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Architectural Drawings Exposed: Rise of Artefactual Value vs Archives’ Democracy

Architecture exhibitions are vehicles of architectural knowledge dissemination and constitute sites of methodological innovation. Two phenomena, pivotal for comprehending the place of drawings in architecture exhibitions, are examined conjointly: firstly, the rise of architectural drawings’ artefactual value, triggered by a series of exhibitions at Max Protetch, Leo Castelli and Rosa Esman galleries, as “Architecture I: Architectural Drawings” (1977), “Architecture II: Houses for Sale” (1980), “Architecture III: Architectural ‘Follies’” (1983), held at Leo Castelli Gallery; secondly, the digitization effect of architectural drawings.

Special attention is paid to the role that Aldo Rossi’s drawings played for the transformation of the status of architectural drawings. Rossi’s drawings constitute an important part of major collections of institutions as the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal (CCA), Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo (MAXXI) in Rome and Fondazione Aldo Rossi in Milan. Despite the fact that both CCA and MAXXI have digitized a large part of Rossi’s drawings, the original still remain significant points of reference for researchers and indispensable components of exhibitions that contribute to the capacity of the above-mentioned institutions to energize current debates concerning the status of architectural knowledge. Both CCA and GRI provide an ensemble of scholars’ programs for *in-situ* researches on original drawings as part of their politics for vitalising current debates.

The democratization accompanying the digitization grants an increase of the fascination for the mysteries of the access to the original. The conviction that knowledge, power and subjectivity are by no means contours given once and for all, but series of variables which supplant one another, is a starting point for understanding the complexity of the double agency of democratizing and fetishizing architectural drawings. Michel Foucault’s distinction between knowledge, power and subjectivity is instrumentalized for analysing the paradoxes of these phenomena.