

THE MEDITERRANEAN AT THE CORE OF MAXXI'S RESEARCH

Opening of

RICCARDO DALISI. Radicalmente

Curated by Gabriele Neri | setting-up by Novembre Studio

in collaboration with the Riccardo Dalisi Archive

Gallery 4 | 10th November 2023 – 3rd March 2024

MIMMO JODICE. Mediterraneo

curated by Simona Antonacci

in collaboration with Studio Mimmo Jodice

Archives Centre MAXXI Architecture | 10th November 2023 – 14th April 2024

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Rome, 9th November 2023. At the core of MAXXI's research lies the exploration of the Mediterranean, a place of coexistence and dialogue, the guardian of a common cultural and identity heritage that today, more than ever, needs reaffirming. The museum's cultural program thus gives life to a new cycle of in-depth studies aimed at exploring the topic of the *Mare Nostrum* ("Our Sea") through the lenses of art, architecture, and design.

Starting with a major retrospective dedicated to **Riccardo Dalisi** (Potenza 1931 – Naples 2022), a year after his death, and a tribute to **Mimmo Jodice** featuring a selection of photographs from the series *Mediterraneo*, MAXXI launches the autumn season with two exhibitions dedicated to the research carried out by these two artists. Their works express a Mediterranean essence that places local themes within global perspectives, and vice versa. Both projects are part of the new MAXXI Architecture program.

Alessandro Giuli, President of MAXXI Foundation, says, "As we open these exhibitions, the challenge is to consider the museum at its full potential and to be aware that cultural programming is a tool for cultural diplomacy. It's a responsibility to be interpreted dramatically and imaginatively, just as these two artists teach us."

Lorenza Baroncelli, Director of MAXXI Architecture, adds, "Dalisi and Jodice share a perspective on the Mediterranean, or perhaps we should say a gaze towards the South. Both have had the ability to anticipate highly-relevant topics to the extent that even today, perhaps especially today, their inquiries challenge us. Past and present intertwine in a timeless recurrence of themes and issues."

RICCARDO DALISI. Radicalmente

Riccardo Dalisi was one of the most multifaceted Italian designers of recent decades. He was unconventional, revolutionary, and hard to classify. Moving freely between architecture and design, art and craftsmanship, participation and social engagement, academic research, and popular traditions, he explored paths and methods that, though often misunderstood, stand out as ground-breaking today, when facing the great challenges of our times as far as design is concerned.

The MAXXI exhibition presents Dalisi's work for the first time in its extreme diversity and vastness. From **creative workshops with children** in Naples (those in Rione Traiano are depicted in a series of photographs by Mimmo Jodice) to his revolutionary work in the field of design (such as **ultra-poor design**, characterized by poor techniques and recycled materials, including sculptures, lamps, and tin objects created by migrant laborers and unemployed people). From **built architecture** (such as the Borsa Merci in Naples, created with Michele Capobianco and Massimo Pica Ciamarra in 1964, or the "creative restoration" interventions in the Irpinia villages struck by the 1980 earthquake) to imagined architecture with **visionary, impossible projects**, utopian plans, and ironic yet provocative drawings that, as a whole, evoke a surreal, poetic, and critical world. The exhibition also presents the artistic revival of popular culture and tradition, with paintings and sculptures, often in large format, where characters of **Neapolitan and Mediterranean culture** are brought to life.

Fondazione MAXXI | Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo Ministero della Cultura

via Guido Reni, 4A - 00196 Roma | www.maxxi.art

Piazza Santa Maria Paganica, 15 - 67100 L'Aquila | www.maxxilaquila.art

C.F. 10587971002 | tel +390632486

Also exhibited for the first time is the **Sedia del cece** (Chickpea Chair), a series of drawings that Dalisi asked from Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Ettore Sottsass, Enzo Mari, Bruno Munari, Paolo Portoghesi, Superstudio, Archizoom, Ziggurat, 9999, Aldo Rossi, Franco Purini, Franco Raggi, Ugo La Pietra, Gae Aulenti, Hans Hollein, and many others. It is inspired by a small chair made by a Neapolitan girl using scrap wood and a clothespin, with a chickpea laid on it.

Among his most famous works is the **reinterpretation of the Neapolitan coffee maker**, the result of research carried out between 1979 and 1987 for the Alessi company, awarded the Compasso d'Oro ("Golden Compass"). It was conducted with the craftsmen of Rua Catalana in Naples and Alessi technicians in Piedmont, generated, in addition to a model that went into production, hundreds of objects halfway between a coffee maker and a puppet, in which functional research, anonymous design, and the ritual dimension of coffee merge into the forms of "Totocchi" (Totò + Pinocchio), warriors, knights, robots, Pulcinella, and other fairy-tale and mythological characters.

Through drawings, sketches, furnishings, embroidery, objects, books, sculptures, paintings, photographs, archive documents, films, and other materials, the radical and revolutionary nature of the "Dalisi method" is revealed. Curator **Gabriele Neri** writes, "By exalting interdisciplinary trespassing, the overturning of the concept of the author, the 'creative disorder,' irony, and play, the potential of residue and dross, Dalisi fought to reaffirm the 'tolerant strength of the community sense, for which everyone, even the least efficient and the outcast, is useful, necessary.' His work hovers between utopia and reality and transforms what we thought were marginal themes and territories into pivotal points of discussion and engagement, especially in times of crisis that force us to rethink our relationship with the project and the world."

The exhibition also highlights the fruitful interactions between Riccardo Dalisi and artists, designers, architects, and critics, including Mimmo Jodice (to whom MAXXI pays tribute with the exhibition of a core of images from the *Mediterraneo* series at the Archive Center), Alessandro Mendini, Giancarlo De Carlo, Massimo Pica Ciamarra, Mimmo Paladino, Ettore Sottsass, and many others.

His work blossomed in the cultural and artistic climate of Naples in the sixties and seventies. It is the expression of a "Mediterranean" nature resistant to a homogenizing, disastrous modernity. However, it has always drawn from much broader influences, both geographically and disciplinarily—pedagogy, semiotics, linguistics, sociology, theatre, etc.—which the exhibition aims to highlight.

The setting-up by **Novembre Studio** evokes the image of an upside-down, alternative world, much like Dalisi's perspective on reality. The dreamlike figures that the master drew and sculpted over the years guide the visitor through an out-of-scale landscape, telling the story of his poetics in a thorough, radical way.

The exhibition also includes the outcomes of research conducted, starting from the traces of the Neapolitan architect, by the artist-photographer **Vincenzo Castella**, in collaboration with NABA - Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti ("New Academy of Fine Arts"), involving a group of young visual artists from the Academy. Through the displayed photographs, the plunges into the workshops of the tinsmiths of Rua Catalana, the streets of the Spanish Quarters, among the "garitte" ("watchtowers") built at Palazzo Reale, and in the buildings constructed in Ponticelli and Rione Traiano, which in the seventies were the stage for pioneering workshops conducted with children.

A **book**, curated by Gabriele Neri, has been published for the exhibition. It is dedicated to the "Sedia del cece" series, edited by Corraini, featuring drawings by Riccardo Dalisi, Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Ettore Sottsass, Enzo Mari, Bruno Munari, Paolo Portoghesi, Superstudio, Archizoom, Ziggurat, 9999, Aldo Rossi, Franco Purini, Franco Raggi, Gae Aulenti, Hans Hollein, Ugo La Pietra, etc. The volume includes accounts by scholars and designers and an essay by the curator.

Texts by Lorenza Baroncelli, Stefano Boeri, Sara Catenacci, Domitilla Dardi, Paolo Deganello, Piero Frassinelli, Claudio Gambardella, Fulvio Irace, Ugo La Pietra, Anna Maria Laville, Iolanda Lima, Gabriele Neri, Gianni Pettena, Franco Purini, Franco Raggi, Lia Rumma, Angela Tecce.

MIMMO JODICE. Mediterraneo

Mediterraneo is one of the most renowned projects by **Mimmo Jodice** (Naples, 1934), a Neapolitan artist among the major interpreters of contemporary photography.

From November 10, 2023, to April 14, 2024, the Archives Center of MAXXI Architecture showcases a collection of vintage photographs from this series, part of the MAXXI Architecture Photography Collection, thanks to the contribution of the Friends of MAXXI.

Archival documents, contact sheets, interviews, study materials, and bibliographical resources are also displayed to delve into the genesis of the project. Jodice developed the project during the '80s and '90s after the experiments of the '60s and '70s, nurturing a growing interest in ancient themes, memory, origins, while refining his poetics centred around the concept of "losing oneself while looking," that is, pursuing visions that exist beyond reality.

This translates into various projects dedicated to Mediterranean culture and archaeology, starting with an initial exploration of areas closest to him (Paestum, Neapolis, Pompeii, Cuma, Baia) and then expanding to the *Mare Nostrum*—from Greece to Tunisia, from Jordan to Libya—reaching museums worldwide. The "encounter" with the Athletes in the Villa of the Papyri at the Archaeological Museum of Naples around 1985, testified in the exhibition by a video of that time, represents a turning point in this research. The systematic pursuit continued in the 1990s and found international recognition with a major exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1995.

In *Mediterraneo*, the faces and bodies of the statues, as well as the architectures, landscapes, ancient ruins, and myths, are transfigured through deep shadows, moving surfaces, sudden glares, thinning, and dilating contours achieved through skilful darkroom techniques, reflecting Jodice's expressive language. The difference between the contact sheets presented in display cases and the final work highlights the uniqueness of each print and the complexity of this process, narrated by the author himself in an exclusive video produced by the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples.

Jodice's journey revolves around the language of photography as an expression of his own visions and, at the same time, a path through a symbolic imaginary: a journey in search of the roots of his culture guided by the idea of an extended city that starts from the Gulf of Naples to embrace the Mediterranean basin and beyond.

MAXXI PRESS OFFICE +39 06 324861 press@fondazionemaxxi.it

RICCARDO DALISI. Radicalmente

Curated by Gabriele Neri

Exhibition sections

RIONE TRAIANO

The Traiano neighbourhood in Naples, whose construction started in 1957 on a project by Marcello Canino, was conceived as an ambitious public housing plan. Inspired by Scandinavian examples, it was to comprise houses, schools, offices, shops and factories, all while respecting nature. But instead of a model neighbourhood, it became a symbol of degradation and isolation, with double the expected population, with incomplete roads and services that were never built.

The images of the neighbourhood were shot by Mimmo Jodice in two moments. The first shots portray the buildings as a scenery of desolate spaces, with children who appear marginalized and far from school. In a second series, the neighbourhood is "animated" by Dalisi intent on creating – with children and his students – ephemeral structures, furnishings and sculptures with waste materials.

GEOMETRIA GENERATIVA

Dalisi's work was based on "generative geometry". According to the architect, the form (of an object, a building, a city, a flower) is constantly evolving: generative geometry therefore tries to grasp these processes of transformation, and use them to "generate" further configurations.

While researching for order, Dalisi also included the concepts of unpredictability and creative disorder, imagining a "living" geometry, like a seed that develops through drawing and building. Generative geometry also makes the coexistence of different voices in a group design possible, respecting each one's singularity.

The project of a kindergarten in the Rione Traiano, to be built together with the residents, was based on generative geometry: from an orthogonal grid a centrifugal movement comes to life and, opening up as a wave, it creates the architecture.

TECNICA POVERA IN REVOLT

In 1971 Dalisi took his students to the Rione Traiano to experiment, together with the neighbourhood's children, the "socio-therapeutic" force of participation and creativity as a tool for emancipation. The main idea was that of a mutual exchange, with no authoritarian imposition from above, as was promoted by many pedagogists of the time.

Dalisi designed and made the others design, assemble, build and sew, thus producing urban sculptures, decorations, toys, embroidery, objects and bizarre furniture, such as small chairs for children and large thrones, in which fairytales and reality merge.

From this experience, he theorized the so-called "poor" technique: distinct from Arte Povera, it valued the collective work of craftsmanship above the specialization of advanced technology; "the liberating strength of authenticity" over the myth of accuracy. "The tecnica povera is in revolt [...] not to supplant and destroy, but to expand and recover the scope of creativity in work".

It was a personal endeavour, independent from every institution, carried out in the basements and on the streets, often with the distrust of the residents and kids themselves. Every day the architect/professor Dalisi turned into an anthropologist, educator, psychologist, animator, craftsman, priest, mediator, receiver and social worker, and went seeking for an unprecedented way of understanding the project and society. The workshops at the Traiano district lasted until 1974, and then continued in Ponticelli, Sanità, Siberia, Secondigliano and Scampia; in the historic centre, in the prison of Nisida, in Salerno, etc.

Influenced by Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theatre", Dalisi also collaborated with the director from Campania Gennaro Vitiello, one of the founders of Libera Scena Ensemble, who used the wood and papier-mâché thrones in his shows.

GAUDÍ A NAPOLI

The work created by Dalisi with children and students evoke multiple references: folk and academic culture; Paul Klee and children's expressiveness; the Bauhaus workshops; the magical dimension that industrial society has lost; Umberto Eco's idea of open work; Danilo Dolci's maieutic approach; etc. Among the reference figures was also Antoni Gaudí, on whom Dalisi wrote a book in 1979, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, studied by his friend Filippo Alison. In Gaudí, in particular, Dalisi found a source of inspiration, a legacy of techniques and forms to reinterpret and identify with. All this resurfaced in later years, in furnishings, architecture and installations that bear witness to a special Mediterranean dialogue between Barcelona and Naples.

GLOBAL TOOLS

Dalisi's activity resonated with the so-called "radical architecture", which, around 1968, between Florence and Milan, had revealed unprecedented perspectives. Together with Archizoom, Remo Buti, Ugo La Pietra, 9999, Gaetano Pesce, Gianni Pettena, Ettore Sottsass, Superstudio, UFO and Ziggurat, in 1973 Dalisi founded Global Tools, a "counter-school" of architecture and design, "without students or professors". Conceived as a system of workshops, the collective aimed to stimulate individual creativity, manual techniques, the expressiveness of the body, and craftsmanship: "The central discourse is the re-proposition of the de-intellectualized man, with his archaic possibility of wisdom...". Although the experiment ended in 1975, Dalisi continued his alternative teaching with projects such as "Università di strada" and the "Progettazione e Compassione" course in the Sanità district.

THE CHICKPEA'S CHAIR

During one of the workshops organized in Naples, a little girl built a small chair with scrap wood and a clothespin. Instead of a doll, she placed a small legume on it: a chickpea. Dalisi was immediately impressed, because this mixed the tale of the princess on the pea with that of Cicerenella (small chickpea), a traditional nursery rhyme.

This object gave him the idea of a "counter-animation": "animating" well-known figures of art and design with the work of a Neapolitan girl. The perfect occasion was the 1978 Venice Biennale. Dalisi wandered through the alleys with the chair and sheets of paper in his hand, asking architects, designers and artists for a drawing inspired by it. The "game" continued in the following years, producing an invaluable collection. Exponents of radical architecture were then joined by Aldo Rossi, Franco Purini, Giancarlo De Carlo, Paolo Portoghesi, Gae Aulenti, Bruno Munari, Enzo Mari and others. The names of Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys, frequenters of the Neapolitan art scene, stand out in the list, along with Jannis Kounellis, of whom, however, no drawing remains.

In fact, the fairy tale turned into a mystery: one day the drawings disappeared, only to reappear some time later, but some were then missing. Dismayed, Dalisi responded with a new project: a series of sculptures inspired by The Chickpea's Chair.

By making famous artists interact with the imagination of a child, Dalisi exalted the collective dimension of creativity, inverting the concepts of author and work of art, to finally create a multi-voiced fairy tale.

DEAR RICCARDO

Dalisi created an extraordinary network of relationships, and this demonstrates his interest in intervening in the most important debates of the time. His exchanges with Giancarlo De Carlo were decisive: a pioneer of participation in architecture, De Carlo in fact stimulated Dalisi's first workshops and hosted his writings in the magazine "Spazio & Società".

An interesting relationship was also created with critics such as Achille Bonito Oliva, Angelo Trimarco and Enrico Crispolti. The latter, who in the 1970s spoke of "aesthetic operator" instead of artist, exalting the principle of cooperation, invited him to the 1976 Venice Biennale, giving him international visibility.

Among the most lasting friendships was that with Alessandro Mendini, who gave him ample space in the magazine "Casabella" and collaborated with him on many occasions, sharing his radical and at the same time fable-like approach to the project.

THE OPERA BUFFA OF DESIGN

A trained architect, Riccardo Dalisi moved to design when he realized that an object, compared to a building, may also be made by a child.

After the experiments of "poor" technique in the Rione Traiano, between 1979 and 1987, he developed for Alessi a surprising research on the traditional Neapolitan coffee pot, in which he brought together the functional and anthropological aspects (the rite of coffee-making) of an anonymous design object perfected over the centuries.

This investigation, conducted together with the artisans of Rua Catalana in Naples and Alessi's technicians in Piedmont, earned him the Compasso d'Oro in 1981. The result was not only dozens of prototypes and a final model put into production, but above all an army of "animated" and caricature coffee makers: warriors, knights, saints, robots, Pulcinella, Totocchi (conflation of Totò and Pinocchio) and many other characters. In Alberto Alessi words, "assaulted" and then convinced by the countless prototypes that came from Naples to his office, "Dalisi managed to affect the security of our industrial condition".

In the following years he collaborated with many companies, from north to south and also abroad, designing lamps, furniture, tiles, mosaics and other products (even a car prototype for FIAT) with free forms derived from nature and imagination.

The unconventional and revolutionary "Dalisi method" has helped to promote the culture of design in southern Italy, in the wake of pioneers such as Roberto Mango, by organizing a number of exhibitions and directing the School of Specialization in Industrial Design at the Faculty of Architecture of Naples.

ULTRAPOVERISSIMO

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MYTHOLOGIES

Dalisi's work was capable of reinterpreting fairy tales, folk tales, modern and ancient myths stemming from the Neapolitan and Mediterranean culture. Since the 1990s, this imagery was translated into paintings and sculptures, often of large format, depicting Polyphemus, Vulcan, Madonnas, angels, players, sovereigns, warriors and many other subjects.

Painted on paper or sculpted with poor metals, these characters add to the endless people of puppets, dolls, Totocchis and coffee makers, but touching a higher and sacred dimension.

These figures testify to his particular approach to religion and spirituality. A frequenter of Tullio Castellani's Centro Coscienza in Milan, linked to Greek thought and immersed in Neapolitan popular religiosity, Dalisi approached the work of several philosophers and theologians, including Raimon Panikkar.

ARCHITECTURE OF UNPREDICTABILITY

Dalisi's work originated in architecture. In 1962 he opened a studio with Massimo Pica Ciamarra, with whom he designed many school and university complexes, intended as places of fertile spatial and social experimentation. With Pica Ciamarra and Michele Capobianco, Dalisi designed the Borsa Merci di Napoli (1964).

In the 1970s, his projects mixed various references: from Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture to his "generative geometry" that – with its dynamic and pointed trajectories – seemed to anticipate the deconstructivism of Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind.

After the earthquake of 1980, Dalisi also engaged in the complex work of "creative restoration" of the towns of Irpinia, working on sacred and anonymous architecture, between reconstruction and renewal.

LIVE ARCHITECTURE

Dalisi's architectural research includes a wide range of impossible projects, utopian plans and ironic but provocative drawings, which together form a surreal, poetic and critical world.

The plan for Panopolis (1999) imagines an ideal city, to be placed in Campania in areas degraded by highways, unauthorized constructions, polluting presences. Its construction, as was for the Palace of Caserta, would have brought together architects, artists and craftsmen, becoming "a factory of emotions and processes of knowledge". In Dalisi's ideal cities, residents would travel by bizarre cars (like the one he proposed to FIAT) and would live in butterfly-shaped houses.

The reading of Serge Latouche and Raimon Panikkar stimulated the publication of Degrowth. Architecture of the New Innocence (2009), book-manifesto for a renewed balance between design and environment.

DALISI NAPLES TODAY

On the occasion of the exhibition "Riccardo Dalisi. Radicalmente", the MAXXI commissioned Vincenzo Castella to carry out a field project, in search of the places in Naples where the architect, designer and artist left his traces.

Inspired by Dalisi's participatory approach, Castella involved a group of young artists (Daniele Marzorati, Davide Barberi, Edoardo Bonacina, Josefine Jyllnor) from NABA – Nuova Accademia delle Belle Arti, thus giving shape to a mosaic of images in which the eye of the individual is diluted in the collective work. The same has happened with Dalisi's urban installations, which include sculptures, lampshades, masks, decorations, urban furnishings and small architectures. Visible or hidden, large or small, these have in fact become part of the incessant stratification that shapes the city, blending with noble and popular features, spontaneous and designed elements, ephemeral and permanent ones.

Like a large open book, this metropolitan "investigation" takes visitors to the workshops of Rua Catalana's tinsmiths, where Dalisi had his studio and produced his works; to the streets of the Quartieri Spagnoli, crowned by small angular sculptures; among the "sentry boxes" placed before the Palazzo Reale; in the Rione Sanità, between the Basilica of Santa Maria and the Giardino degli Aranci; to the buildings he designed for Ponticelli and finally, to the Rione Traiano where, during the 1970s, his pioneering workshops with children took place.