di San Lorenzo did not seek to provide its visitors with an education in taste or an art historical lesson, but to generate a uniquely ecstatic experience. The Tesoro di San Lorenzo abandoned all previous concern with the educational function of the museum, at least as defined by Argan, and demonstrated a more mature relationship with the avant-garde tradition and the heritage of international functionalism, which at the time was being questioned in Italy and elsewhere in Europe.[54] The architecture of the Tesoro suspends the visitor in an ahistorical

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[52] Marco Mulazzani, "'Un'architettura scavata, tutta di dentro'. Il Museo del Tesoro di San Lorenzo", in Federico Bucci and Augusto Rossari (eds.), *I musei e gli allestimenti di Franco Albini*, p.74.

[53] Among the objects are the Sacro Catino, the hexagonal green plate reputed to be used by Jesus during the Last Supper, the plate on which Salomé received St. John the Baptist's Head, la Croce degli Zaccaria, a reliquary studded with gems and gold containing a fragment of Jesus's Cross and a human-size sculpture of the Madonna Immacolata in silver.

[54] It is Paolo A. Chessa, in an article of 1957 (Paolo A. Chessa, 'Il Museo del Tesoro di S. Lorenzo', in *Comunità*, n.47, February 1957 pp. 62–7), who first highlighted the distance travelled by Albini in respect to the functionalist principles and the supposed 'educational function' of the architects. In Italy, Rogers through his magazine *Casabella-Continuità*, contributed to questioning, while being carefully not to dismiss, the functionalistic tradition. Marco Mulazzani, 'Un'architettura scavata, tutta di dentro', pp.63–4.

dimension, where everything (from the architecture to the exhibits and their display) contributed to conflate the past, present and future.[55]

[55] According to Mulazzani, in the Palazzo Bianco, Albini 'interpreted' the presentation of the Margherita di Brabante pieces for educational purposes, while in the Tesoro di San Lorenzo, he dispensed with any educational aim so as to immerse the collection in an 'interpretative' installation, aiming to suspend the visitor out of time or place. Therefore, it is not by chance that the museum itself brings to mind a timeless and sacred chamber. Ibid., p.73.

Fig.32: Museo di Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, 1949–51, exhibition design by Franco Albini.

Fig.33: Museo di Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, 1949–51, view of the electrical movable apparatus with the *Elevatio Animae* of Margherita di Brabante by Giovanni Pisano, exhibition design by Franco Albini.

Fig.34: Museo di Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, 1949–51, view of the electrical movable apparatus with the *Elevatio Animae* of Margherita di Brabante by Giovanni Pisano, exhibition design by Franco Albini.

Fig.35: Museo di Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, 1949–51, view of the electrical movable apparatus with the *Elevatio Animae* of Margherita di Brabante by Giovanni Pisano, exhibition design by Franco Albini.
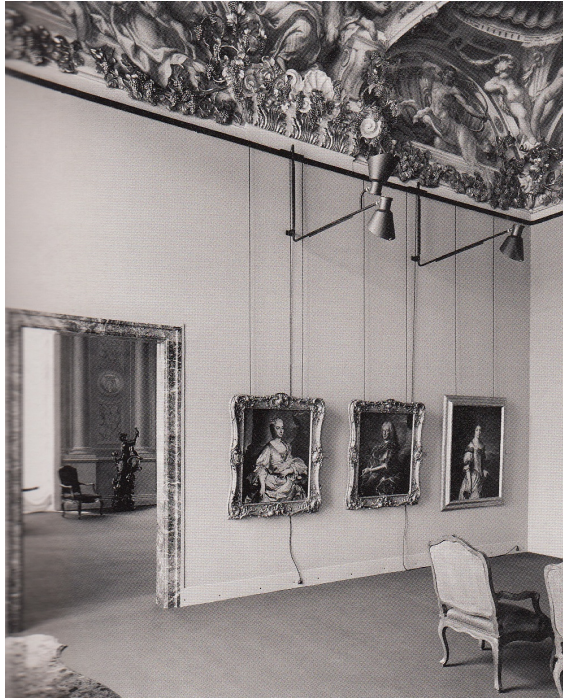
Fig.36: Museo di Palazzo Rosso, Genoa, 1952–62, exhibition design by Franco Albini and Franca Helg.

Fig.37: Museo di Palazzo Rosso, Genoa, 1952–62, detail showing interactive handle, exhibition design by Franco Albini and Franca Helg.
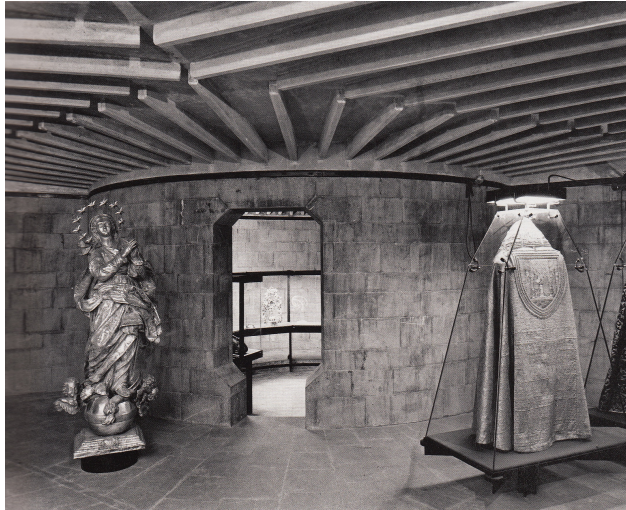
Fig.38: Tesoro di San Lorenzo, Genoa, 1952–6, exhibition design by Franco Albini and Franca Helg.

Fig.39: Tesoro di San Lorenzo, Genoa, 1952–6, exhibition design by Franco Albini and Franca Helg.

Fig.40: Tesoro di San Lorenzo, Genoa, 1952–6, aerial view of the museum's foundations, exhibition design by Franco Albini and Franca Helg.

Scarpa's approach was characterised by the direct engagement of the visitor with the exhibit, so the viewer could 'listen' to the objects, as he declares in an interview.[56] He shared with Albini the use of abstraction as a methodological tool through which to create his installation designs. After identifying those formal values inherent in a work of art, he then organised the space according to them. Almost as an extension of the exhibit, Scarpa modelled the forms of the display directly after the individual object or group of objects to be presented. Another source of inspiration lay in the transposition onto the display space of geometries, colours and lines inferred directly from other artistic sources. From this point of view, Mondrian's grids, or the tonalities in various Paul Klee paintings, became real compositional forces driving Scarpa's designs. Furthermore, he was influenced by the colourist tradition of Venetian art, which he had had the chance to study in depth as a young student at the Venetian Fine Art Academy and his further activities and projects in the city in the following years. In his various museum projects, such as Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo or the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona, Scarpa employed coloured panels, usually green, blue or red (although in Abatellis he also used black), to create contrasts between sculptures in the foreground and their coloured backgrounds. In so doing he could both highlight details of the works of art and guide the movements of visitors in order to further enhance their experience of the exhibit. He adopted the same strategy, but this time with textiles, for the exhibition design of *Vitalità nell'arte*, discussed later in chapter five.

The use of coloured panels, combined with other devices created by Scarpa – such as putting works of art slightly out of the viewer's sightline in order to compel visitors to seek out what can only be partially glimpsed, or to allow for the possibility of seeing a work from another perspective – suggests a willingness to keep the visitor actively engaged through his/her experience of the museum. In this way, Scarpa aimed to draw the visitor's attention to particular details of the works of art, enabling a more thorough knowledge and appreciation of their aesthetic values. In the museum of Palazzo Abatellis, for example, Scarpa positioned the fifteenth-century sculptor Domenico Gagini's *Head of Page* off-centre against a black panel in the background, thereby highlighting the gilding of the sculpture's

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[56] Orietta Lanzarini, "Trascrizione di 'Un'ora con Carlo Scarpa'", a cura di Maurizio Cascavilla e Gastone Favero, TV interview for Rai, 1972, in Jasenka Gudelj and Paola Nicolin (eds.), *Costruzione del dispositivo storico. Tra fonti e strumenti*, Milano: Mondadori, 2006, p.200. 'By listening to a plastic object, whether sculpture or painting, certain qualities [can] help intuitively in knowing how to understand it.'

hair. Another masterpiece of the collection of Palazzo Abatellis, as well as the massive painting of the *Trionfo della morte* mentioned earlier, is the *Annunziata* by the fifteenth-century painter Antonello Da Messina. Scarpa caught the visitor's attention, as he/she approached from the previous room, by positioning an ancient banner on the opposite wall. The display of the *Annunziata*, designed using natural light, presented the painting in the middle of the room, on a panel slightly off-centre from the entrance so as to surprise the visitor once he/she entered the room. With its panel angled diagonally to enjoy the best lighting effects, the *Annunziata* shared the room with three other paintings positioned on the wall next to the entrance. Visitors were allowed to adjust the position of these works via a mechanism that enabled them to be shown in optimum conditions according to the light.

Technology played a significant part in Scarpa's vocabulary also, but it could be said he always used it to enhance the feeling of being immersed in history and to disclose its mystery to the visitor without conceding anything to sentimental romanticism (unlike the BBPR studio). The Castelvecchio museum is a case in point. In this architectural pastiche, where refurbishments from different eras clashed with each other, Scarpa managed to create a sense of spatial order, altering the courtyard of the building according to his museographical needs. As noted above, an important source of inspiration for Scarpa was the language of contemporary art.[57] In the large rooms of the ground floor, for example, he created an internal façade on the wall alongside the museum's courtyard in which he positioned metal windows clearly inspired by Mondrian's grids (fig.41). Furthermore, to solve the problem of the ground floor rooms of the museum, where (as in Abatellis) for practical reasons he had positioned the sculptures, he opted for the use of concrete (fig.42). Polished and divided into sections regularly intersected by stone partitions, the concrete did not disrupt the visitors' experience of the castle, but at the same time highlighted the immediacy and contemporary quality of that experience.

Scarpa also used concrete in the display of the sculpture of *Cangrande della Scala*, a fourteenth-century sculpture particularly important to the city of Verona, being its symbol (fig.43). He positioned the monument in the courtyard of the castle, sheltered by a protruding rooftop, at the level of the first floor. Visitors had the opportunity to glimpse it

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[57] Marisa Dalai Emiliani highlights this relationship in her essay 'Le fonti visive della museografia lirica di Carlo Scarpa', in Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia*, pp.120–49.
Lanzarini addresses the issue in her extensive research on Scarpa's exhibition design at the Venice Biennial, Orietta Lanzarini, *Carlo Scarpa. L'architetto e le arti, Gli anni della Biennale di Venezia, 1948–1971*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2003.

while moving around the ground floor, enjoying its final revelation once they climbed the stairs to enter the second part of the museum which housed the collection's paintings. Positioned at an angle on a suspended concrete gangway, the Cangrande's smile and his horse's bent head fully revealed themselves to the visitor. Scarpa created a small gangway for the visitor, to allow for a closer and better view of the monument. In fact, rather than create a fake monumental plinth, his solution was to design this gangway in a manner clearly belonging to the language of exhibition design. In installing the equestrian monument in such a position, the architect conveyed its historical meaning without either betraying its formal qualities (being a monument on a grand scale) or creating a fake installation by mimicking its original plinth. At the same time, this museographic device allowed visitors to grasp the historical distance between them and the monument, despite the physical proximity. This approach, Lanzarini claims, is historical at its core, and allowed Scarpa to reintroduce into the present an object from the past deprived of its original context, while still respecting that original meaning.[58] This feeling of dialectical immersion in different temporalities was enhanced by the decision to put a series of wooden panels between the outside and the inside of the first floor, which visitors could not ignore in approaching the sculpture. Dalai Emiliani finds inspiration for this in Burri's burnt wood works, which helped Scarpa to maintain the tension between the use of an old material, such as wood, and the modern way in which it was positioned (figs.44–5).[59] The first floor of the castle also allowed a more direct dialogue with the city of Verona, views of which could be seen from the small windows in the walls that guided visitors on their route through the museum. In the upstairs gallery, light again played a central role, with paintings grouped so as to best benefit from its effects. Scarpa displayed some of them on prepared easels in order to surprise the visitors and take advantage of the best light conditions in the room.

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[58] Orietta Lanzarini and Marco Mulazzani, 'L'esperienza del porgere', p.159.
[59] Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia*, pp.138–9.
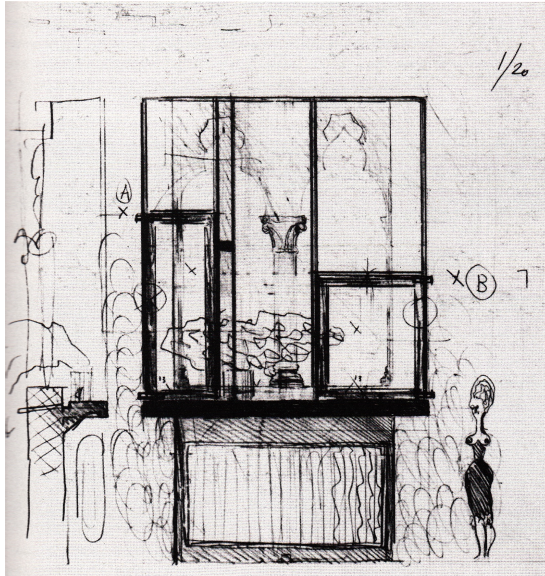
Fig.41: Carlo Scarpa's sketch for the metal window inspired by Mondrian on the ground floor of the Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona.

Fig.42: Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, concrete floor in the 'Galleria delle sculture' (Sculpture Gallery) on the ground floor. Exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa.

Fig.43: Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, view from below of Cangrande della Scala. Exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa.

Fig.44: Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, view from above of Cangrande della Scala with the wood panel at the entrance of the first floor inspired by Alberto Burri. Exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa.

Fig.45: Alberto Burri, *Legno Nero Rosso*, 1960.

3.3.iii The BBPR Studio at the Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milan

The refurbishment of the Museo del Castello Sforzesco in Milan is inscribed within the series of reflections developed in this chapter regarding the role of an institution presenting historical items and works of art, since it aimed to explore how a historical collection within a historical building – the Castello Sforzesco, acknowledged by citizens of Milan as one of the most important symbols of their city – could connect with the everyday life of a community. At stake once more was the issue of how history can relate to the present, positioning the museum as first and foremost an urban problem rather than an institution exclusively relevant to the discipline of art history. This perspective becomes clear if we compare the BBPR studio's position with that of Costantino Baroni, the museum director in charge of the selection of the collection items. As previously mentioned, Baroni supported an interpretative museography wherein the museum itself, and not just its building, could become an architectural theme, even a 'work of art.' In particular, Baroni used a philological method to consider which items should be part of the collection. The same approach led him to understand how to treat the historical additions that constituted the architectural palimpsest of the Castello Sforzesco. The BPPR, by contrast, conceived its refurbishment of the museum from an ideological perspective: rather than give precedence to a philological restoration based on a historic truth, the BBPR studio preferred to incorporate the castle's remains (including possible recent falsifications from the nineteenth century restoration) within a new plan, aiming to reposition the museum within the everyday life of the Milanese community.[60] As the BBPR studio stated:

> The urban location [of the museum] – close to the heart of the city despite being a peaceful oasis, facing the park with its vast landscape extending as far as the Arco della Pace, where children play, soldiers walk with ladies, with its retired old persons, students, couples – is an ambience of vast popular resonance that we could not ignore in attempting to identify a style for our installation display.[61]

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[60] It is Dalai Emiliani who reconstructed the different positions assumed by Baroni and the BBPR studio in respect to museum restoration. This is a key conceptual passage, underlining the different perspectives taken by Italian architects of the period following the Second World War in respect to the museum as an urban problem rather than an instrument for art history, as Baroni's position seems to suggest. Marisa Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia*, pp.100–2.

[61] Ludovico B. Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'Carattere stilistico del Museo del Castello', in *Casabella-continuità*, 1956, n.211 (June–July), p.63. My translation.

Thus their aim was to achieve for the museum a 'popular didactic function intellectually easily accessible to the masses, to their spontaneous emotionality, to their need for spectacular, imaginative and great expressions.'[62]

A museum directly accessible to its community, able to communicate with its visitors without any learned mediation but only through the power of an evocative display, could not be more distant from the scientific and rigorous institution theorised by Argan under Dewey's influence.[63] Both Argan and the BBPR studio felt that education played a key role within the modern museum; for the former, education could be achieved via art historical research into the displayed art works or artefacts, through which the visitor had to be guided, while for the BBPR studio, the solution was different. The museum had to become a monument for the community, a space within which everything, the displayed items, the devices adopted for the installation and the historical spaces of the Castle, needed to be brought into harmony, to communicate immediately with the visitors.

Lanzarini noted that Albini and Scarpa, through the use of abstraction, managed to suspend the temporal dimension in the dialogue between visitors and art works, while the BBPR studio instead used figuration to further amplify the relationship with the specific period in time to which the objects and the architecture of the building (faked parts included) belong. In this case, the architecture played a significant role not only for the imposed conditions of space and light, but also because of the feeling that such a huge and charged edifice was able to arouse in the visitor. According to this, for Lanzarini, the 'study of form, as figuration in dialectic contact with the contingent reality' was a central issue for Rogers, the intellectual of the group.[64] Rogers believed in the 'communicative value of a form in its aesthetic meaning, and therefore, in its ethical one.'[65]

For Rogers, history played a significant role, as demonstrated by the change in the title of the magazine *Casabella* after he became director, adding the word 'continuità,' meaning continuity. As already mentioned, inspired by Croce, Rogers considered everything belonging to the past, from ancient eras to the most recent moments just lived, as material on which to build the present. In this situation, the task of the architect was to

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[62] Ibid. My translation.
[63] Here my position differs from the argument proposed by Bonfanti and Porta for whom Argan, in recognising the role of exhibition display in the re-organisation of the museum, was pursuing a similar aim. Ezio Bonfanti and Marco Porta (eds.), *Città, Museo e Architettura, Il Gruppo BBPR nella cultura architettonica italiana 1932–1970*, Milano: Ulrico Hoepli Editore, 2009, p.153.
[64] Orietta Lanzarini, *Per restare*…, p.110. My translation.
[65] Ibid. My translation.

understand through critical judgement which bits of the past needed to be preserved and for what reason. In his magazine, a recurrent preoccupation was the meaning of international style in the aftermath of the war, when history became such an unavoidable concern due to the restoration and consistent scrutiny of generations of Old Masters.

In her brilliant analysis of the BBPR studio's approach to the Castello Sforzesco, Lanzarini underlines how the architects intervened in the fragmented collections of the museum – including helmets, medieval armours and arms, sculptures, fragments of sculptures, coins, paintings, tapestries – applying the use of modern technology to the 'mise-en-scene' of history, a history to which both the building and its collections belonged. The overwhelming dimensions of the building, out of scale with both the visitor and the objects in the collection, clearly conditioned the BBPR's choices in designing the display. Lanzarini recognises the techniques used by the BBPR in the mimetic or metaphoric approach to the installation design: for example, a mimetic solution was adopted for the display of the double relief of Jesus and Mary, which was inserted within a structure mimicking the shape of a gothic window that would immediately be associated with the architecture of Milan's Duomo, thereby facilitating its reading (fig.46). On the other hand, a metaphoric approach was used for the display of the bust of *Mora*, which sits in a wooden plinth clearly resembling a woman's dress, helping the viewers to imagine the complete figure (fig.47).[66] It is again in the link with restoration and the treatment of history that the BBPR found the solution of how to bring into harmony collections, architecture and the visiting experience. Through such formal devices in their installation design, the BBPR wanted to help visitors to understand the (monumental) value of the museum they were visiting.

The problem with this approach, according to Lanzarini, was the risk it posed of a return to the 'period rooms' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the Museo del Castello Sforzesco was laid out according to the refurbishment of that era by Luca Beltrami.[67] It could be argued though, firstly, that the use of technology, so shamelessly emphasised by the BBPR in each room – for example through the gigantic light fittings which clearly declared their presence – was a deliberate choice to prevent them from falling into that trap. Secondly, the 'period rooms' generally allowed visitors to enter a time machine – albeit a historically sloppy one, since often the combination of furniture,

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[66] Ibid., p.111.
[67] On Luca Beltrami's installation please refer to Maria Teresa Fiorio (ed.), *Il Castello Sforzesco di Milano*, Milano: Skira, 2005.

art works and other objects was not chronologically consistent – of a precise and defined art historical period, aiming to obliterate the memory of the present. In the BBPR's solution, instead, the revival of the past always involved an acknowledgment of the present and did not follow any strictly art historical periodization. This can be seen, for example, in the decision to present the archaeological remains of the Church of S. Maria di Aurona not in an ordered chronology as they were reconstructed, but in the order in which they were recovered from the archaeological site. This playing with history and with its academic divisions (embodied by the disciplines of art history and archaeology) tended to again subvert the position of the museum as the tool of a precise disciplinary context. This reading could also be applied to the installation of the *Head of Teodora* at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan: the Byzantine empress's sculpted portrait is installed at head-height and framed by an oversized golden plate hung behind it (fig.48). As noted by Lanzarini, the BBPR studio drew its inspiration from the most well-known representation of Teodora in art history: the sixth-century mosaic in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, where the empress is depicted with a golden nimbus, recalled by the BBPR's installation (fig.49). For Lanzarini, this demonstrates the sophisticated range of reference used by the BBPR in their displays, although the architects may well have been caught out by their own inventiveness, since no one apparently grasped the connection.

The only situation in which the architects of the BBPR interrupted the direct dialogue between the building's structure and the collection was with the installation of the *Pietà Rondanini*, by Michelangelo (fig.50). As already mentioned, this intervention created a time-based experience for visitors, who were invited to descend a set of purpose-built stairs in the Sala degli Scarlioni. Once at the bottom, visitors did a u-turn to enter a space in which an olive wood panel was positioned facing a concrete wall, against which the Michelangelo masterpiece was finally revealed. Set between two walls of different materials, the sculpture was denied any possible dialogue with the rest of the museum and its collection, partly undermining the entire project of the BBPR studio whose aim was to create an organism whose parts were all interrelated. At the same time, such exceptional masterpieces, bought from the city of Milan in 1946, required exceptional installations.

Fig.46: Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milan, 1945–56, installation view of the double relief of Jesus and Mary, exhibition design by BBPR studio.

Fig.47: Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milan, 1945–56, Sala degli Scarlioni, installation view of *La Mora* on the right. Exhibition design by BBPR studio.

Fig.48: Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milano, 1945–56, *Head of Teodora* as installed by BBPR Studio.

Fig.49: Basilica di San Vitale, Ravenna, 6th century, Portrait of Empress Teodora

Fig.50: Museo del Castello Sforzesco, Milan, 1945–56, Sala degli Scarlioni, installation shot of one of the proposed positions for the display of the Pietà Rondanini, by Michelangelo. Exhibition design by BBPR Studio.

3.4 The Synthesis of the Arts at the Milan Triennial

As presented in chapter two, it was in the fifth edition of the Milan Triennial in 1933, coordinated by Sironi, Ponti and Felice, that for the first time the unity of the arts became one of the main strategic approaches of the institution's activities, following on from the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* in Rome that, a year earlier, had demonstrated the power of collaboration between the arts.[68] From this edition onwards, the unity of the arts became one of the main concepts for the development of the Triennial's enquiries into the present. Architects Pagano and Persico, traditionally recognised as having 'fathered' the sixth edition of the Triennial in 1936, transformed the institution into an invaluable instrument through which to practice a functionalist language within the Italian context and to further reflect on the meaning of architecture. In the pages of the magazine *Casabella*, Pagano claims:

> Exhibitions must be conscious acts of civilisation rather than *divertissement* for collectors … What the sixth Triennial wants to realise is to join the architects' world with that of the figurative arts, aiming to create an artistic and civic consciousness in the industries, aiming to determine the fact that 'unity' does not mean either compromising or negotiating but intimate and deep adhesion of the arts to life.[69]

On the one hand, this ethical call aimed to stress the difference between the Triennial and a commercial fair, on the other it recognised in the unity of the arts the only concept that would enable the avant-garde call for the adhesion of arts and life to be realised within a rising industrial society such as Italy. It is for this reason that the unity of the arts within the Triennial could remain a recurrent theme for the editions organised after the Second World War, overcoming its past links with Fascist propaganda.[70]

The first post-war edition, the T8 Triennial in 1947, constituted an exception, due to the state of the country at that time. Dedicated to the theme of the home, reflecting the country's immediate needs – scarred by the destruction of the war and afflicted by a lack of

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[68] The desire was to realise Ponti's motto 'style and civilisation' through the different themes developed in that Triennial: the exhibitions on decorative arts, the exhibition on architecture, a series of commissioned wall-paintings for the ground floor and the stairs of the Palazzo dell'Arte, as well as an exhibition on contemporary housing.

[69] Giuseppe Pagano, 'Programma della VI Triennale', in *Costruzioni-Casabella*, n.76, April 1934. My translation.

[70] Since it could help to understand what kind of role the architect/designer could find in the new era of production that started after 1945, when the importation of U.S. capitalism into Italy deeply transformed the country's economy.

housing – the T8 represented at its best the social and ethical impetus of architects and intellectuals in devoting themselves to a social cause. At that time, it was still possible to take a political stance (the *Centrismo* would start one year later), although that resulted in a general undermining of manufacturing and furniture industry.

According to Pansera, with the political changes of 1948, the administration of the Triennial decided to take a less overtly critical and more pragmatic position and to shift the attention of the Triennial to more generic areas of the arts, such as the decorative or the more luxurious, and, we could add, the recurrent theme of the unity of the arts.[71] In chapter two, I demonstrated the affiliation between the Milan Triennial and artists and architects in the 1930s, generated by the regime's propaganda exhibitions. In the 1950s, this collaboration helped the new administration of the Triennial to avoid getting caught up in politics.

In the ninth edition of 1951, the *Giunta* of the Triennial (the academic committee formed by different architects and artists such as Albini, Baldessari and Nizzoli among others) could rely on the unity of the arts as the general theme under which to bring together different kinds of exhibitions and works of arts.[72] In particular, the ninth edition identified 'Art as one of the most decisive forces able to provide a form to civilization; the exhibition aimed to intervene in the artistic field inviting artists to confront real problems, promoting new ways of collaboration among the different arts, architecture, painting and sculpture, to elevate the common standard of life, both spiritual and practical.'[73] The intention of this edition was firstly to draw attention back to the production of objects, neglected in the previous edition, and secondly to invite artists from different artistic tendencies to interact with the architectural spaces of the Palazzo dell'Arte.

With respect to the exhibition culture analysed here, two aspects emerged from the unity of the arts as the Triennial's main principle: the first is the further invitation to contemporary artists to produce works in response to the Triennial's spaces, the second the continuation

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[71] Anty Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale*, Milano: Longanesi, 1978, p.69.

[72] On the theme of the synthesis of the arts in pre- and post-war Italy and the influence of Le Corbusier, see Romy Golan, *Muralnomad. The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009; Romy Golan, 'La doppia scommessa dell'Italia dalla "sintesi delle arti" all'opera aperta', in *Il Caffè Illustrato*, 2006, n.33, pp.60–72. On its development in the first half of the 1950s, and its link with industrial design, see Cecilia De Carli, 'Il tema dell'unità delle arti alla X Triennale di Milano', in Cecilia De Carli, Francesco Tedeschi (eds.), *Il presente si fa storia. Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Luciano Caramel*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2008, pp.381–400.

[73] Anty Pansera, *Storia e cronaca della Triennale*, p.614. From the programme of the ninth Milan Triennial. My translation.

and reinforcement of the thematic exhibition. This is a remarkable difference from the other Italian institution dedicated to promoting national and international fine art, the Venice Biennial. The presentation of contemporary art at the Milan Triennial differed considerably from that offered by the Venice Biennial. The latter framed contemporary art within art historical discourse, while the former, inspired by the quest for the unity of the arts, aimed to contextualise the works of art in a given space and with respect to the institution's goal of making a link to commercial production. The Triennial presented works of art specifically produced, or adapted, in relation to the Palazzo dell'Arte, rather than installing already existing ones. This parallels the attitude of architects towards the museum interior, as presented in the first part of this chapter. In the museum, the focus was on how visitors could experience art in an institution that was being rethought in respect to its place in the everyday life of a community. In a similar way, at the Triennial contemporary art occupied a series of spaces – particularly the entrance area of the Palazzo delle Arti – in order to activate the role of the arts as an ensemble.

It should be noted that the Triennial did not aim to fit the works of art created for it into academic categories or genres. Contemporary artists experienced the freedom to experiment with the space itself, liberated by the fact that nobody among the organisers addressed them as critics or art historians. From this point of view, one can understand why Lucio Fontana could, in 1951, present his ravishing neon arabesque, considered one of the first environments realised in the history of art, at the Milan Triennial rather than at the Venice Biennial (fig.51).[74] In Milan the most daring artistic productions found a welcome that was not expected in Venice; crucially, spaces were given to artists to produce new works in response to the architecture.

It was the 1954 edition that identified in the synthesis of the arts and industrial design (the latter arguably a recent spin-off of the former) the two themes around which the Triennial was dedicated. In the catalogue's introduction, President Ivan Matteo Lombardo states: 'The unity, meaning the correlation and almost the reciprocity of the arts and the collaboration between the art world and the industrial one ... for which the solutions that the Triennial proposes emerge from one unified research, that of the

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[74] The first time Fontana presented his neon structure was at the Galleria il Naviglio, Milan, in 1949, invited by the art dealer Carlo Cardazzo. On the Galleria il Naviglio and Carlo Cardazzo: Luca Massimo Barbero (ed.), *Carlo Cardazzo. Una nuova visione dell'arte*, exh. cat. Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 2008–9, Milano: Electa; New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2008.

functionality of art.'[75] By invoking the direct collaboration between two worlds closely related since the 1930s, as I explore in chapter four, Lombardo registered a *de facto* situation that particularly concerned the area in and around Milan (though not limited to it). The theme of the unity of the arts not only allowed artists to intervene in the production of commodities, but to re-direct the theme of the synthesis of the arts towards the relationship between arts, crafts and industry.

Despite its popularity among organisers and participants (both artists and companies), the unity of the arts evoked by the Triennial barely reached its true goal, which was to demonstrate the success of a possible collaboration between architecture, painting and sculpture. Instead it tended to result in what amounted to mere decoration in some areas of the Palazzo. At the same time, the Triennial was the first public institution in which large-scale mural paintings, environments, ceramics and other media could be exhibited together without hierarchical distinctions between the major and minor arts. Here the role of the commercial companies involved in the Triennial was key, as the 1954 edition demonstrates.

In the main hall of the Palazzo dell'Arte, this edition of the Milan Triennial involved three artists, Giuseppe Zigaina, Roberto Crippa and Gianni Dova, the first one a figurative painter, the other two members of the Spatialist movement founded by Lucio Fontana in 1950 (fig.52). On the wall, Zigaina depicted a scene of men working in the field titled *La Trebbiatura*, in a typical social realist style. Crippa, instead, created an art work for the floor, while the site for Dova's intervention was the ceiling. Both the latter artists realised their art works thanks to industrial materials produced in Milan. Crippa's floor employed a polychrome marquetry made from 'Pavinil,' a type of PVC produced at the time by Montecatini, while Dova created his work for the ceiling with panels of veneered 'Novopan', produced by the company Arredamenti Borsani. A line in the form of a spiral, typical of Crippa's production in those years, recalled Fontana's ceiling of 1951; Dova further implemented the goal of Spatialism by reaching a synthesis of the colour, sound, movement and light that compose the physical space.

As already stated in the introduction to this chapter, while in the Fascist period the unity of the arts was aimed at conveying political messages, in the era of the Republic, this

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[75] Ivan Matteo Lombardo, 'Propositi e realtà della decima Triennale', in Agnoldomenico Pica (ed.), *Decima Triennale di Milano 1954*, exh. cat. Milano: SAME, 1954, p.22. My translation.

general theme became quite the opposite, an excuse to avoid political clashes. Not only should the themes of the art works avoid any political reference, but the very decision to admit both abstract and figurative artists, avoiding any distinction between the two, in itself constituted a political decision on the part of the Triennial's organisers in avoiding a particular political stance. At the time, following Zhdanovism, the PCI via its general secretary Palmiro Togliatti, started a heated debate in a national newspaper inviting artists to embrace the communist cause and to abandon their subjective aesthetic to produce only works that could serve the communist revolution, basically by adopting the language of social realism.[76] In this way, art could convey a message immediately understandable by the masses.[77]

That Zigaina's painting, the typical product of the social realism of the period, was hung between the two abstract compositions by Dova and Crippa must, at the time, have sounded like a cautionary tale against further expansion into the arena of politics. According to Dorfles, the three works of art did not complement each other, as he immediately pointed out in his review, published in *Casabella-Continuità* that year, titled "La sintesi delle 'arti maggiori'."[78] In it, he – an artist himself, as well as a critic and leader of the Milan-based MAC group, and also extremely learned about design and aesthetics – assesses the Triennial's role with respect to the theme of the synthesis of the arts.

The lack of a critical discourse able to synthesize the three arts prevented the artists from integrating themselves with the architectural setting: 'the synthesis could have been tried if one synchronic mind had directed and orchestrated the different creations of painters and sculptors, and tried to modulate the effects.'[79] While some panels and works

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[76] The doctrine of Zdanovism, derived from the Soviet politician Andrej Aleksandrovič Ždanov (1896–1948), invited communist artists after the Second World War to base their artistic production on marxist-leninist principles. In Italy, it found expression in the letter signed by PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti under the pseudonym Roderigo di Castiglia (a famous character of the Italian novel 'I Promessi Sposi' by Alessandro Manzoni). In the letter, published in the newspaper *Rinascita* on 10 October 1948, the author attacked abstraction in painting, reclaiming the need for painters to employ social realism as their only style. The article is reprinted in Luciano Caramel (ed.), *Arte in Italia 1945–1960*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1994, pp.50–4.

[77] It was within this scenario that Zigaina's painting created a great scandal. Initially, the massive mural painting by the artist, a friend of Pier Paolo Pasolini, depicted a group of peasants standing listening to one of their party give a speech while working in the fields. The Triennial committee immediately insisted that the standing figure be erased to avoid any political reference and subsequent embarrassment to the institution, and the painter was obliged to go along with this requirement.

[78] Gillo Dorfles, "La sintesi delle 'arti maggiori'", in *Casabella-Continuità*, November–December 1954, p.44. My translation.

[79] Ibid., p.46. My translation. Dorfles recognises how one of the examples in which the unity of the arts reached its highest point is the Labyrinth for children of the BBPR, positioned in the park of the Triennial. In this installation, a series of walls in arabesque shapes recalls the graffiti on the floor created by the artist Saul Steinberg. Visitors walking in the installation finally stood at the centre of it, where there was a small

seemed to be exhibited without thought for the overall plan, Dorfles hoped for the creation of an ambience capable of promoting the synthesis of the arts, concluding that:

> this in fact should be the duty of each Triennial and in general of modern architecture: [to] harmonise with each plastic, pictorial, figurative and non-figurative element the internal ambience of the building, and with the external ambience of the city, in a way that it is possible to discuss, not only theoretically, a renewed synthesis of the visual arts.[80]

The debate surrounding the unity of the arts continued in the following Triennial editions. But while in the 1950s the issue intruded on only some areas of the Palazzo dell'Arte, in the 1960s, as proposed by Paola Nicolin, the theme became the organising principle of all the different sections of the Triennial.[81] This happened thanks to the recognition that a fully realised synthesis of the arts would have led to the creation of a complete environment, rather than simply marking out certain areas of the entrance space. The 1964 and 1968 editions called into question the entire format of the Triennial, developing a programme much more similar to a curated event. In the 1964 edition, sociologists like Umberto Eco, author of the acclaimed 'Open Work', published in 1961, collaborated with architects such as Giancarlo De Carlo and Gae Aulenti and advertisers such as Mario Testino, demonstrating the openness of the Triennial to new kinds of intellectual activity more in tune with the productions of the culture industry. Despite being of great interest, these two editions are not part of the immediate remit of the present dissertation.

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triangular pond above which a mobile by Alexander Calder was suspended. This correspondence between movement and stillness in the three arts, creating a similar experience of harmony for the visitor, was for Dorfles the proof of a possible realisation of the unity of the arts according to his definition.
[80] Ibid., p.48. My translation.
[81] Paola Nicolin, *Castelli di Carte. La XIV Triennale di Milano, 1968*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010, p.53

Fig.51: Ninth Milan Triennial, Milano, 1951, Lucio Fontana, neon ceiling.

Fig.52: Tenth Milan Triennial, Milan, 1954. On the floor work by Roberto Crippa, on the right-hand wall the painting by Giuseppe Zigaina, on the ceiling work by Gianni Dova.

3.5 Contemporary Art at the Venice Biennial between 1948 and 1956.

To understand the breakthrough in the presentation of contemporary art that occurred with the Milan Triennial, it can be useful to draw a comparison with the other *Ente Autonomo* declared by the dictatorship: the Venice Biennial. The Venice Biennial, until its last edition of 1942 under the direction of Maraini, aimed to present a series of works suggesting a strong continuity between the regime's ideals and artistic production, without paying attention to those (nationally and internationally) who diverged from this trajectory. As explained in chapter two, by 1934 Maraini had eliminated from the artistic committee all art historians who disagreed with his perspective and could threaten, through their aesthetic pluralism, his project for a Biennial dedicated to celebrate the greatness of Fascism.

After the Second World War, the Fine Arts section of the Venice Biennial reopened its activities in 1948 (the Cinema section had already done so in 1946), with the institution chaired by Giovanni Ponti in the role of Extraordinary Administrator – at the time also Mayor of Venice – who had distinguished himself during the conflict with his partisan activities.[82] As mentioned before, Ponti invited Pallucchini to become the general secretary of the Fine Art sector. Pallucchini, at the time director of the Fine Arts office for the city of Venice, had previously organised a series of excellent exhibitions dedicated to Venetian modern art masters, demonstrating his skill as an exhibition organiser and demonstrating the diplomatic competence needed for such a job. With a typical 'zero hour' approach to the previous decades, Pallucchini stated in the 1948 catalogue his willingness to go back to the original intentions and goals of the Venice Biennial in 1895, quoted in his text.[83] Another confirmation of the line drawn under Fascism was the opening exhibition dedicated to Carrà, Morandi and De Chirico, presenting paintings only made between 1910 and 1920 and avoiding anything that alluded to a possible political involvement after 1922.

Furthermore, in contrast with the independent attitude of Maraini, Pallucchini adopted the opposite strategy in his willingness to counter-balance the political drift of the previous decades. He invited the most important art historians of the day to work with him towards realising the Biennials' programmes: Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi, Nino

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[82] Like many other institutions, the Venice Biennial was regulated by a now outdated Fascist legislation, and it was for this reason that, during the period when this legislation was being redrafted, Ponti became Extraordinary Director of the institution.

[83] Rodolfo Pallucchini, 'Introduzione alla XXIV Biennale', in *Catalogo XXIV Biennale di Venezia*, Venice: Edizioni Serenissima, 1948, p.XII.

Barbantini, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, together with artists Carlo Carrà, Felice Casorati, Marino Marini, Giorgio Morandi and Pio Semeghini, all became members of the Venice Biennial artistic committee, discussing in a series of heated meetings which artists or artistic groups should be represented at the Biennial.[84] These art historians represented the best critics in Italy at the time, and championed very different tendencies.[85]

The Pallucchini Biennials – as the editions from 1948 to 1956 are labelled – reinstated the leadership by art historians within the institution of the Biennial. This had the effect of reinvigorating the Venice Biennial as an institution devoted to presenting contemporary art works mainly from an art historical perspective. The intention was not only to present either mid-career artists or historical exhibitions from artists of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, but to position contemporary production within an art historical narrative, particularly to show the influence of the Italian masters of the previous centuries on more recent art. In this way, the Italian public was to understand the art historical evolution of the last centuries. Of course, the difficulty of setting the most contemporary artistic production within a singular art historical narrative, Italian to its core, which considered the output of the western world as the only one possible, fostered a rather sceptical attitude towards a younger generation of artists. Furthermore, in the case of those avant-garde artists and movements presented at the Biennial (such as Braque, De Stjil, Mondrian or the Surrealists), the art historical perspective encouraged a focus mainly on formal aspects of the works of art, rather than offering a broader vision encompassing the social, political, economic and cultural contexts in which such avant-gardes operated.[86] By ignoring any potential political content in the avant-garde, the Venice Biennial aligned itself with the general consensual and conservative attitude promoted by central government of the time.

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[84] The minutes of the meeting are collected in the archive of the Venice Biennial, ASAC, Marghera (Ve), AV 7.

[85] Longhi, for example, strongly supported the need to present the French masters of the 19th century (for him key to understanding the transformation that occurred in art history), considering the only contemporary artist worthy of note to be Giorgio Morandi. Venturi, after his period of exile in Paris and the U.S., firmly believed that to be an art historian meant to be a critic of the art of his own time. He demonstrated an interest in abstraction, promoting especially in the 1950s a series of young artists such as Emilio Vedova, Renato Birolli, Afro and Toti Scialoja. Positioned at opposite poles, the confrontation between Longhi and Venturi resulted in a series of epic clashes as demonstrated by the minutes of the meeting.

[86] In its review of the main avant-garde movements, the Venice Biennial never dedicated a proper exhibition to Constructivism and Dadaism, the latter conflated with the Surrealist exhibition organised in 1954. The lack of interest towards the movement most closely aligned with the politics of the Soviet Union, and one that challenged the art historical canon at that, is telling of the cultural policy that Pallucchini and the academic committee of the Biennial decided to develop.

The Biennial's art historical stance can be detected also in the catalogues of those years, which granted each artist who participated in either a monographic exhibition or a national survey at least one page of critical presentation, written by a critic or an art historian. It is clear that the museum as understood by critics such as Longhi, Argan or Venturi, rather than the thematic exhibition style of the Triennial, offered the general model for the Biennial exhibitions. The Biennial was considered the place to present art within the framework of substantial academic research.

From this perspective, it is interesting to look at Scarpa's contribution to the Biennial, for which he realised several exhibitions, offering some of the most memorable experiments in installation design. Such was the case, for example, with the Paul Klee exhibition, the hanging of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in the Greek Pavilion, and the room dedicated to De Chirico, Carrà and Morandi (together with Arturo Martini), all realised in 1948. As reconstructed by Orietta Lanzarini in *Carlo Scarpa l'architetto e le arti*, Scarpa created the installation design of these exhibitions starting from the formal logic of the works of art selected.[87] The position of each work of art was carefully chosen in order to echo the others, with a set of museographic devices – such as plinths, panels or the overall design of the space – specifically created by Scarpa. His Biennial installations became a critical commentary intended to clarify an artist's production, enabling visitors to understand the meaning of a work of art. This was the same strategy that Scarpa adopted within his museum projects. But while, in the latter case, the goal was also to interrogate the function of the institution, in the Biennial the goal, as was clear from the beginning, was to formulate a critical judgement without needing a narrative format that related to any stated intention of the institution.

In the case of the Klee exhibition, for example, the height of the long display panel was meant to accommodate six of Klee's paintings in a row, determined by the dimensions of *Der Graue und die Küste*. Another painting, *Geöffnet*, inspired the animated sequence of the design installation of the room, while from *Oberägypten* Scarpa drew inspiration for the pattern of the pillars.[88] In this way, he created a lively ambience recalling in its features the lines and colours of Klee's masterpieces, furthermore experienced in the choreographed movement of visitors through the space as imposed by the installation design. Similarly, the juxtaposition of the masterpieces from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection aimed to create

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[87] Orietta Lanzarini, *Carlo Scarpa. L'architetto e le arti,* Venezia: Marsilio, 2003.
[88] Ibid., pp.32–40.

an organised visual space. For example, the long white leg of the *Woman Walking* 1936 by Giacometti echoed the form of the leg in the Max Ernst painting *The Antipope* 1941–2, positioned nearby.[89]

Fig.53: XXIV Venice Biennial, Venice, 1948, installation view of the exhibition *Paul Klee*, exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa.

Fig.54: XXIV Venice Biennial, Venice, 1948, installation view of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection hosted at the Greek Pavilion, exhibition design by Carlo Scarpa.

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[89] Ibid., p.49.

The thematic exhibitions organised at the Triennial deployed the full range of techniques at the disposal of architects and promoted a new vision of themes urgently in need of being readdressed. Nicolin argues that the project of the unity of the arts was what enabled the Triennial to pursue the thematic exhibition as one of its main exhibition strategies: 'in the attempt to give an answer to the need for synthesis, [the Triennial] proposed thematic-expositive solutions, looking at the unity of the arts as a new grammar of vision, able to return form and meaning to the scope of the project.'[90] Nicolin stresses how the Triennial aimed, from 1948 to 1968, to create a *mise-en-scène* of a more complex nature about the character of contemporary reality, interpreted through the relationship between art, architecture and design.[91] As explained in the second chapter and in the introduction to this chapter, I believe that alongside the synthesis of the arts, what contributed to the rise of the thematic exhibition was also a questioning of the museum, together with the recognition of exhibition design as a proper architectural discipline in its own right. By the 1950s, thematic exhibitions became so closely bound up with exhibition design that it would have been unthinkable for one to happen without the other.

Architects used different approaches to visualise their ideas. Often they addressed themes specifically linked to architecture, as a way to theorise issues related to the discipline itself, without ever forgetting the key role played by the experience of the visitor in the space. In the thematic exhibitions of the 1950s, the avant-garde tradition of conveying experimentation and discourse through this medium found renewed strength. As with the Milan Triennial's thematic exhibitions, foreign directors such as Thomas Grochowiack, Willem Sandberg and François Mathey opened their contemporary art museums or Kunsthalles to themes others than those belonging to the strict subject matters offered by art history.

How did the Milan Triennial effectively develop the thematic exhibition model? The discussion of the *Sala della Coerenza*, in chapter two offered a first typology, partly referring to the avant-garde exhibitions promoted by the Bauhaus. The exhibition continued its development through the combination of written texts by the BBPR studio and sculptures by Fausto Melotti, the latter juxtaposed with the former in order to

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[90] Paola Nicolin, *Castelli di Carte*, p.52. My translation.
[91] Ibid.

reinforce its message and produce a visual unity. Alongside the use of contemporary art, photography became one of the most powerful media to convey concepts and themes through exhibitions, as had already happened at the avant-garde exhibitions such as the *Pressa* in 1928. While the Triennial used photography as a way to represent architecture that could not otherwise be brought into the exhibition space, it was in 1951 that the medium was used not in an illustrative way but as a means of actually creating architecture so as to articulate an exploration of architecture itself.

In the small-scale exhibition *Architettura, misura dell'uomo* curated by Rogers, Vittorio Gregotti and Giotto Stoppino (the last two, at the time, were young students of the first), Rogers devised a space produced by a series of photographic images dispersed almost to resemble the pages of a book thrown into the air (fig.55).[92] While in the previous photographic exhibitions about architecture, labels provided explanatory texts to introduce visitors to the typological theme addressed and to the meaning of the objects displayed, in this case, the curators allowed the visitors the independence to construct their own narrative, creating relationships between the different images themselves. Documented in the 1951 July–August issue of *Domus*, the exhibition heavily influenced the English Independent Group, which a few months later organised the show *Parallel of Life and Art* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London.[93] As can be clearly inferred by the similarity of the exhibition design, this further proves the influence of post-Second World War Italian experimentations in exhibition design on international exhibition design.

Inspired by the Gropius and Bayer exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris in 1930, *Architettura, misura dell'uomo* presented examples of harmonised forms from different ages and cultures – such as a typical Mediterranean house, the Rockefeller Centre in New York City, the Angkor Wat complex, the 'modulor' by Le Corbusier on the façade of the Unité d'Habitation of Marseille and Reims Cathedral – paired together with more mundane images, such as a woman jumping or a golfer hitting a ball, all reproduced in a chrono-photographic style. An introductory panel explained the meaning of the exhibition to

[92] Giotto Stoppino, 'Testimonianza di Giotto Stoppino', in Anna Chiara Cimoli, *Musei effimeri*, p.53.
[93] Ernesto N. Rogers, 'Architettura, misura dell'uomo', in *Domus*, July–August 1951, n.260, pp.1–5.
This influence has been further confirmed by Victoria Walsh's essay published on the occasion of the Richard Hamilton retrospective at Tate Modern, London in 2014. In particular, Walsh article demonstrates the influence on the exhibitions *Growth and Form (*1951) and *Man, Machine and Motion* (1955), London, of the ninth Milan Triennial exhibition *Studi sulla proporzione*, conceived by Carla Marzoli and installed by architect Francesco Gnecchi-Ruscone, later discussed in this chapter. Victoria Walsh, 'Seahorses, Grid and Calypso: Richard Hamilton's Exhibition-making in the 1950s', in Mark Godfrey, Paul Schimmel and Vicente Todolí, *Richard Hamilton*, exh. cat. Tate Modern, London: Tate Publising, 2014, pp.61–92.

visitors. Rogers and his students aimed to underline the essential relationship existing between architecture and man, with the former a function of the latter, acquiring different aspects according to the human needs of time and place. 'Go around the room freely: the documents exhibited suggest the theme: architecture, measure of man. They acquire full meaning when you get into them with your feelings and your thoughts, because you are, even here, the architecture's protagonists.'[94] Covering the floor of the room with fine gravel to subtly immerse the visitor in another physical dimension as compared to the rest of the Triennial, Rogers, Gregotti and Stoppino celebrated not only the relationship between the subject and the architecture within history, but also the essential role played by the visitor within the exhibition space. Cimoli argues that Rogers did not want to address the theme from the point of view of the unity of the arts, as understood by the organisers of the ninth Triennial, because for him this unity of the arts was already established fact.[95]

At the same Triennial edition, other exhibitions explored the relationship between architecture and the human subject, be it housing, studies on proportion or spontaneous architecture. The exhibition titled *Studi sulla proporzione*, conceived by Carla Marzoli and installed by architect Francesco Gnecchi-Ruscone, combined – through an elegant grid composed of metal elements – photographs with objects displayed in vitrines (fig.56). The theme of proportion, echoing again the role of man with respect to architecture as seen in *Architettura, misura dell'uomo*, paid homage to Le Corbusier's ideas of proportion, epitomised by the image of his 'modulor', positioned at the end of the exhibition as a crowning achievement.[96] Tracing the history of proportion from the ancient Greeks through the Renaissance to the present day, mixing the different disciplines such as architecture, painting, physics, maths, music and biology, to name but a few, the exhibition aimed to "rebuild a 'spiritual unity' among different forms of knowledge."[97] It is again Cimoli who points out the importance of this exhibition to post-war Italian culture: deeply humanistic but at the same time constantly in contact with, and interested in, the most advanced scientific discoveries and material creations produced by industry. Located in a long, narrow corridor of the first floor of the Palazzo delle Arti, the exhibition presented the material in two chronologically distinct units: the first part, studies in proportion dating up

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[94] Ernesto N. Rogers, 'Architettura, misura dell'uomo'. My translation.
[95] Cimoli, *Musei effimeri,* p.52.
[96] The 'modulor' is the system of measure devised by Le Corbusier having the dimensions of the human body as the point of reference in relation to the Golden Section and the Fibonacci series. Le Corbusier published in French in 1951 the first of a two-volume work in which he extensively theorised the modulor. Le Corbusier, *The Modulor: A harmonious measure to the human scale, universally applicable to architecture and mechanics*, London: Faber and Faber, 1954 (vol.1), 1958 (vol.2), translated by Peter de Francia and Anna Bostock.
[97] Cimoli, *Musei effimeri*, p.65. My translation.

to the end of the eighteenth century, the second, from the nineteenth century up to the present. Manuscripts and books, together with objects from different disciplines, guided the visitor through the room. From Herodotus to Vitruvius and Boethius, to the music scores of Schönberg and Malipiero, or texts by artists such as Paul Valery and Max Bill or art historians such as Wittkower, *Studi sulle proporzioni* aimed to condense in its restricted space the whole subject in a way that was attractive for the visitor.

The Triennial organised another key thematic exhibition in its 1957 edition. *Sezione di Museologia* assessed a decade of radical transformation in museum design, exhibiting different solutions adopted by architects in the presentation of works of art. Divided into three sections, the exhibition was a meta-reflection on museum installation through the restaging of certain displays. The first section introduced the history of the museum through the centuries, the second put forward a series of case studies on installation, specifically addressing works of art in different media, and the third presented an overview of more recently refurbished museums. The combination of historical information, organised and presented through photographic panels, and works of art displayed through historical techniques, vividly reflected on the nature of museology itself (fig.57). In particular, the first room of the second section addressed the issue of how to present works of art in the museum space with respect to their original use or context (such as column capitals), while the second and third rooms concerned the illumination, both natural and artificial, of sculptures (fig.58). Installation design was finally exhibited at the Triennial and recognised as being of the same level and importance as architecture, design and graphics. At the same time, the exhibition attracted harsh criticism, especially from Rogers, who felt that by separating museographic solutions from their original contexts for its own purposes, the exhibition failed to grasp the inner meaning of each installation design, which would have been dependant on its original specific context.[98]

About eleven years before the *Sezione di Museologia*, on the eve of the new wave of exhibition design that would sweep through Italy, architect Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi published an article proposing a counter-argument to that posited by Pagano in 1941. Rather than considering the exhibition as an experiment for architectural solutions to be applied to a more stable form of architecture, according to Gentili Tedeschi, they should be considered just as 'opportunities to do good exhibitions, or if you prefer, a good

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[98] Ernesto N. Rogers, 'Utilità e inutilità della Triennale', in *Casabella-continuità*, 1957, n.217, p.2.

architecture for exhibitions.'[99] Gentili Tedeschi's plea was a reminder to his colleagues to avoid the staged installations that often characterised the exhibition-making of the first half of the century, where the exhibits were secondary in respect to the exhibition design, giving way to 'an "exhibition of an exhibition" or even an "exhibition for the exhibition".'[100] Fresh in his mind was a decade of propaganda exhibitions and trade fair pavilions where, on more than one occasion, exhibits had become the puppets of both the regime and the architects. The need on the one hand to pass on a clear message and on the other hand to be afforded the possibility of exploring *in corpore vili* what kind of solutions an architecture inspired by functionalism could reach, turned the exhibition into both a medium and a mass-medium in its own right.

The 1950s saw the confirmation of the new recognition of exhibition design as an official discipline for architects to practise in. Visual art, which during the Fascist regime had resisted engaging with exhibition design, enjoyed an incredible boom in the post-war era as an arena for architects, as demonstrated by both museum refurbishment and fine art exhibitions. In the case of museums, architects' installation designs contributed to the questioning of the traditional bonds between the institution and its historical disciplines; in the case of fine art exhibitions, their effect maintained a more stable relationship with the critical discourse developed by art historians who generated the exhibition themselves. While in the case of the former the traditional institutions of display were called into question, in the latter no such thing occurred. The extent to which display conditions were linked to the development of exhibition or installation design can be seen in the example of the Milan Triennial, which commissioned artists to interact with its own spaces and developed thematic exhibitions to address a range of aesthetic, political, ethical and anthropological issues. In the 1950s, the Venice Biennial opened its rooms only to those artists and works of art whose aesthetic values had been already validated by an art historical community. No one had yet created a thematic exhibition just featuring contemporary works of art. To understand the conditions under which this could happen, it is necessary to turn to the private sector and its engagement with exhibition making. The following chapters will therefore analyse the pre-history, origin and activities of the CIAC

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[99] Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi, 'Organicità e decorativismo nell'allestimento delle mostre', in *Metron*, n.10, 1946, reprinted in Sergio Polano (ed.) *Mostrare. L'allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Milano: Edizioni Lybra Immagine, 1988, p.159.
[100] Ibid. Curiously, the same accusation has been levelled at curators since the early 1970s, as demonstrated by Daniel Buren's infamous attack on Harald Szeemann; Daniel Buren, 'Ausstellung einer Austellung', in *Documenta 5*, exhibition catalogue, Kassel: Bertelsmann, 1972, now reprinted in its English version in Phaidon Editors and Bruce Altshuler (eds.), *Biennials and Beyond – Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962–2002*, London: Phaidon Press, 2013, pp.171–2.

to highlight how in the *Cycle of Vitality* thematic contemporary art exhibitions finally came into being.

Fig.55: Ninth Milan Triennial, Milan, 1951, *Architettura misura dell'uomo*, curated by Ernesto N. Rogers; exhibition design by Ernesto N. Rogers with Vittorio Gregotti and Giotto Stoppino.

Fig.56: Ninth Milan Triennial, Milan, 1951, *Mostra degli studi sulla proporzione*, curated by Carla Marzoli; exhibition design by Francesco Gnecchi-Ruscone.

Fig.57: Eleventh Milan Triennial, Milan, 1957, *Sezione di Museologia*, installation view of the first section of the exhibition designed by Giuliano Cesari, Piero De Amicis, Pier Angelo Pallavicini, Fulvio Raboni and Ferruccio Rezzonico.
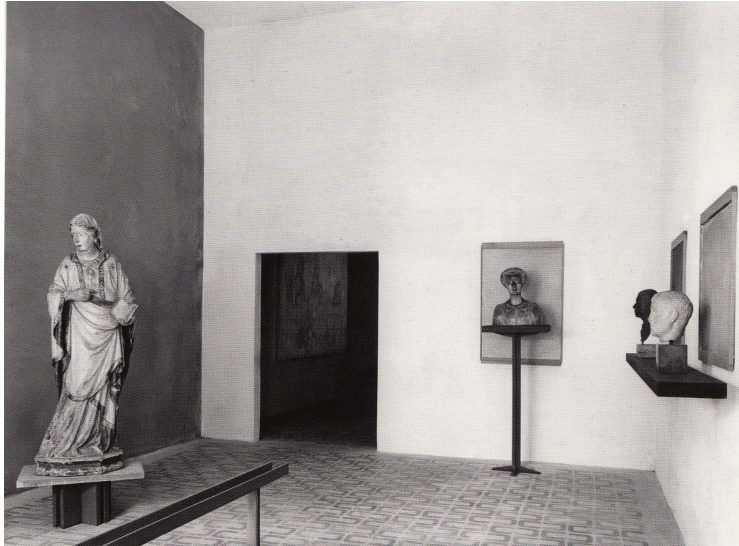
Fig.58: Eleventh Milan Triennial, Milan, 1957, *Sezione di Museologia*, installation view of the second section of the exhibition, with different examples of how to install and light sculptures in a museum. Designed by Giuliano Cesari, Piero De Amicis, Pier Angelo Pallavicini, Fulvio Raboni and Ferruccio Rezzonico