

GIO PONTI. Loving architecture

27.11.2019 - 27.09.2020

In May 2020 the exhibition reopens to the public on the following days > 22-23-24 /29-30-31.

And from 2 June on the usual museum opening days and hours

curated by Maristella Casciato e Fulvio Irace
with Margherita Guccione, Salvatore Licitra, Francesca Zanella

in collaboration with
CSAC - Centro studi e archivio della comunicazione dell'Università di Parma
Gio Ponti Archives

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*Love architecture, be it ancient or modern. Love it for its fantastic,
adventurous and solemn creations; for its inventions; for the abstract,
allusive and figurative forms that enchant our spirit and enrapture our
thoughts. Love architecture, the stage and support of our lives*

Gio Ponti, Amate l'architettura (In praise of architecture) 1957

Rome, 26 November 2019. Architect, designer, art director, writer, poet and critic, **Gio Ponti** was an all-round artist who traversed much of the 20th century, profoundly influencing the taste of his time, responding to its most significant demands and anticipating many of the themes of contemporary architecture.

40 years on from his passing, **MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts**, is devoting a major retrospective to this exceptional figure. The exhibition examines and presents his multi-faceted career, starting with an account of his architecture, a unique and original synthesis of tradition and modernity, history and progress, elite culture and quotidian existence.

The exhibition title, **GIO PONTI. Amare l'architettura (Loving architecture)** echoes that of his best-known book, *Amate l'architettura (In praise of architecture)*. Curated by **Maristella Casciato** (Senior curator of Architectural Collections at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles) and **Fulvio Irace** (architecture critic and historian) with **Margherita Guccione** (Director, MAXXI Architettura), **Salvatore Licitra** (Gio Ponti Archives, Director) and **Francesca Zanella** (CSAC, President), the show will be hosted in MAXXI's stunning Gallery 5 until **27 September 2020** and has been produced by **MAXXI** in collaboration with **CSAC - Centro studi e archivio della comunicazione of the University of Parma**, which conserves Gio Ponti's professional archive, and the **Gio Ponti Archives**. Main partner **Eni**.

For **Giovanna Melandri**, President of the Fondazione MAXXI, "Celebrating the greatness of Gio Ponti signifies immersing ourselves in a legacy that is peerless in terms of versatility, talent and application. Private buildings and public commissions, companies and places of study, objects of everyday use, office and naval furnishings, cathedrals and museums alternate within research that was never dogmatic or ideological, in which there was dialogue between classicism and modernity, the natural landscape and the urban horizon, the social vocation of space and the safeguarding of beauty."

As **Margherita Guccione**, Director of MAXXI Architettura says, "Neither classical nor modern, the work of Gio Ponti was unique in the history of Italian 20th century architecture, a century the architect spanned almost in its entirety, ranging from the design of objects of everyday use to the invention of spatial configurations for the modern home and the creation of complex projects embedded within the urban context, maintaining architecture, *setting and saving grace of our lives*, as the fixed core of his research.

The exhibition is the fruit of painstaking research that has aimed to update our understanding of the figure of Ponti the architect, highlighting a number of the guiding issues underlying his long career and his extraordinary ability to foreshadow the spaces and concepts of contemporary architectural practice. His aspiration towards verticality and lightness through the dematerialization of facades, his conception of a green city in which nature returns to playing a key role in the agenda of planning and architecture, as well as designing flexible domestic spaces, capable of adapting to the demands of their users, are without doubt themes that, over half a century ago, anticipated with unique clarity the concerns of the present-day.

THE EXHIBITION

On display are **archive materials, original models, photographs, books, magazines and design classics** closely associated with his architectural projects and organized into eight sections evoking key concepts expressed by Ponti himself. The exhibition layout is immersive and spectacular, suggesting the master's own idea of space: fluid, dynamic and colorful. In the museum lobby, visitors are welcomed by a powerful installation of monumental Alcantara banners, hanging the full height of Zaha Hadid's spaces which reproduce the stylized facades of skyscrapers, evoking the skyline of an imaginary *Pontian* city.

Leaving the lifts that lead to the third floor, the reproduction of the *giallo fantastic* linoleum floor used for the ramp immediately transports visitors into the most famous of Pontian skyscrapers, the Pirelli tower in Milan. Before entering the Gallery, the photographic project by **Thomas Demand** recounts the exceptional vertical buildings conserved at the CSAC Archive and also on display in the exhibition.

Within the Gallery, the section ***Towards the exact house*** traces the theme of the house that was central to Ponti's research into defining a space congruent with modern life: here we find the first typical Milanese *Domus*, the designs for the *La Casa Adatta* exhibited at Eurodomus in 1970 and, above all, the synthesis of much of the architect's thinking over the years: his apartment in Via Dezza, Milan.

The exhibition continues with a focus on Ponti's **Classicisms** from the 1930s, when major commissions led to imposing projects on the urban scale, such as the *Scuola di Matematica* in Rome, 1934, and the two Montecatini buildings in Milan, from 1936 and 1951.

The osmotic relationship between architecture and nature is explored in **Living nature**, featuring the projects realised along the Mediterranean coastline (*Villa Marchesano* in Bordighera, 1938 and the *Hotel Parco dei Principi* in Sorrento, 1959).

We then arrive at the best-known buildings, documented in the section **Architecture of the surface**, which are the ultimate expression of a design philosophy based on surfaces rather than volumes, in which the facades become two-dimensional planes to be pierced and folded like sheets of paper (the renowned *Villa Planchart* in Caracas, 1953-57, and the *Istituto italiano di cultura* in Stockholm, 1958, both testifying the international standing of Ponti's work).

Architecture as crystal is the aphorism that celebrates the idea of a closed, finite form that gives rise to a faceted, crystal-like plan. This section also features certain major works such as the *Denver Art Museum* (1971) and the church of *San Carlo Borromeo* in Milan, along with projects on a smaller scale, underlining the ease with which Ponti shifted from the urban dimension to that of the single object within a coherent and integrated conception of the design process. On show are the designs of the cutlery for Christofle, the ceramics for Marazzi, the handles for Olivari, the bathroom fixtures for Ideal Standard, the *Superleggera* chair for Cassina and even the model of a bodywork for a car, with styling that by no coincidence was named the *Linea Diamante*. Lightness and the dematerialization of the vertical characterise the section **Light façades** with the *Concattedrale* in Taranto (1970), the *Grande magazzino de Bijenkorf* in Eindhoven and the *Ministerial Buildings* in Islamabad. The exhibition concludes with the same evocative setting with which it opened, the *Pontian city*, composed of skyscrapers developing vertically, reducing their footprint and leaving space for green areas. This image emerges strongly in the sections **Appearance of skyscrapers** and **The spectacle of cities**, housed at the point where the Zaha Hadid designed MAXXI is closest to *its city*: next to the great glass wall that opens Gallery 5 to the panorama of 20th century Rome.

Alongside the skyscrapers and the city, testifying to a philosophy that ranges uninterruptedly from the urban context to the domestic environment, is the **reading room**, echoing the interior of the Ponti House on Via Dezza, with the reproduction of the ceramic floor realised for the occasion by Ceramica De Maio and the presence of the furnishings designed by Ponti and produced by Molteni.

The exposition is enriched by a kind of exhibition within the exhibition thanks to a **photographic commissioning project** conceived and curated by **Paolo Rosselli** who, together with the other seven auteurs he has selected, has given rise to a series of contemporary views of Pontian works, illustrating their present day existence. Delfino Sisto Legnani looked at the *Concattedrale* in Taranto; Allegra Martin the *Hotel Parco dei Principi* in Sorrento; Giovanni Chiaramonte *Villa Planchart* in Caracas; Filippo Romano the *Grande magazzino de Bijenkorf* in Eindhoven; Giovanna Silva Il Liviano (the faculty of letters) and *Palazzo del Bo* (rectorate), University of Padua; Michele Nastasi the first and second *Palazzo Montecatini* in Milan; Stefano Graziani the *School of Mathematics* in Rome; Paolo Rosselli the *Pirelli tower* in Milan.

The **catalogue** is published by Forma Edizioni, edited by Maristella Casciato and Fulvio Irace, and is a dual edition in Italian and English, consisting of 300 pages, 150 illustrations, and texts by 45 authors including Giorgio Ciucci, Barry Bergdoll, Domitilla Dardi, Anat Falbel, Farhan Karim, Jorge Rivas, Règean Legault, Bernard Colembrader and Alessandra Muntoni.

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