

DENTRO LA STRADA NOVISSIMA

20 facades designed by 20 architects including Frank O. Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Hans Hollein, Franco Purini, Arata Isozaki, Robert Venturi, Oswald Mathias Ungers draw the *Strada Novissima*, the exhibition curated by Paolo Portoghesi at the first Biennale of Architecture in 1980

Today at MAXXI, a focus dedicated to that exhibition is an opportunity to reflect on a crucial moment in the history of twentieth century architecture

07 December 2018 - 29 September 2019

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Rome, 6 December 2018. The First International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale curated by Paolo Portoghesi opened on 27 July 1980, and was entitled *La Presenza del Passato* [The Presence of the Past]. During this Biennale, Paolo Portoghesi proposed the exhibition **La Strada Novissima**, that involved **20 international architects** who created **20 life-size facades** to activate a reflection on the theme of the road and create a concrete image of a different way of thinking about architecture.

Today the MAXXI, after almost forty years, returns to reflect on this theme with the great exhibition *The Street. Where the world is made*, and the same **Portoghesi curates DENTRO LA STRADA NOVISSIMA** an **in-depth focus** on this crucial moment in the history of twentieth century architecture, which started the international discussion on postmodernism. The Focus will be held at the *Architecture Archive Centre* from **7 December 2018 to 28 April 2019**.

As a whole, *La Strada Novissima* proposed a real 70-metre path and 10 life-size facades per side designed by **Ricardo Bofill, Costantino Dardi, Frank O. Gehry, Michael Graves, GRAU, Allan Greenberg, Hans Hollein, Arata Isozaki, Josef Paul Kleihues, Rem Koolhaas, Léon Krier, Charles W. Moore, Paolo Portoghesi with Francesco Cellini and Claudio D'Amato, Franco Purini and Laura Thermes, Massimo Scolari, Thomas Gordon Smith, Robert A. M. Stern, Stanley Tigerman, Oswald Mathias Ungers, and Robert Venturi-Denis Scott Brown-John Rauch**

Each facade, 9 meters high and 7 metres wide, was an expression of the artist's style and research, and all together, in their diversity, composed an urban path to cross, expression of a plurality of voices, a plurality of readings, and ways of appropriating of the past.

The *Strada Novissima* proposed a return to the idea of the street, appealing to the communicative power of architecture and at the same time giving it back an ironic dimension. An iconic image of the *Post Modern* in architecture, in *Strada Novissima* ferments, visions, and research until then hardly decipherable but certainly no longer negligible on the world's architecture scene are condensed.

The exhibition had its first replica in Paris, in the former Salpetriere Hospital, in 1981, and the second in San Francisco in the port Arsenal, in 1983, thus deserving to be defined "*The Street that crossed the Ocean*".

Among **archive documents, photographs, project drawings** and **direct testimonies**, the focus **DENTRO LA STRADA NOVISSIMA** offers a physical as well as a historical journey that allows you to find yourself inside the 1980 exhibition: an operation aimed at reconsidering those ferments and visions. Accompanied once again by the guide of Paolo Portoghesi, we reconstruct a historical itinerary among the documents that tell, in stages, the definition of one of the most extraordinary experiences of Italian architecture of the twentieth century and a physical journey within the projects that actually designed the *Strada Novissima*.

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

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PONDERING ON THE STRADA NOVISSIMA

Paolo Portoghesi

I called on Francesco Cellini and Claudio D'Amato to help me with the Aresenale, and together we decided to give the name Strada Novissima to the sequence of artistic facades that were being created in Venice. The reference we chose was the Strada Nuova of Genoa, an experiment of innovation in the body of the living city that was based on the belief that a road can be not only a phenomenon of spontaneous growth but also a programmed unitary fact. The novelty of this endeavour lied in the fact that the configuration would have been entrusted not to a single architect, as in the case of Regent Street in London, but to many architects involved in a noble competition.

The intention was to reinstate the traditional street, the "corridor road" that Le Corbusier had branded with infamy, and to propose the alternative Plan Voisin, with the skyscrapers immersed in greenery. For those who were born in Rome, and who remember the city during their infancy during the war, which was clean and without traffic, the corridor road is the mirror of life, a meeting place, a place for strolling, the paradise of the *flâneur*. However, the road must be of the human scale, the *échelle humaine* that Le Corbusier preached, even if he did not practice what he preached, and created the Unité in Marseilles, where the road is closed into four walls, without earth, and without sky.

The primary objective was to show how, without renouncing modernity, we could go on and try the road of heresy. The important thing was to try to recover the third dimension of modernity that, in addition to the conclusion of the International Style included, in my opinion, Expressionism, Art Nouveau, and, what would later be baptized "The Other Modernity", the modernity of Tessenow and Piacentini. The selection of the architects was laborious and difficult. I invited Christian Norberg-Schulz, Vincent Scully, and Charles Jencks to help me, and Giuseppe Mazzariol, Nino Dardi, Udo Kulterman, and Robert Stern were also on the board. The size of Frampton was the first sign that we were treading on thin ice and many stood by waiting for us to fall. To give me security was the solidarity received from Aldo Rossi, with whom I conquered my first success by creating the Teatro del Mondo. Invited to add his facade, Aldo preferred to build a symbolic entry door, which was inspired by the sides of the Duomo of Milan and to present his works in the Theatre, off the Sint Mark's basin.

The Strada Novissima, amidst the roar of dear enemies (Zevi, Gregotti, Tafuri and so on) set sail happily, and after a landing in Paris at the Festival d'Automne, it is preparing to cross the Ocean to go to San Francisco.

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THE EXHIBITION

A journey through archival documents, photographs, project drawings and eyewitness accounts leads you *dentro la Strada Novissima* (inside the Strada Novissima), an extraordinary collective experience orchestrated by Paolo Portoghesi in 1980 for the first Venice Architecture Biennale, a true and proper manifesto for postmodern architecture.

ALLAN GREENBERG

The meaning of our architectural past is more complicated than the simple copy or the distorted forms transmitted to us by history. As a tradition, it is the means by which we give shape to our systems of social, political and religious norms. This is confirmed by the types of buildings that undergo constant changes with changing circumstances in society. These types of structures provide a series of expressive and functional solutions to architectural problems.

(...) A building should complement rather than contrast the pre-existing architectural tradition. The legacy of the past challenges us to create the architecture of our own time.

ARATA ISOZAKI

My facade is reminiscent of a typical house located on a traditional Japanese street. The main body of the building is set back from the road and is protected by a high fence. The guests go through the gate and find a path that leads to the house. (...) A more "talkative" or more complex facade would diminish the effect and lead to confusion. Generally, the facade is composed of very few elements to express its meaning.

MASSIMO SCOLARI

A painter may be measured with the problems of architecture or architecture is measured with painting. I believe that architecture must be compared with architecture and painting with painting. In this facade, I decided to create a "representation": the axonometric image. As a painter interested in the problems of architectural representation, this facade could not conceal anything but its own pictorial image.

THOMAS GORDON SMITH

Although I am genuinely interested in the history of architecture, I am opposed to the importance that is currently given to the word "past". I am not interested in the "past"; it is too distant and unapproachable. However, I am passionate about those architectural elements that are currently available to architects through history, and I am excited by the opportunity to design buildings with this broad language that solves today's problems and transmits their spiritual content.

HANS HOLLEIN

The presence of the past appears clearly in my contribution in multiple ways. It is an architecture of reminiscences, not only in the sense of the history of architecture but also of the cultural heritage and personal past of each of us — which manifests itself in citations, transformations, and metaphors. (...) I deal with both History and my history. I decided to make my facade almost like a countermove to what it would suggest, in the "street", as a presence of the past as it appears in the "corderia" — the columns.

GRAU

A. ANSELMINI, P. CHIATANTE, G. COLUCCI, A. DI NOTO, P. EROLI, F. GENOVESE, R. MARIOTTI, M. MARTINI, P. MILANI, F. MONTUORI, P. NICOLOSI, G. PATRIZI, F. PIERLUISI, C. PLACIDI, E. ROSATO

The chance to participate in the 1st International Exhibit of Architecture, organised by the Venice Biennale is a favourable opportunity to take stock of the current situation regarding proceeding with our experiences. (...) Therefore, the façade is an immediate messenger of the more disruptive symbols: breaking with the surrounding history, opening towards other histories other lives, other forms of life; sanctification of our testimony as people and artists; refusal to reduce architecture to a pure "facade" and to pure "scenography".

JOSEF PAUL KLEIHUES

In architecture and in urban planning the presence of the past as “always the same” under a continuously new casing is subjected, first of all, to the principle of hope. It is credible only in opposition to chaos and superficiality, to the elegant architecture of the Monday and to the technocratic pragmatism, which denies both the past and the future.

The presence of the past in texts, drawings, buildings, and cities has the possibility of detecting new goals since it is non-marking.

STANLEY TIGERMAN

By nature architecture is optimistic. Building means that we want something to become part of existence. For this to be done, it has to have root in optimism. I believe that Neo-Platonism, which considers architecture at the service of eternity, shows scepticism towards the contradictions of life.

(...) Therefore, mine is a commitment that is necessarily incoherent and schizophrenic and, yet, it is inevitably optimistic.

LÉON KRIER

My theoretical work consists of writings and drawings. What I write always finds its demonstration in the drawings, and what I design always has an explanation and a foundation in my writings.

All the projects I have developed are a manifesto on a particular reconstruction tactic, both on the architecture and building scale, and on the scale of the entire city.

FRANCO PURINI, LAURA TERMES

The project reflects the fact that two people designed it. In fact, the number 2 is the symbolic theme par excellence in the composition. The existence of an entire façade, it being composed of the main front and a back enclosing two small observatories allowed to simulate the presence of a building, an isolated house inserted in a landscape capable of being the common landscape of the two cities.

(...) Our discourse on this project is perhaps not the truest among the many possible: the fun of playing within a consideration of architecture as a “smiling thing” remains

ROBERTO VENTURI, JOHN RAUCH, DENISE SCOTT-BROWN

According to my teachers at Princeton, John Labatut and Donald Drew Egbert, the past was an essential source of ideas and examples that they used with ease and simplicity when trying to understand and teach modern architecture. It came to me that as a student, and later as an atelier, from the beginning of our career, we have linked past and present architecture in our thinking and in our work.

ROBERT A. M. STERN

Our proposal for “Strada Novissima” deals with the reality and illusion of the past. The past is considered as a recent past — referring to the work of our firm — and as a distant past, relating to the history of architecture.

The elements of the façade connect these two levels and, at the same time, consider the location of the pavilion in this street with its ambiguous scale.

OSWALD MATHIAS UNGERS

After a long phase of doctrinal dependence on the dogmas of modern architecture, today what counts is to re-accept architecture as art. Architecture has the ability — like all the other arts — to free the human environment and existence from the grey of everyday banality and the triviality of reality and to transcend artistically the compulsions of material necessity. With this, architecture, not only contributes significantly to shaping the human environment but returns to assume the humanistic responsibility that belongs to it.

CHARLES W. MOORE

Finally, we have come to understand the exciting concept for which buildings are made alive by the attention, energy and human love that we put into them and that to possess these qualities buildings must know not only to involve the architects but also anyone another person interested in them, in particular, the inhabitants.

(...) Their images, the address, and the contents will have to come mainly from the memories and fantasies of the people, and in this way, they will embrace the individual and collective, historical and fictional past.

FRANK O. GEHRY

The facade that I designed for the Venetian exhibit is made of thin planks of raw wood connected in the traditional way of the Californian popular housing. It is a sort of perspective design made of a material that is fundamental and significant in the architecture of my country. This construction technique, of course, has been used for centuries in these parts of the world where wood is available and is therefore even more significant. It has affected and will continue to affect many lives.

TALLER DE ARQUITECTURA – RICADO BOFILL

The intention is to study lost architecture, the architecture of excellent quality, noble and cultured architecture, and relate it to the current building technology systems. Make the regulatory layout of a city baroque. Prefabricate the *Renaissance*.

Faced with the barbarism of real estate speculation that has destroyed the balance of the urban landscape, adopt the rules of the divine proportions from the design of the panel to the composition of the facade, up to the modelling of urban vacuum.

MICHAEL GRAVES

If one considers that the primary interest of the language of architecture is the metaphorical representation of man and landscape, one could perhaps use this simple primary language so that it expresses not only simple but also complex and poetic ideas.

(...) When one is interested in making the basics of reading, communication, and action that takes place within the architectural composition more imaginative, one should also make sure that the composition is not so literal as to be able to have a single reading or resemblance. The composition must be able even to have other interpretations.

PAOLO PORTOGHESI, FRANCESCO CELLINI, CLAUDIO D'AMATO

In the whole history of architecture, the facade has been the "face" of a building, the part enabling the building to be oriented as the human body, the part making the identification between the human being and the house possible (...). Building a street by use of facades was a way to polemically draw the attention to the process of refounding and recoding of architecture as the matrix of the city while denying the relevance of the theory preaching the self-sufficiency of the architectural object.

COSTANTINO DARDI

I have worked a lot in these years on the theme of textures, binary fabrics with an alternating module contrasting with the emerging polarities of the volumes of architectural objects. However, in the end, I discovered that the façade designed for "Strada Novissima" could be interpreted as an autobiographical restoration. On the one hand the break, the disruption, the discovery of the cavity, the light as a solution of continuity of the compact masonry masses of the first projects (...); on the other hand, the question of rationality and order, the geometry underlying the plant, the clean cuts, the clean surfaces of the primary projects.

REM KOOLHAAS, ELIA ZENGHELIS

In the "new" historicist and typological architectures culture will be the mercy of a cruel procrustean arsenal that will censure certain "modern" activities with the excuse that there is no place for them [...] the total desertion from the field of utilitarian architecture opens up an exhilarating perspective: that the area of modernity will be abandoned to create a condition where novelty will be rare, sporadic invention, shocking imagination, subversive interpretation, and modernity will be the new exotic... an era of new sobriety.