

Lina Bo Bardi in Italia

Quello che volevo, era avere Storia

(What I Wanted Was to Have a History)

at MAXXI on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of this pioneer of Italian architecture

December 19, 2014 – March 15, 2015
Sala studio Centro Archivi MAXXI Architettura

www.fondazionemaxxi.it

Rome, 18 December 2014. A “small” exhibition dedicated to a “great figure,” Lina Bo Bardi, a pioneer of Italian architecture, who became famous after emigrating to Brazil in 1946.

The exhibition ***Lina Bo Bardi in Italia. “Quello che volevo, era avere Storia”*** has been organized by MAXXI Architettura on the occasion of the centennial of the architect’s birth on December 5. **The exhibition will be open to the public from December 19 to March 15, 2015.**

The event, curated by Margherita Guccione, traces the years Lina spent in Italy, her debut, her graduation from university in 1939 in Rome, where she was born, her publishing activity in Milan during the war years, and her voyage by ship, with her husband Pietro Maria Bardi, to their new home, Brazil.

An emblematic photo tells the story of Lina Bo Bardi’s arrival in Brazil: her eyes gaze at the new world – ***“I felt as though I were in a country beyond one’s imagination, where everything was possible”*** – but in her mind she could still see Italy, the ruins of the war and the intense period of her life in Milan.

After receiving her degree, Lina moved to Milan. Unable to work as an architect during the war years, she got involved in the publication of many architecture periodicals and popular magazines. In addition to her publishing activity, she designed architecture and interior decor for the pages of magazines like *Domus* and *Lo Stile*. She also curated illustrations for a feature in *Grazia*. *Un'amica al vostro fianco*. Along with Bruno Zevi and Carlo Pagani she founded the magazine *A*, conceived as a full-fledged illustrated architecture magazine.

During this Italian period, Lina developed her ideas on paper, but the same ideas would be seen in many of her works in Brazil, where she would be offered an even greater chance to manifest her interest in man, the “constant physical protagonist of what we call this adventure that is architecture.” Witness to this are the works exhibited, realized with the collaboration of the magazine *Domus* and the Lina Bo and P. M. Bardi Institute in São Paulo, Brazil, which include original models, photographs, period magazines, archive documents and videos. But the words of *Curriculum letterario*, a sort of autobiography which Lina wrote to offer her version of the facts, as well: the detailed account of the years in Italy which introduces us to the exhibition, sheds light on how crucial this period was to the architect’s construction of her future thinking.

“Lina is one of the most fascinating figures of twentieth-century architecture owing to her personality and her professional commitment to the whole field – says **Margherita Guccione** –, from publishing to design, from museography to cinema, from teaching activities to works of outstanding expressive force realized in Brazil, in São Paulo and Bahia. The Museum of Architecture retraces the life of this talented woman – in a man’s world – first in Rome, then in Milan, of essential importance to her work, and to our understanding of her life as an intellectual and the topicality of her ideas.”

Thanks to **Arper S.p.A.**, Monastier di Treviso, technical sponsor

Lina Bo Bardi (Rome, 1914 – São Paulo, Brazil, 1992)**In ITALY | 1914-1946|**

1914-1939 Rome Achillina Bo was born in Rome on December 5, 1914. After studying at the capital's arts high school, she successively earned her degree in Architecture in 1939.

1940-1946 Milan Lina moved to Milan immediately after graduating where, together with her colleague Carlo Pagani, she worked for Gio Ponti in the editorial office of *Domus* and *Stile*. Lina and Pagani soon opened their own practice, which was destroyed by a bombing raid in 1943. Lina was also very active as an illustrator and freelance journalist for the journals *Grazia*, *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, *Bellezza*, *Vetrina e Negozio*, *Cordelia*, *Tempo*, *Aria d'Italia* and *Milano Sera*. Successively, again with Carlo Pagani, she became vice editor of *Domus* and editor of the *Quaderni di Domus*. In 1945, together with Bruno Zevi and Carlo Pagani, she founded the journal *A*. In August 1946 she married Pietro Maria Bardi in Rome. One month later they left together for South America: their first stop was Brazil.

In BRAZIL | 1946-1992|

1946-1958 São Paulo Lina and her husband decided to remain in Brazil, which she chose as her adopted nation. Soon after her arrival she was involved in the design of the first Museu del Arte in Rua 7 de Abril, São Paulo (1947). In 1950 she founded and served as editor of the journal *Habitat*. In 1951 she completed the Casa de Vidro and designed the iconic Bowl Chair. In 1958 the construction of a home for Valeria Cirelli offered her an opportunity to further examine the theme of the private residence. Between 1957 and 1968 she was involved in the design of the MAPS, Museu de Arte de São Paulo.

1958-1964 Bahia In 1958 Lina moved to Salvador de Bahia after being invited to direct the Museo di Arte Moderna di Bahia and design the renovation of the Solar do Unhão and its successive conversion into an exhibition space. The same year she completed the private Casa do Chame-Chame, now destroyed, and, in 1959, the design of the exhibition *Bahia no Ibirapuera*, as part of the 5th São Paulo Art Biennial.

1965-1992 São Paulo Lina designed stage sets for theatre and cinema and developed and curated important exhibitions, including *The Hand of the Brazilian People* (1969) and *Repastos* (1975). Between 1977 and 1986 she completed the vast project to convert an abandoned factory into the SESC-Fábrica da Pompéia Leisure Centre. The same years she realized the Espírito Santo do Cerrado church in Uberlândia (1976-1982), the Chapel of Santa Maria dos Anjos in Vargem Grande Paulista (1978-1982) and the Teatro Oficina in São Paulo (1984). From 1986 to 1989 she worked on the recovery plan for the historic centre of Salvador de Bahia; her last work is the new City Hall of São Paulo (1990-1992). Lina Bo Bardi died on the 20 March 1992 in her Casa de Vidro.

The press kit and images of the exhibition can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/area-riservata/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

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Press office MAXXI +39 06 3225178, press@fondazionemaxxi.it

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INTRODUCTION

This exhibition retraces the History of Lina Bo, in the form of a reverse chronology: from 1946, the year she left for South America with her husband Pietro Maria Bardi, back to her graduation in Rome in 1939. It tells the story of her intense and tormented years in Milan, prior to her departure for Brazil, a nation she adopted as her home and where she finally found personal and professional satisfaction. Her education in Rome at the arts high school and the *Regio Istituto Superiore di Architettura*, and the influence of a family environment, would prove fundamental to her development as an artist and intellectual. In Milan, together with Carlo Pagani, Lina received her first professional commissions, despite the limitations imposed by the War. In parallel, she was a member of the editorial board of various architectural journals and instructive publications; her intense editorial activities during this period formed many of the aspects that would define her human side and, successively, strongly influence her work. In addition to designing buildings connoted by a significant material and expressive strength, evidence of a consistent attention toward the social responsibility of architecture, Lina also created multi-coloured imaginative worlds in her drawings: a highly personal iconographic universe that would consistently accompany her development as an architect. These are the origins of Lina Bo Bardi's history, evoked in her *Curriculum letterario* (Literary Curriculum); a history of ideas at the time considered avant-garde, and extremely relevant to this day; a history written and drawn entirely by her.

I naturalized as a Brazilian citizen. When a person is born, they cannot choose, they are born by chance. I was born here, I chose this place to live in.

This is how Lina Bo Bardi concluded her collection of texts entitled *Curriculum letterario* (Literary Curriculum), a selection of which are presented here to retrace a reverse chronology of events prior to her departure for Brazil.

1947. I told Pietro that I wanted to stay, that here I found the hopes of the nights of war. So we stayed in Brazil.

While the Bardi's decision to remain in Brazil was never part of their plan, it was never questioned. It can be traced back to Lina and Pietro's feelings at the end of the Second World War, when they found themselves in a nation reduced to rubble unable to find the courage to implement the necessary radical social and political reforms. A month of travel may have separated them physically from this situation, but not from what Lina had become: Brazil offered her many more opportunities to express her attention toward mankind through architecture, "an adventure in which people are called to intimately participate as actors".

I arrived in Rio de Janeiro by ship, in October. Enchanting.

I felt as though I were in a country beyond one's imagination, where everything was possible. I felt happy, and in Rio there was no debris.

1946. Marriage to P. M. Bardi. Pietro was important, modern, a promoter of art, the most important Italian journalist at the time. We fell in love, we got married.

Lina Bo and Pietro Maria Bardi were married at the *Campidoglio* (City Hall) in Rome on 24 August 1946. The history of Lina's encounter with the famous journalist, gallery owner and art critic is not fully known, though in all likelihood it dates back to the early 1940s. It is also possible that it was preceded by a missed encounter when Lina, only just fifteen, was presented with an opportunity to show her student work at Bardi's Roman gallery, an opportunity she chose to avoid for an already developed critical awareness.

1945. The war ended. The hope of building instead of destroying enlivened everyone.

A few days after the Armistice, with a reporter and a photographer, I made a documentary in the war-torn areas.

Lina Bo Bardi and Carlo Pagani's collaboration with the photographer Federico Patellani is documented in various images recording the extent of wartime destruction. There is also a more private series of photographs depicting Lina and Carlo, recognised here for the first time, facing the photographer's lens in an unprecedented guise surrounded by the collections in Bardi's Studio d'Arte Palma.

We felt we needed to do something to get architecture out of the mire. In Rome I met up with Bruno Zevi [...]. That was when we decided to found an architecture weekly "A – Cultura della Vita."

I was also invited [...] to participate in the National Congress of Reconstruction.

After returning to Italy from the United States in 1945, Bruno Zevi founded the APAO, *Associazione per l'Architettura Organica* (Association for Organic Architecture) that immediately established a synergy with the

Milanese *Movimento Studi Architettura*, which Lina had joined at the moment of its constitution. The activities and relations between the two movements reveal the origins of a personal relationship between Lina and Zevi that, beginning with the shared commitment to the creation of a journal *A*, would accompany, with a substantial harmony of opinions, all that Zevi would evocatively define as Lina's "anxious journey".

1944. The Milanese architects would meet in a temporary studio, hidden from the fascist Salò militia, to study a new trade union and professional organization.

Milan was overwhelmed by wartime destruction, but there was already a climate of reconstruction. Some of the architects who, like Lina, had been actively promoting rationalist architecture during the conflict, merged into the *Movimento Studi Architettura*, constituted in April 1945, participating in projects linked to the reconstruction. This debate found its most complete form in the *First National Conference for Reconstruction*, held in Milan in 1945, where Lina presented a report on "Propaganda for Reconstruction", focused on raising public awareness.

During the war, one year corresponds to fifty years, and the judgement of men is a judgement of posterity.

I felt that the only way was that of objectivity and rationality.

July 1943. Fascism fell. In the bombing of August 13 I lost my studio. [...] That's when they called me to direct "Domus."

In the autumn of 1943 Lina Bo renewed her collaboration with *Domus* and, together with Carlo Pagani, in March of 1944 assumed the role of vice editor of the magazine, enriched at the time by the creative talents of Bruno Munari.

From '41 to '43 I worked intensely in the field of journalism, collaborating with popular magazines such as "Tempo," "Grazia" and "Vetrina." I also edited the series "Quaderni di Domus" [...]. And I began working for "L'illustrazione italiana."

Lina's wartime editorial activities saw her active on various fronts. On the pages of widely distributed reviews she provided solutions for furnishings, accessories and interior design, in some cases sophisticated and innovative, and already describing the universe of her ideas about design. Her commitment to domestic space was given an original expression in the *Quaderni di Domus*. Created and directed by Bo and Pagani, these monographic inserts examined various elements of the home. Alongside purely architectural or design-related drawings and proposals, Lina also worked as an illustrator *tout-court*.

The start of the war [...] brought other problems with it: it was impossible to build, the field of "Practice" was abandoned in favor of that of "Theory." I had a studio in Milan, but work was so scarce [...] that I began working as an illustrator for some of the major Milanese journals and magazines, including "Stile," founded by Gio Ponti.

Lina Bo and Carlo Pagani opened their own practice in Milan. However, the pre-eminent activity for the duo during this period was their collaboration with the newly created journal *Lo Stile*. Between 1941 and 1943 Bo and Pagani would provide important stimuli, contributing texts, sketches and cover illustrations that increased the publication's national status.

All of Italy was at a standstill, but not Milan. In Milan, to "practice," I entered the studio of the famous Gio Ponti [...]. Non-stop activity from 8 a.m. to midnight, including weekends. Work: from the design of cups and chairs, fashion, that is, clothes, to urban projects.

Having left Rome immediately after graduating, Lina was introduced to the Lombard capital's cultural circles by Carlo Pagani, a native of Milan. Here she came into contact with affirmed artists, intellectuals and architects such as Giorgio de Chirico, Elio Vittorini and Gio Ponti.

I earned my degree at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Rome. [...] By virtue of the stylistic-aesthetic "nostalgic" trends, not only of the university but of the whole of the Roman academic environment, I set off for Milan.

Lina graduated in Rome in 1939, presenting her final year project for a Special Centre for Maternal and Infant Care, which she would recall as a "Maternity Ward for Single Mothers". The theme of housing for unwed mothers was an important prelude to her successive design work and writings, marked by a constant attention toward social commitment. It was during her university studies that Lina met Carlo Pagani, with whom she would go on to share her successive professional experiences in Milan.

I never wanted to be young. What I wanted was to have a history.