

ENERGY. OIL AND POST-OIL ARCHITECTURE AND GRIDS

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Margherita Guccione, *Director MAXXI Architettura*

With the exhibition *ENERGY*, MAXXI Architettura is presenting and transmitting in concise yet exhaustive form the range of activities underpinning the Museum of Architecture: study and research, documentation, promotion and exposition.

Energy is a research exhibition that intends to present to the public the most relevant aspects of the theme through a layout recounting the role played by energy in the processes of development and transformation that have affected the Italian landscape with ever greater intensity, since the middle of the last century and which will characterise the landscapes of the third millennium.

The theme of energy is in fact developed in relation to the transformations of the territory within the ambit of three discreet moments that integrate to provide the visitor with a diachronic vision embracing past, present and future. In a single itinerary, the sources and the forms of energy are studied, described, photographed and imagined, drawing on past history, images of the present and projects and visions for the future.

Each of the three moments has been tackled in a specific way, experimenting with diverse registers in terms of scientific approach and exposition: the search for archive materials recounting the story of the networks and architectures associated with the distribution of energy in the Italy of the period following the Second World War; photography capturing the everyday panorama through the authoritative gaze of three contemporary photographers; the promotion of new ideas through proposals capable of imagining how in the future energy growth will determine the new landscape, the built environment and the modes of human relations.

Painstaking research investigating a wealth of archive materials has represented an opportunity to develop important relationships with other institutions such as the ENI Historical Archive, the IUAV Project Archive, the Accademia di San Luca and La Sapienza University. The MAXXI Architettura collections themselves contain works by masters such as Pier Luigi Nervi, Vittorio De Feo and Michele Valori. The theme embraces an broad range of innovative and experimental manufactures: service stations of various kinds from the standard to the exception; motorway service areas, characterised by the original Autogrill format; motels, reception structures; residential quarters and tourist villages for the workers of the major forms associated with energy, urban realities expressing the culture of the period. Everyday presences, of an absolute familiarity in the lives and imaginations of us all, the service stations, the autogrills, the motels and the villages for the employees of major oil companies such as ENI are also frequently cornerstones of our highest architectural culture, among which are concentrated a number of the most advanced design research projects of the post-war years such as the Settebagni motel by Mario Ridolfi, a tower lashed and frayed by the new wind of the Italian economic boom, the autogrill bridge buildings by Nervi and Bianchetti, in which structure takes on form, the service stations by Nino Dardi and Vittorio De Feo, mirrors of their respective, albeit distant, formal and compositional research, and lastly the ENI village at Borca di Cadore by Edoardo Gellner, a fine example of the insertion of a modern idiom within a mountain setting.

Taking advantage of the evidently stimulating potential of the energy-infrastructure-territory relationship to prompt new creative processes, today seven architectural groups of international repute have each been asked to present MAXXI with an original experimental project associated with the distribution of energy in its most diverse and up-to-date forms, with particular and necessary attention being paid to sustainable and renewable sources. While the historical section reveals the virtual hegemony of oil and methane as the energy resources of the last century, contemporary architects are today called upon to respond to the challenge of alternative energy sources prefiguring the human environment of tomorrow. The site-specific installations by the seven architectural firms asked by the museum to interpret the theme of energy in the third millennium, free from the ties of real world design, are flanked by a selection of pure research works into the prospects of the development of new energy sources, such as the project developed by the laN+ studio with the artist-curator Freddy Paul Grunert, investigating an inescapable relationship for formally prefiguring new settlement models of tomorrow, existing research and works of art, examples of a concrete relationship actuated between energy and the composition of architectural space.

Past and future are then connected, physically as well as ideally, through the action of reading and interpreting the contemporary landscape in the field by three photographers specifically for this exhibition. The diverse pictorial accounts of specific contemporary energy sites presented by the photographers, from the petrochemical plant at Ravenna in the reading of a photo reporter such as Paolo Pellegrin or, as in the shots by Alessandro Cimmino, ordinary petrol stations recounted through architecture and lastly, as in the work of Paola De Bello, through the faces that animate them on a daily basis, continually modifying their image. These are works that expanded the cone of observation from the extraction of natural resources to their capillary distribution throughout the country, capturing in a synthesis of just a few frames, the complex relationships between the anthropic and natural environments. The photo shoots were specifically commissioned by MAXXI Architettura that, in a formula that has already been employed on a number of occasions, he acquired the new works for the architectural photograph collection.

There are, therefore, numerous reasons underlying the realization of an exhibition capable of offering the public multiple sensations and perspectives, presenting more or less specialist levels of reading, in line with the museum's intention to appeal to as broad a public as possible, without foregoing the quality of the research, the transmission of critical thinking, a confrontation with reality and the stimulation of new creative expressions.

As testified by the plurality of origins of the architects participating in the exhibition ENERGY – South Africa, Australia, Korea, Japan and Chile – in its promotional and research activities MAXXI Architettura is confirming its ability to pick up on the most current debates and to recognise and select the innovative figures and themes animating the global contemporary architecture scene with an international outlook that makes it a museum with an international vocation.