

ROMA INTERROTTA. TIME STOOD STILL IN NOLLI'S PLAN OF 1748

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TITLE

Roma Interrotta. Interventi sulla pianta di Roma del Nolli

AUTHOR

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CURATOR

Piero Sartogo, Franco Raggi and Daniela Puppa

LOCATION

Mercati Traianei, Roma

PERIOD

May - June 1978

By invitation of the Association Incontri Internazionali d'Arte in 1978, the Italian architect Piero Sartogo gather eleven other figures to assemble an exhibition, which strives to become a pivotal event in the architectural panorama and debate of that time.

Piero Sartogo, Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi with John Rauch, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Rob Krier, Aldo Rossi and Leon Krier, starting with the map of Rome drawn up by Giambattista Nolli in 1748, more than two centuries later, exploit this cultural opportunity to analyze the process of modifying the urban fabric of the Italian capital.

The attempt of the twelve personalities involved is to investigate and, consequently, to safeguard the immense cultural heritage of the city and its historical center. Peculiarity of this initiative is the complete and total freedom of the elaborations and the contributions yielded, which sometimes generate real utopian projects.

The exhibition Roma Interrotta [Interrupted Rome], followed by the conference Roma – Città Futura and its publication with the opening text by Christian Norberg-Schulz (Il genius loci di Roma), turns out to be the pretext to shed light and raise awareness of the issues on the rehabilitation of Rome, a square one to kick off a series of enterprising initiatives.

Even the title, which echoes Giulio Argan's words, then the mayor of Rome, is a clear reference, or rather accusation, towards the conditions in which Rome finds itself at that time; the capital is, precisely, defined by the historian as «interrupted» because it is a city that has ceased to be envisaged and it has begun, instead, to be redesigned at the mercy of building speculation and boundless growth.

Hosted from May to June in the archeological setting of the Mercati Traianei in Rome, the exhibition is connoted by proposals dealing with the themes of memory and imagination, diverging from the mere urban design and landscape planning, without setting out to find solutions. Assigned to

each architect one of Nolli's twelve panels, deemed the last example of coherent urban design, the participants are urged to reinvent and highlight the difficulties encountered in that city's portion allotted, erasing the occurrences of the previous two hundred years.

Inside a turquoise-coloured cube, the two Rome's plans mirror each other, held by a steel structure, of the same color, resting on a base of faux serpentine marble; the thought-provoking comparison is emphasized at the visitor's sight, as well as the meeting of the antique with the new. The shade of this space recalls the curtain placed at the entrance of the roman market, which is inflated with the help of a large fan, simulating a continuous breeze; this ploy enhances an unavoidable solemn and ceremonial atmosphere and contributes to immerse people even further into the imaginary theme. In the side rooms, once the site of workshops, displayed on lattice structures, it is possible to admire the drawings of each architect, in a dimmed light in contrast with the gloom of the walls, that seem to project the visitor almost into an underground environment.

In the projects presented, the relationship between the Tevere river and the urban tissue is still lively and, above all, oblivious to the embankment's construction during the Unification of Italy, to the actions of gutting during the Fascist twenty years and to the senseless post-war reconstruction. The exaltation of the public space is the protagonist, as well as the multidisciplinary and transversal nature of the proposals, which illustrate Rome as a heterogeneric city, and, at the same time, a surreal field, an almost, fantastic urban territory, dreamed up in the mind of the different authors.

From Sartogo's avant-garde proposal, with clear references to Futurism, in which he focuses on pre-existing matrices, the so-called 'emergencies', such as the Basilica di San Pietro and the Mausoleo di Adriano, imagining a phalansterium; to Dardi's more rational and controlled project around the Trident, which organizes the area into functional cues, as well as for Giurgola in the area adjacent to Porta Pia.

Numerous Piranesian influences are evident in Grumbach's approach with his system of Beaux Arts-style parks along the walls; in Graves's rays at Porta Maggiore; in the fortresses and castles of an extreme classicism of the two Krier brothers.

From the creation of collages, drawing from his own educational itinerary, as Stirling does, or from the elements that make up the American main streets like Venturi or, again, from Napoleonic projects in Rowe's interventions on the Palatine, the Caelian, the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus.

Finally, the more archaeological proposition of Rossi, with the return to the Roman baths and aqueducts, and the more environmental suggestion of Portoghesi with the recovery of ancient coves.

Roma Interrotta is an exhibition that entices also future generations to reflect on the enduring character of the eternal city and that contains a series of crucially topical points, both in its method and its outcome, so much so that it was repropose at the 2008 Venice Biennale, at the behest of the then director Aaron Betsky, in the Arsenale artillery.



Entrance to the Mercati Traianei, the turquoise of the cube and the curtain contrasting with the red of the walkaway. Courtesy: Franco Raggi.



Inside the turquoise cube, the two opposing plans: Nollí's on the right and the revisited one on the left. Courtesy: Franco Raggi.



Exhibition of drawings on reticular structures in the workshops of the Mercati Traianei. Courtesy: Franco Raggi.



Collage of the outcomes of the twelve participating architects. From left to right: Piero Sartogo, Costantino Dardi, Antoine Grumbach, James Stirling, Paolo Portoghesi, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi with John Rauch, Colin Rowe, Michael Graves, Rob Krie