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## TODAY IS ALREADY YESTERDAY: THE GLOSSA XXI ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT FOR THE ITALIAN MEMORIAL IN BLOCK 21 AT AUSCHWITZ

### *Abstract*

*The architect of the proposed Glossa XXI Architectural Project for the Italian Memorial in Block 21 at Auschwitz, presents and elucidates the restorations it involves and its response to criticisms made by the Direction of the Auschwitz Museum.*

The project to expand the Italian Memorial of Auschwitz faces more than one difficulty. Not only must it enable the original building to communicate a painful past to future visitors, but it also must respond to challenges regarding the perceived inadequacy of the building. These goals are, to an extent, mutually exclusive. The new intervention should neither perpetuate the shortcomings of the original structure nor clash with it; rather, both voices must be made to harmonize. Project Glossa XXI seeks to be informative without compromising the universal experience of the original memorial. It should be a monument, not an exhibition.

### *The Project*

The main structure of the project will be the “Glossa line.” The Italian word *glossa* (“gloss”) refers to explanatory notations on an original text. The line is made of train tracks that are fused, deformed, melted, and stretched, forming a plane on which text is written in bas-relief. This durable material will resist weathering and erasure, even if it is forgotten and abandoned. It will constitute a plaque, like the stele found in Italy, in memory of those who fought against Nazi-Fascism, recalling the dead with dignity; but unlike traditional stele, it will be extended, continuous, and dynamic. It will also serve the function of concealing all of the exposed utility elements that spoil the simplicity of the setting.

The Glossa line lies between the ellipse and the enclosing walls. It remains behind the scenes, appearing only partially from certain angles. In order to counter the ambiguous opinions that led to the closure of the memorial and continue to call for its destruction, the architectural addition must strive for rigorously

accurate data, history, statistics, numbers, and names. It accompanies the spiral of emotions and ideas with the linearity of a timeline, enabling viewers to understand the at-times enigmatic memorial. Italian, Polish, and English texts will read from left to right, from beginning to end, while an autonomous but related Hebrew text will read from right to left.

The time line will capture relevant facts about the memorial—its authors, the reasons behind its broad political spectrum, the Shoah, the Italian resistance, the post-war period—culminating in a timely and necessary elucidation of the work itself. The Glossa line could conclude with today’s state of affairs, including the resurgence of racism against gypsies and immigrants, new forms of slavery, the renewed rise of anti-Semitism, and the laws that subtly enable it. This line will seem unending, raising new questions for visitors to the former concentration camp.

The measurements on the line, warping and bending around the sinuous curve of the paintings by Samonà, will refer to the numerology and the symbolism of Jewish gematria of 157, 317, and 523. 157: “Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.” 317: S-H-O-A-H (Holocaust) = 5+300+6+1+5. 523: the hidden number of Shoah. For example, the Glossa line will be 31.7 centimeters tall, placed 157 centimeters from the ground and wall whenever possible. These measurements will be further developed in more ways and points in different forms.

### *The Entrance*

The spectator enters and is drawn to the line, thereby alleviating past confusion over the entrance (many would enter via the exit). The Glossa line will be a starting point but also a point for rest, reflection, and silence. Where partisans once left Italian flags and flowers, the line also establishes a place to accept stones for Jews, candles for Catholics, and other mementos and flags. It is inscribed, “The beginning is here, but so is the end, if you so desire.” From there, the development

of the line will accompany the memorial, solving some of the spiral's structural problems by serving as a support in some places and helping to stretch the canvas more effectively where crumbling has occurred. It will conceal humidity controls and smoke detectors. The text will flow along the front face, explaining various points and highlighting selected parts. Lights could also be aimed at specific points to make them more visible, without conflicting with the track-lighting designed by BBPR (which are at times blinding and too aggressive). These should be reviewed with lux calculations to ensure that the graphic effect on the walls does not damage the paintings. The music will be composed by musicians of international repute and integrated by sound engineers.

#### *The Middle Room*

In the middle room, for those walls curved in the middle, we must solve the problem of the doors, open here and there in a manner inconsistent with the cycle of the exhibition. Emergency exits will be guaranteed, but the white surfaces will be closed and adjusted. The Glossa line continues along these walls, bending with them over the doors. Here, it forms a handle for escape in case of emergency, marked with a small red line below. At the double doors the line expands as well, revealing thousands of names of those deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, illuminated from below by a specially designed light placed behind the Glossa line.

#### *A New Hall for the Twenty-first Century*

In the back of Block 21, leading to the second exit door (now closed), we propose to disassemble the existing door (placed behind the sound system) to create a new room, a quieter autonomous venue where one can linger in the memory of the fallen. Located on the axis of the memorial, a slight tilt of the Glossa line will

create the effect of warped perspective. At the end the line will jut outwards in several triangles to symbolize the different types of prisoners and demarcate new places for memorial offerings. This room is designed to preserve the memory of past victims and transmit them to twenty-first century audiences. In the middle of the room a piece of railroad track will be placed, possibly the twenty-first track of Milan's Central Station, representing the material basis of the Glossa line as well as the infrastructure that enabled the criminal "transport" of deportees. This will encourage reflection on the borders, distances, means, and materials that made a criminal deed such as the Holocaust possible.

#### *End of the Tour*

The line will continue through all rooms, lowering from time to time to give better access to children and blind visitors, who are invited to touch it. The Glossa line will fall under the wooden walkway, passing virtually to the other side of the wall, terminating in a genuine stele. This plaque will speak to audiences of today and tomorrow, conveying messages of brotherhood and respect for all of the remembered places. In the end the Glossa line will bend, as in the beginning; but here, instead of welcoming stones and candles, it will support a guest book to which everyone is invited to contribute. This will allow anyone entering from the end to understand, but also to leave a trace, a reflection, thus forming an element of continuity through words, design, and architecture.

\*The Project Glossa XXI, which originated in the PhD network of the University of Palermo, was presented officially on January 27, 2012, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, at the Academy of Brera. Tamar Shafir edited this text, with contributions by Jacopo Ferrario.



Entrance to Block 21, Auschwitz, the Italian and Dutch Memorials. Photograph by Michele Miele.



Entrance to the Italian Memorial, Auschwitz, closed by Museum Director Piotr M. A. Cywiński, July 1, 2011. Photograph by Michele Miele.



Above: members of Krakow's Academy of Fine Arts and Università degli Studi di Palermo and Reggio Calabria along with the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera's PhD Consortium on the day of closure of the Italian Memorial. Photograph by Michele Miele.



Above: Italian Memorial, Auschwitz, first room. May 2011. Photograph by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.



Italian Memorial, Auschwitz. May 2011. Photographs by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.





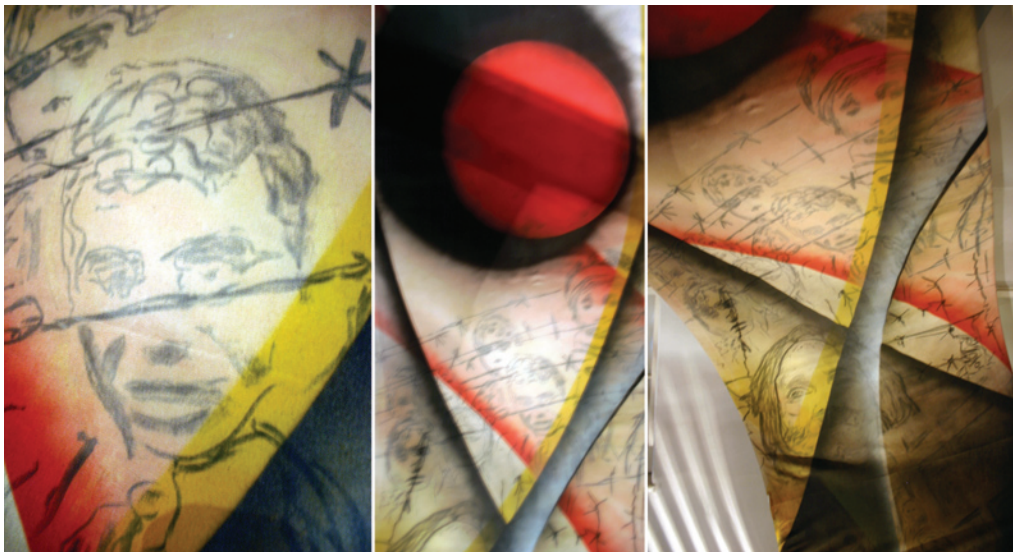
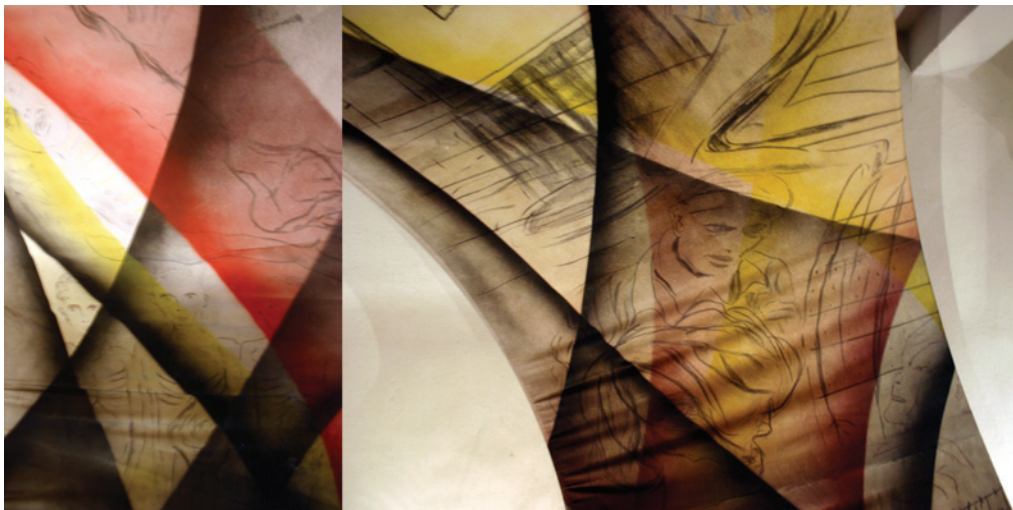
Middle and last room of the Italian Memorial, Auschwitz. May 2011. Photographs by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.



BBPR and Primo Levi's project for the Italian Memorial called for all windows of Block 21 to be unblocked, with the camp outside clearly visible. Now all windows are closed. Photograph by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.



Pupino Samonà's paintings, Italian Memorial, Auschwitz. Photographs by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.

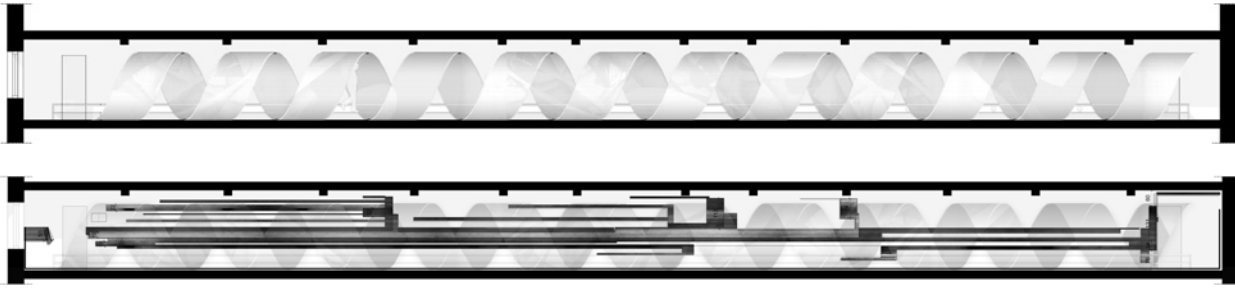




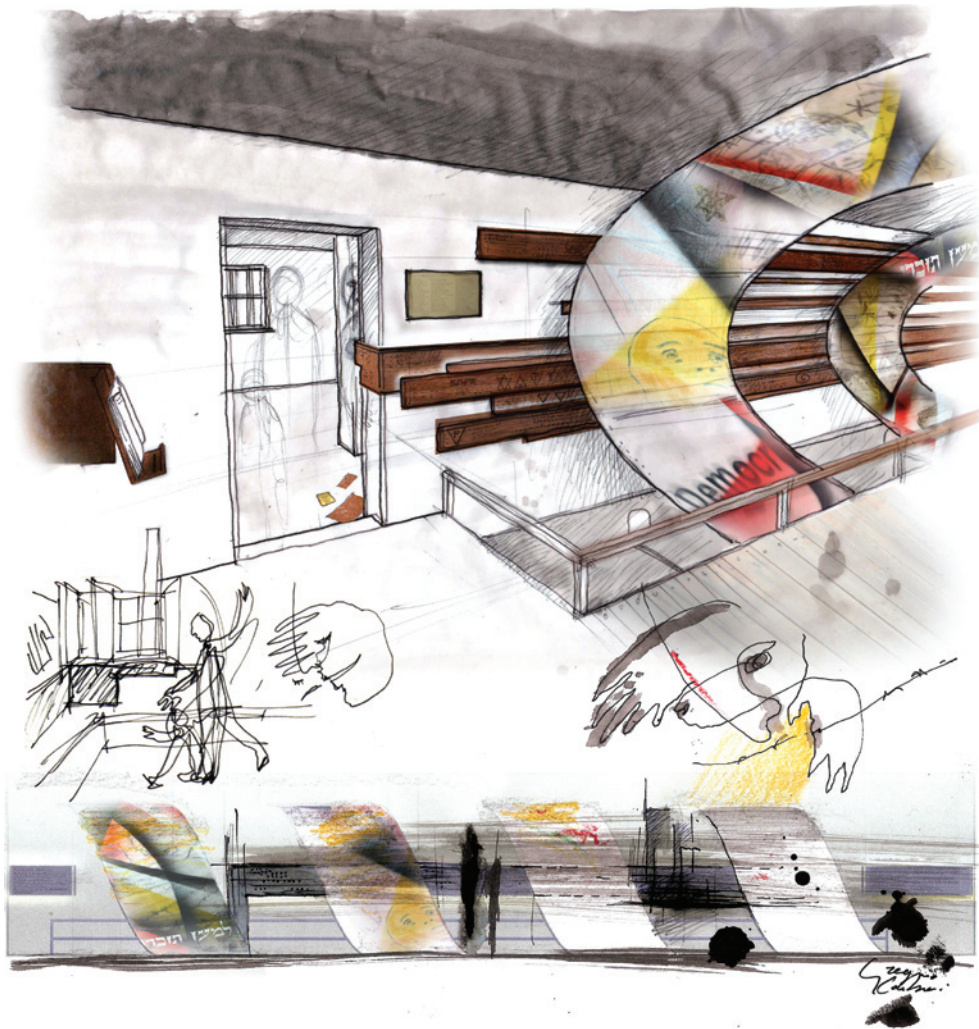


Entrance to the Italian Memorial. Photographs and sketches for the Glossa XXI Project by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.



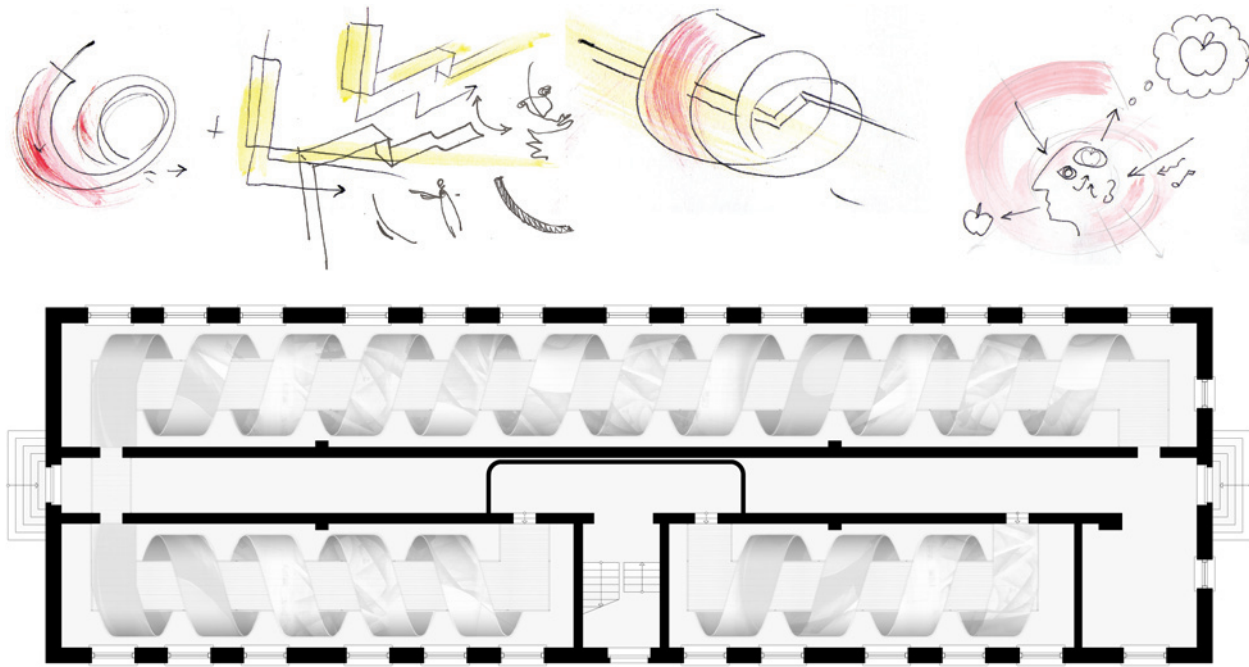


Cross-section and sketches of the Glossa XXI project for the last room of the Italian Memorial. Drawings by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.

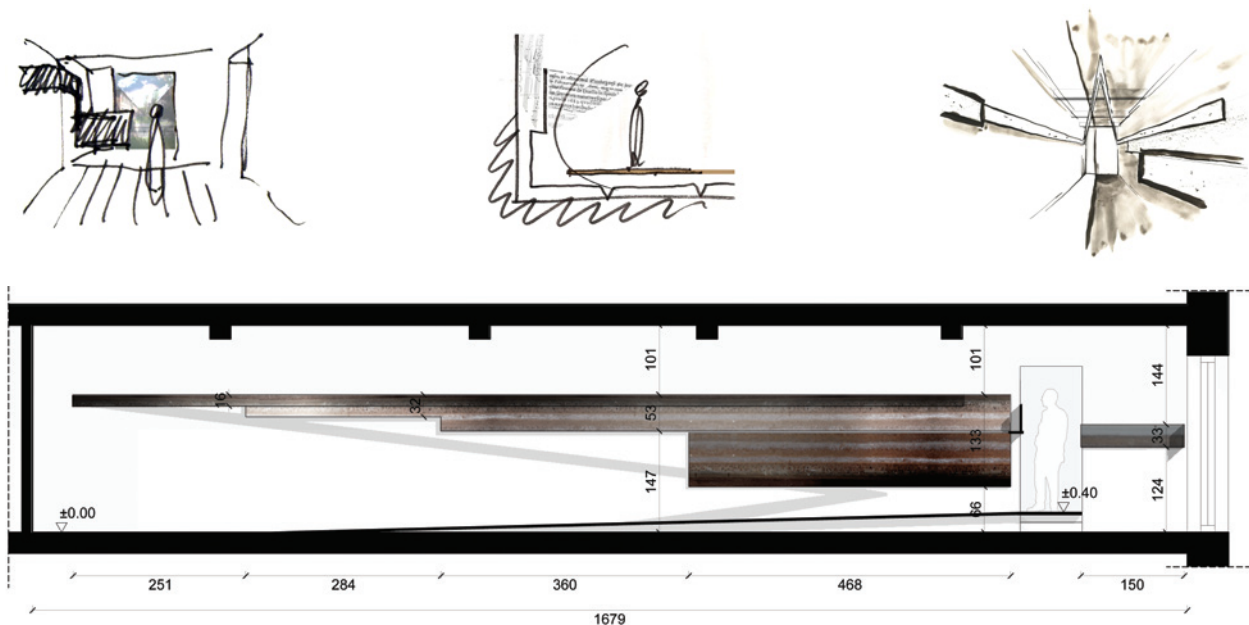




Glossa XXI project for the last room of the Italian Memorial. Rendering by Gianluca Melcangi.  
 Below: Glossa XXI project concept sketches by Gregorio Carboni Maestri and Gianluca Melcangi.



Plan of the Italian Memorial by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.



New Room XXI. Sketches and cross-section for the New Room XXI for the Italian Memorial by Gregorio Carboni Maestri.