

# Afterville

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CITTÀ di BIELLA

## Piemonte's primacies

**Riccardo Bedrome**  
President of the XXIII UIA World Congress of Architecture

After the take-off of its exhibition *Astronave Torino*, MIAAO, with *The Grand Ceramics Theater*. BAU+MIAAO is launching another cultural event -this time associated with the XXIII UIA World Congress of Architecture UIA; cementing a relationship that is destined to flourish. Turin's Order of Architects, and its Foundation, have decided to transfer their head office to the monumental Baroque complex of San Filippo Neri, designed by Filippo Juvarra; where they will be the Museum's new neighbours. It so happens that Juvarra is also one of the subjects of the exhibition series: *La città disegnata dagli architetti*, which includes the MIAAO exhibition. This is the Congress's main collateral event, and may encourage participants, visitors, and Turin's inhabitants to discover the old capital city's conception, and the mastery that many great architects long ago lavished on it to give it a rigorous and rational appearance. The architects Juvarra, Guarini and Antonelli also worked at Oropa, in the area of Biella. This small town has intelligently taken the strategic opportunity of the Congress's presence to reveal its hidden beauty, and the works of its artificers, including important "avant-garde" 20th century architects such as Nicola Mosso, his son Leonardo, and Giuseppe Pagano. This number of *Afterville* also refers to BAU Biella Arredo Urbano (Biella Street Furniture) project coordinated by Enzo Biffi Gentili. *Afterville* would also like to celebrate three European primacies of Piedmont: the Colour, Lighting and Street Furniture Urban Plans. These innovative instruments were all drawn up in Turin between the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties. Their international success led their promoter, Enzo Biffi Gentili, to be given an entry in the *Dictionnaire international des arts appliqués et du design*, (Editions du Regard, Paris 1996). Among the project leaders were the architect Achille Castiglioni, and the designer Ettore Sottsass. By the way, as it is seldom known that Sottsass graduated and did his youthful professional training in Turin, the city's Order of Architects is inscribing him in its Roll of Honour. Biella's latest street furniture project by Ettore is the one carried out with Sottsass Associati for Biella. Biella is now conducting new research, under the artistic direction of the same person who promoted these Turin Plans thirty years ago, not only into street furniture, but also into urban identity, with projects in the applied public arts, involving works by world-famous designers including Jean-Michel Wilmotte, Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue, Jordi Garcés and Enric Soria. Besides, again for the first time in Italy, Biella has started up a "town and area graphic arts plan". Five young graphics studios, after being invited to design new urban "reading" and "writing" projects are involved in this as members of the commission that will select the best designs. The theme of the World Congress is *Transmitting Architecture*. It is instructive to consider this type of project as one of the ways to transmit architecture, and with it, a town's history and reality; as an exercise in communicative feedback between citizens, visitors and the built environment. Here's a golden opportunity to forget the old platitude that Biella is just a little "provincial town"...

**TRANSMITTING ARCHITECTURE**  
JUNE 29th, JULY 3rd 2008 TORINO



# BAU + MIAAO

new projects and urban identity researches

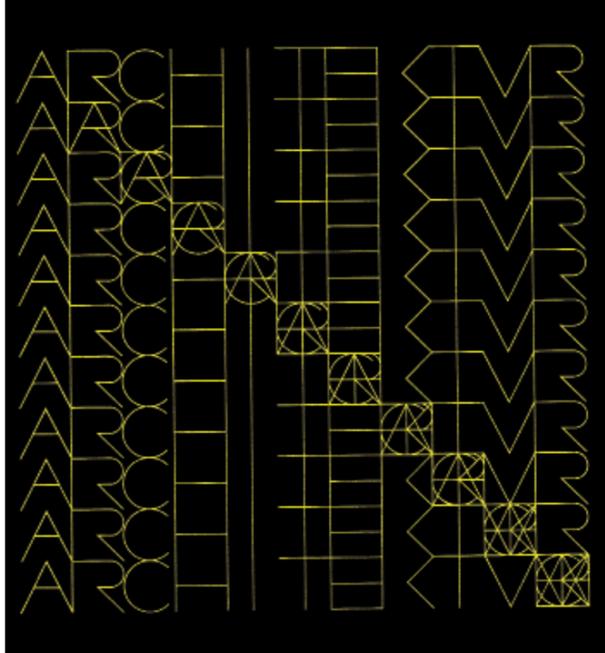


MUSEO INTERNAZIONALE DELLE ARTI APPLICATE OGGI

## Biella is bella

**Vittorio Barazzotto**  
Lord Mayor of the City of Biella

Biella is the administrative centre of a district renowned all over the world for the quality of its textile products. Indeed, the initiative of its entrepreneurs and the skill of its workers have, over the years, allowed to perfect manufacturing techniques such as to produce cloths and yarns of an excellent quality. It is therefore natural that the most famous designers have used Biella-made products for their high-fashion and *prêt-à-porter* creations; that so many star-system celebrities, managers, beautiful women and international personalities have worn and still wear clothes made with Biella textiles. It may sound strange, but, in truth, only a few have benefited of this undisputable record and, indeed, in the public perception, Biella is still just a name, with no specific geographical location: everyone knows it exists but no one knows exactly where it is. This is because of the understated attitude of the Biella people, who have long shun the spotlight, preferring to retreat into a comfortable isolation: what really mattered, after all, was that the attention was focused on this or that manufacturer of an excellent product. That isolation, which until not long ago was regarded as a privilege, is now the reason behind a general redesign of the Biella territory, to better integrate it -through a suitable infrastructural network- into the communication and economic system of the macro-areas of Northern Italy and Europe. Indeed, in the last decades, under the pressure of a global market, low-cost products have invaded the consumer world and many Biella-based plants have been forced to shut down or relocate production in better-positioned areas. A number of small and medium manufacturers, though, remain active, maintaining their focus on a high-quality product, for a more upmarket consumer segment, fortunately growing. What is needed is an innovative strategy, designed also to revitalise the many empty spaces left in the city by the shutting-down factories, once sources of work, income and employment. And this is why the City I lead has committed itself, right from the beginning of its term, to a programme focusing primarily on the externalisation -also in environmental and architectural terms- of the identity of Biella, a city which has already introduced the concept of quality in the production and provision of services to its citizens: schools, safety, support to the disadvantaged segments of the population, public green areas, cabling of the city's territory for IT purposes. This is the reason behind the effort being made to renew the image of Biella and make it even more enjoyable through initiatives such as the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano (Biella Street Furniture) project, whose aim is that of setting off and conveying the value of certain features of the city through colours, lights, writings and street furniture.



Leonardo Mosso, *Architektur*, 1969, writing-structure, key ideogram system modulated square alphabet made up of a limited number of horizontal, vertical diagonal and curved graphemes, Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese

## Variable Biella

**Sergio Scaramal**  
President of the Province of Biella

The Biella Province has in its small size and morphological variety a very valuable asset: its mountains and hills, its plain and human settlements all contribute to creating a landscape of countless nuances. From the Oropa Sanctuary, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to the Viverone lake, the views change gently, reminding us that the landscape perfectly embodies the notion of Common Good: and that there are some things whose quality and excellence must be protected because they belong to us all. One of the most attractive features of Biella's architecture is that it is immersed in the surrounding landscape: even the old industrial heritage buildings lie on the sides of rivers, reproducing their colours (and once even their sounds). Textile factories -whether they are still in use, disused or used for other purposes- represent a central feature of our architecture. A member of Recep, the European network of local authorities for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, the Biella Province strives to protect and promote its territory, its cultural identity, its social fabric, overseeing to its necessary transformations and treating its diversity as a source of value. We care for our landscape, not only in that we defend its historical and environmental assets, but in that we protect our space and quality of life, in the attempt to build a future based on the history of our living spaces.

## Oropa's hour

**Mercedes Bresso**  
President of the Piedmont Region

The Piedmont Region aims to enhance its resources. Important cultural events can be considered as factors of development, as tourist attractions, as promotional vehicles or as possible sources of employment. The Region has great pleasure therefore in welcoming the XXIII World Congress of Architecture, an event that thousands of professionals have awaited, at Venaria Royal Palace: a symbol of the capacity of cultural, architectural, urban and social rebirth of an area that seemed until a few years ago to be destined for a sad decline. A rich programme of associated events complete this cultural offer, and are aimed at a vast public. In particular we're pleased that the Biella area will be featured in the combined event: *The Grand Ceramics Theater*. BAU+MIAAO. This exhibition of art, architecture and design organised by MIAAO in the splendid complex of San Filippo Neri, designed by Juvarra, is also about street furniture, and Biella's capacity to profit from the pioneering experience of Turin in terms of reviving its Lighting and Colour City Plans. Besides, it also takes account of Oropa's great environmental, architectural and artistic traditions between the 17th and 19th centuries. In this way it enhances an extraordinary heritage that is both "local" and international: Oropa's Sanctuary and Sacred Mountain, which have been included since 2003 in the UNESCO's list of World Heritage of Humanity Sites.

## Bugella pivella

**Doriano Raise**  
Councillor for Town Planning and Street Furniture of Biella

Let me explain the title of this article, *Bugella pivella*, an expression (chosen by the editorial office) now perhaps obscure but once perfectly understood, appropriately describing its content. *Bugella* is Biella's old Latin name, dating from at least 826 AD, while *pivella* means young woman. An oxymoron really, a figure of speech, revealing the "back to the future"-inspired approach which underpins the work of the city's Council Department of Town Planning and which, in 2006, led to the launch of the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano (Biella Street Furniture) project and the institution of the UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano (Street Furniture Office). For these activities, Biella has counted in the past and can count today on the cooperation following at last page

## Aura of Europe between Turin and Oropa

**Enzo Biffi Gentili**  
BAU Biella Arredo Urbano project consultant  
MIAAO Museo Internazionale delle Arti Applicate Oggi Director

Let us discuss, in this magazine -which also serves as a "catalogue" for the BAU+MIAAO, *The Grand Ceramics Theater* exhibition held at the MIAAO in Turin- of the new image & communication strategies and projects, of urban identity. Let us not use the term "street furniture", an expression which seems limited, at least in its most widespread usage. Not so in the past. Indeed, during the "foundation congress" of this discipline in Italy -promoted by myself in Stresa in 1982- Giovanni Klaus Koenig said that "street furniture is the first form of communication of a city towards its citizens", it is an act of "cultural restoration" aiming at "removing a disturbance within a message" (and not at creating it, as too often happens). If to this we add that it is also a way of "transmitting architecture", we are in perfect harmony with the subject of the XXIII UIA World Congress of Architecture, to be held in Turin: *Transmitting Architecture*. Here, we do all of that based on the experience of the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano (Biella Street Furniture) project implemented in Biella, a province city of the Piedmont region, whose administrative centre, Turin, is this year the world capital of architecture and, temporarily, the *World Design Capital* (the logo "world design capital" has been recently registered by the city of Milan: a rapid move aimed at making people used to call it so). As you will see, many pages of this magazine are dedicated to the history of the design culture of Biella and Turin. This choice has been made for two reasons: the first, dictated by the need of cultural "references" to be introduced to a world assembly; the second, dictated by our belief -as Manfredo Tafuri teaches us- that history does not precede action, but it is an action itself. Besides, there are some important anniversaries which should not be forgotten by 2008 Italy. It is exactly eighty years since three important events were organised in Italy in 1928: the first Exhibition of Futurist Architecture, held in Turin, which saw the participation of the local Futurist group led by Fillia; the first Italian Exhibition of Rational Architecture promoted by MIAR, which was held in Rome; and the first issue of *La casa bella, rivista per gli amatori della casa bella*, published in Milan, whose name was subsequently be changed into *Casabella*. As chance would have it, we have mentioned some primary events and cultural movements whose chief protagonists, over the time, were the architects Nicola Mosso and Giuseppe Pagano, also active in Biella and Turin, to whom we pay homage. Regarding Futurism -the centenary of which will be celebrated next year- our Subalpine region represented one of

the few certain reference points in regards to completed architecture works (not only designed). In the *Manifesto of Aerial Architecture* by Marinetti, Mazzoni and Somenzi -dated 1933, published on 15 February 1934 in *Sant'Elia*, issue no. 4- we read, indeed, that "the Lingotto Fiat factory was the first Futurist constructive invention". Saying that the style of Giacomo Mattè Trucco -the architect who designed the important Turin factory- can be considered as Futurist is perhaps pushing it a bit, on the other hand there is no doubt about the avant-gardiste views of Bruno Zevi asserts, "as a driving force and leader of a renewing movement has no parallel in the world, because in no other country modern architecture experienced such extreme drama" (B. Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Einaudi, Turin 1975)- besides the Office Building he designed in Turin for industrialist Riccardo Gualino from Biella, we want to remember here two Biella works which represents important translations of his "moral" notion of industrial and community architecture. Other *homages* in these pages are more direct operating models for the BAU project, i.e. the ones paid to Ettore Sottsass and Achille Castiglioni, invited by me to come to Turin and contribute to the preparation and implementation of the Turin Street Furniture and City Lighting Plans at the beginning of the eighties. Sottsass Associati are also the designers of some recent Biella street furniture projects, such as the shelters and supports for information (while the Biella Colour Plan, is based on the Turin plan of 1978 -another thirtieth anniversary- managed by Giovanni Brino, the director at that time, fortunately still active and alive). A totally Biella "invention", with no Turin precedent, is the fight to establish a "urban and territorial graphic design", being also "decorative", which is led together with the AIAP, the Italian Association planning for visual design. In sum, with its territory including the World Heritage Site Oropa, to which is dedicated the final part of this magazine, we can safely say that Biella can really contribute to identifying new ways to make every city *bella* (beautiful). Even though, some time ago Paolo Portoghesi warned us in Stresa by saying: "letting it believe it is beautiful is not enough to cure it, but let us not abandon it any longer than it has already been done..."

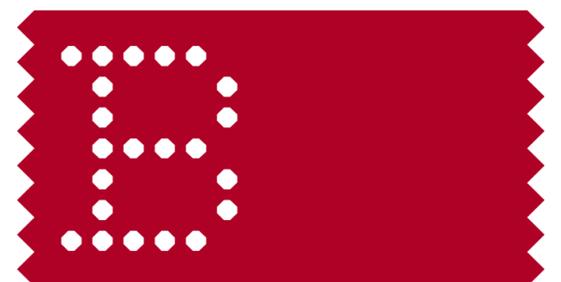
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**Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past**

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, 1935

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Diversi Associati, *Trademark and Logo of the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano project*, 2008



**Biella è bella**

## Summary

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Fillia, Pippo Oriani, Mino Rosso, *Sketch of a plastic mural for Casa Cervo, no. 18* 1934, gouache on paper, 33x24 cm  
Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese

## Futurist Biella

Luisa Perlo

That Biella is part of the history of Futurism is due in large part to Nicola Mosso. Born in Graglia Biellese in 1899, Mosso was one of the many Piedmont architects who emerged from the Turin Academy of the Fine Arts' School of Architecture. Painting was part of his designer DNA and shaped his career until 1986, the year he died. In 1927 he was one of the few Italians to participate in the international competition held to choose a design for the Palais des Nations in Geneva, submitting a project influenced by the Juvarian stylistic elements he had cultivated at Studio Fratelli. The competition brought him into contact with Europe's avant-garde: Mosso was thunderstruck by the Le Corbusier work he saw exhibited. Examples of how his style evolved include his own studio-house in via Grassi in Torino; Casa Campa, built in 1928, a Déco edifice Mosso reworked in 1950, adding a Rationalist element in homage to what he had learnt in Geneva with the use of a *plan libre*. But what determined his modernist bent was meeting Fillia and the group of Turin Futurists, which led him to abandon "pastists" references and create his own version of rational-Futurism. Beginning in the early thirties, Mosso concentrated on interior architecture - developed through Neoplastic chromatic scales, such as the Electric Railway Station at Cossato of 1932-33, which has been lost, and the furnishings he designed, including those for Casa Campa and for Casa Barberis in Asti, which still stand. His settings and architecture from this period appeared in the periodicals *La Città Nuova* and *Stile futurista* and in Fillia's *Gli ambienti della nuova architettura* published by UTET in 1935. One of Mosso's most typically Futurist designs was the physical education room presented the same year at the *Mostra del Naturismo in Piemonte* held at the Promotrice delle Belle Arti in Turin. But for Mosso, the "Futurist reconstruction of the universe" was also worked out in reiterated attempts at "integrating the arts", which he did by inserting plastic-pictorial elements, especially ones by Fillia, in architectural designs, most of which never saw the light. An exception was Casa Cervo at Biella, from 1933-34, whose final version includes plastic murals by Fillia, Pippo Oriani and Mino Rosso. Mosso's dedication to his birthplace never wavered. His most important buildings from his Biella period include the impressive Palazzotto Ripa, constructed in 1936. Many of his ideas for buildings in the Biella area were never used, from the open-air Pavilion of Sacred Art in Oropa to a church for the town of Vaglio Chiavazza, from 1931. The relationship with Biella was destined to become more intense in the post-war years, when his interest in light and how it could be handled in architecture deepened. Emblematic of the "white expressionism" with which he began the fifties (when he devoted himself to studies on exposure to sunlight, the basis of his project for an "Organized Solar City", which were published by Torino's Academy of Sciences) were the designs he did in 1950 for the exhibition spaces at the Archaeological Museum and Fine Arts Museum in Biella, which won him the Domus Prize and an exhibit at MoMa in New York. His best known work from this decade is the Church of the Holy Redeemer, built in Torino's Mirafiori neighbourhood in 1957, a mature, lofty evolution of his "red period", designed with his artist-architect son Leonardo and Livio Norzi: a tetrahedron of natural light in brick and cement, "expression of his mathematical/structural thought", whose *genius loci*, according to Augusto Sistri, can be traced "to a possible reference to Guarini". This fascinating edifice, admired by outstanding architects like Richard Neutra and Alvar Aalto, was awarded the "Architecture rivellate" prize by the Turin Order of Architects Council. The Nicola Mosso archives are conserved in Mosso's studio-house in via Grassi and the Istituto Alvar Aalto in Pino Torinese.

# A Futurist turning

Leonardo Mosso

The Casa Cervo at Biella is the most famous still existing example of Nicola Mosso's Futurist architecture -and much more than that. The chance to construct a building on the corner of two of the city's main streets gave Mosso a fine opportunity to express his very personal, "sculptural, Neoplastic" Futurism. The work resulted in being the only sculpture-architecture in the Futurism's history. The Casa Cervo, says Enrico Crispolti -one of the first experts to "revalue" Italian Futurism after the second world war- is "an exceptionally important example of the *integration of the arts*". In reality, the management of the work, characterised in its final state by the plastic murals of Fillia, Pippo Oriani and Mino Rosso, did not originally involve other artists. Mosso, in fact, at first ignored the possibility of adding further works of art. The archive documents show how the operation was both a "Futurist" architectural work and a dynamic neoplastic "installation"; or "pictorial structure". The "integration" between the arts and the artists that Crispolti mentioned, occurs perhaps after a meeting with Marinetti -who describes Mosso as a "friend of strong soaring Santelia architectures". The Casa Cervo's notably large and colourful perspective, with its bright yellow, orange, light and dark grey, white, red and black colours, makes it resemble a large multi-coloured urban sculpture -and shows that Mosso did not anticipate the involvement of other artists at that time. The Futurist, dy-

namic, visual-plastic characteristic of the Casa Cervo appears immediately complete and definite, because of its obvious sculptural and pictorial "gestures" confirming the parameters of its poetic "Futureplastics" features, which need to be explained. Some reading keys could be: abandoning the closed, blocked, "box-shaped" parallelepiped -unfortunately so common in urban environments- and the planimetric facade, in favour of a constructive critique adopting a polymorphous, multi-coloured, three-dimensional volumetry that aims to achieve an original "angular solution"; the reciprocally unbalanced geometrical-kinetic relationship of the two facades; the elements recalling traditional architecture, such as eaves, mullions and windows, transfigured into abstract notations; the high relief treatment of the volumetric corner, with its positive and negative multi-directional "excavations and filling"; the plasticity in depth of the recessed balconies, a tradition in Biella western region; the striking red frames marking the angular *facies* of the building; and the colours of the Casa Cervo, strongly marking it pictorially and wrapping it up in a sort of Futurist chromatic symphony. Here the materials, geometries and colours are superimposed and articulated in rigorous stereometry, to express one of the happiest inventions of the 20th century's Futurist and Rationalist season. Mosso had a second opportunity to develop the concept of "synthesis of the arts", through the

Nicola Mosso, *Casa Cervo, One of the plastic murals of the balconies*, 1933-34 marble plaster in colours, Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese



Fillia, Pippo Oriani, Mino Rosso, *Sketch of a plastic mural for Casa Cervo, no. 11* 1934, polymeric life size sample, 98x74 cm Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese, Photo by Studioelle



Nicola Mosso, *Design for Casa Cervo at Biella, Perspective view*, 1934, drawing in pencil and pastels on paper, 49,5x57 cm Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese, Photo by Studioelle

resonance between the works of artists active in different fields, when reviewing his design for the Casa Cervo. Perhaps he did this after discussing it Futurist meetings -frequently held also in Biella- or with Marinetti. This was a big opportunity for Turin's futurist art movement to collaborate in creating an obvious "manifesto" of arts integration. Some of the subsequent tables in colour demonstrate the original neoplastic volumetry of the architecture and its Futurist envelope of colours; but with an important addition: the plastic murals of his artist friends Fillia, Oriani and Rosso, which appear in the walls of the galleries. Other plastic murals were proposed to be included in other works of that time by Mosso,

including the Electric Railway Station at Orbassano, and Nasi Agnelli Palace in Turin's piazza Carlina, but these were not carried out. Finally, the Casa Cervo as constructed had the same volumetry as in its original design, but the "artificial" tones and timbres of its colours were softened, reducing them to the natural, tonal chromaticism of the materials, and to the large, red horizontal and vertical corners. The plastic murals, as well as being reduced in number, were transformed, from polymetric bas-reliefs, produced from the different treatments of the skin-like layers of materials as Mosso intended, into "frescoes". The original technique for this process has been uniquely preserved in the big life-

size model in the Alvar Aalto Institute in Turin, shown here. Even when simplified and organised as frescoes to fit the geometry of the balconies, these plastic murals are really synthetic "paintings" of the city and territory of Biella, which appear along with their symbols: the factory, the ploughed fields, the mountains, flight, etc. These works echo the landscape that can be seen all around from the top floor balconies. Thus, the architectural design of the Casa Cervo, while losing its bright colours, acquired different environmental and educational values from the Po valley; allowing its frescoes to be enjoyed by residents, local citizens and foreigners alike, in a dazzling synthesis of domestic and public art.

## Threwoody for railway

Laura Castagno

Nicola Mosso is one of the architects of the Modern Movement who are highly focused on spatial relationship between flat and raised, volumetric fluency, colour game and dialectic of materials. Before being a design attitude, this is a mental attitude, which is particularly evident in how he utilises the interior space. We can find such attitude also in his mature

works, and it always arises from a spatial module building the whole volume starting from just a simple tridimensional element. In the thirties, for interiors Mosso chose to adopt pictorial arrangement solutions -that most of times he was barred from using outside- often featured by chromatic creations having Neoplastic filial relationship and where,

between floors, walls and ceilings, he introduced continuity and discontinuity elements. "Modern architect thought on the architectural problem turns back to the essential principle stating that the function must condition the shape: thus interiors take on primary importance together with the purpose for which a building is constructed", as Italo Lorio writes in the volume *Gli ambienti della nuova architettura*. The highly up-to-date Index of architectures and arrangements managed by Fillia -mentor and leader of the Turin Futurist group- for the UTET types in 1935, is the fullest expression of the Rational-Futurist climate reached in the Subalpine area, which includes the Electric Railway Station of Cossato Biellese, one of the most interesting manifestation on this matter in the design work of Nicola Mosso, alas lost to us. In 1931, Mosso created the first complete design of the furniture for the "veranda piece of furniture" of the villa of the same client, the Biella engineer Italo Migliau, Railway Managing Director. A design -which was not adopted- characterised by red and black buxus furniture which is evidence of his transition from the Déco heritage to a completely modernist language. Designed in 1932 and built in 1933, the Cossato Station was shown during the International Exhibition of Architecture of the Royal Institute of British Architects, which was held in London in 1934, and then widely treated in the Fillia volume (testimonials which were not enough to save it from being demolished during the postwar period): black & white pages reproducing its main spaces and the stairs, which, although deprived of the kaleidoscopic *palette*, restore with plenty of details the striking arrangement solutions and, in particular, the original furniture solution designed by the architect. The bar-restaurant

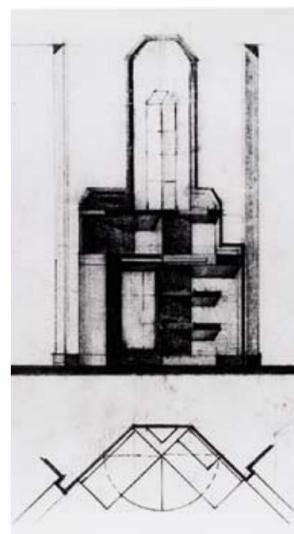
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Nicola Mosso friend of strong soaring Santelia architectures  
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Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 1941

zone -accessible from both inside the Station and the square in front of the Station- featuring a strictly Neoplastic style partitioned service glazing, almost seems to be a Mondrian piece articulated in the space, towards the waiting room: the restaurant was furnished with small square stools and round tables made of chrome aluminium, coloured Securit glass and linoleum; the waiting room was harmoniously enveloped by the notes of different colours -yellow-lemon plaster to walls, brown-crème-orange lino to floor- and furnished with austere oak benches featuring Pompeian red lino upholstered seats and masonite backs, standing out against the dazzling walls of the room and creating an intriguing contrast, and a Luminator lamp, connected to one of the benches and functioning as the centre of gravity of the spatial composition. Chromatic temperature suddenly changed in the stairs to upstairs, where Mosso cooled down it by using veined blue Italy's marble to steps and blue-black to the opposite floor, adding a touch of softness by using pink to walls. In the stationmaster's office, functioning as ticket office, in addition to two wall mounted cabinets with dark edges there were a buxus desk with metal supports and some chairs with chrome aluminium frame and fabric upholstery to seat and back. Dated July 1933, those chairs are particularly interesting: although they could not certainly ignore the metal furniture survey exhibited the same year at the Milan Triennial, they were able to face the problem of the articulation of the tubular furniture into the space with simplicity and elegance, necessary to ensure stability to the small construction. Although being totally original chairs, oppositely to almost all Italian tubular furniture proposed that faithfully followed the Stam-Breuer line or

the examples of Mies van der Rohe, they showed conceptual connections -for example in the exploiting of diagonals- with the line followed by the brothers Luckardt for some metal chairs at the beginning of the thirties. Such composition of diagonals will become a characteristic element of Mosso's architecture and furniture in the fifties, joined at and coming from his studies on geometry of the space.

Nicola Mosso, *Veranda piece of furniture for the engineer Migliau's villa in red and yellow buxus*, 1931, drawing in pencil and pastels on paper, 25x21,4 cm Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese

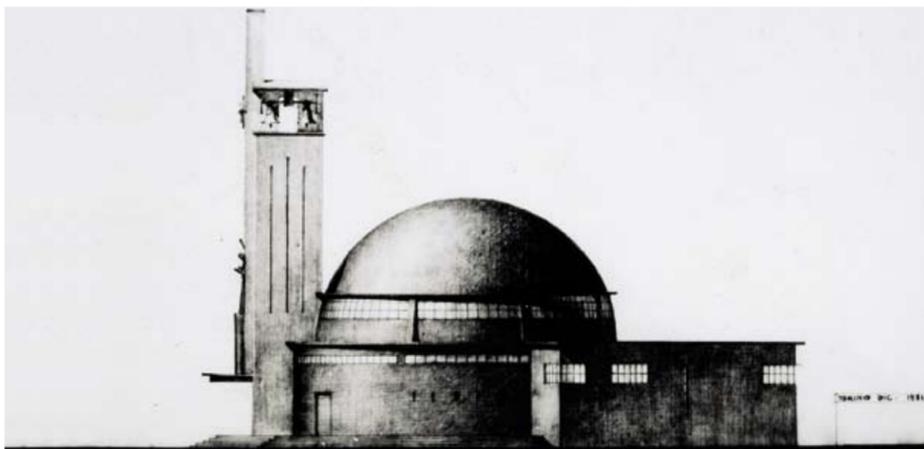
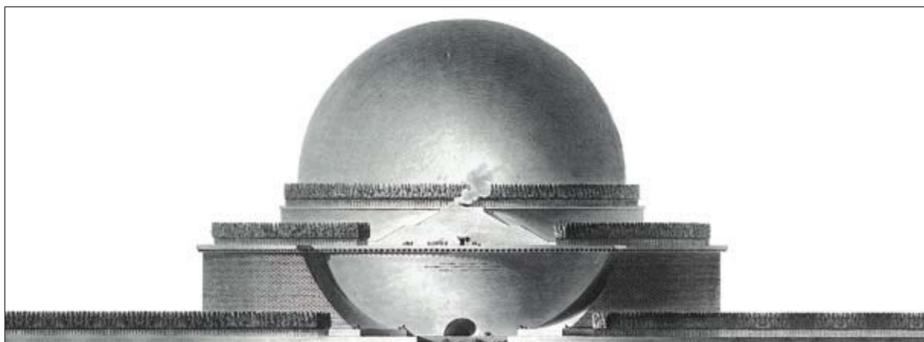


Nicola Mosso, *Electric Railway Station at Cossato Biellese*, 1933, Nicola Mosso Collection at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese

# Celestial spheres

Elisa Facchi e Udesign

In the opinion of Laura Castagno, the plate we see here of a design made by Nicola Mosso in December 1931 for the Church of Vaglio Chiavazza, just outside Biella, represents the climax of a "linguistic crisis". In the view of the scholar, who is one of his most discerning exegetists, this is a design that marks "his shift towards modernity, as it was viewed in those years", clearly indicating "the transition from an academic style, referred to in those years as rearward-looking (*passatista*) to a rational-Futurist language". We agree, and take it further. In our view, this drawing appears to levitate, considering the almost aerostatic quality of the object, not only between "pastism" and Futurism, but also between past and future. It is true that "buildings in the shape of a sphere" were envisaged in the *Manifesto of Aerial Architecture*, written by Marinetti, Mazzoni and Somenzi in 1933, once again revealing Mosso's ability to inspire, and anticipate, the *air du temps*. But, accustomed to "visual thought" and inclined to the practice of *homography* (which was considered unmentionable by some), Castagno's description of that "great and daring hemispherical dome that descends almost to the ground... marked by a crown of small horizontal openings" brings to mind an analogy with the 1784 design by Etienne-Louis Boullée for Newton's Cenotaph. So here we bring in the church in Vaglio -evocatively, we believe. Taking an indulgent view of the relationships between design culture and the imagery of science fiction, on the other hand, we also consider as judicious the linking of this sacred building in Biella with the "spherical architectures" in the sidereal spaces of Kubrick's and Lucas's films. These are visions that have also had great impact upon current masters like Rem Koolhaas and Reinier de Graaf of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: the Convention and Conference Centre in the *Waterfront City* project in Dubai, *The Sphere*, is a sensational quotation from *Death Star* in *Star Wars*... And yet this is not just some extravagant "futuristic" project. A statement from OMA claims we are not facing the "creation of the next bizarre image" but a "return to pure form", because "the sphere existed even before man". This bears out our dual interpretation of the design by Mosso, who proves to be a prophetic and cosmopolitan architect -another association is required with the spherical *Maison d'un cosmopolite* by Antoine-Laurent Vaudoyer - in a territory where the Church of Vaglio was never built, and the Station in Cossato was demolished...



from the top  
Etienne-Louis Boullée, *Design for the Cenotaph of Isaac Newton*, 1783, exterior view

Nicola Mosso, *Design for the Parish Church of St. John the Evangelist at Vaglio Chiavazza*, 1931, drawing in pencil on paper 51x52 cm, Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese

*Death Star II*, image from the film *Star Wars Episode VI The Return of the Jedi*, 1983

Office for Metropolitan Architecture/Rem Koolhaas, Reinier de Graaf, *Waterfront City*, Dubai, 2008, central island rendering of design, Courtesy of OMA, Amsterdam

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Almost circles...  
in order that their  
impossible perfection  
would have the form of  
project

Guido Strazza, *Dioce*, 1991

## Leonardo architect

Luisa Perlo

Born in Turin in 1926, and a "de-luxe" emigrant to Northern Europe regions -since his season in the Finnish studio of Alvar Aalto from 1955 to 1958, until his more recent residences as artist and teacher- as an architect Leonardo Mosso can claim he is from Biella; and not only because of his collaboration with his father Nicola. Himself the future father of "semiotic structural design" which characterised his most noteworthy work up to the *Light Structures* discussed elsewhere in these pages, Mosso in his thirties was still orientated towards "the architectonic object". Typi-

cal of his newly adopted "structural abstract language" is the light hyperbolic paraboloid-like covering of the "Benedetto Croce" Library, created for Augusto Co-lonnati at Pollone Biellese in 1958-60. His research into "natural and spatial flexibility" inherited from Aalto modulates into a minimal variation in the design for offices and warehouses for the Vittor Tua Ski company in Occhieppo Superiore, from 1963-64. The first floor, a single hall, is lit from above by "conically sectioned" skylights, while the Luserna stone cladding of the external volumes of the building makes them vibrate with light, marrying its geometrical rigour to a certain Rationalist *genius loci*.

Leonardo Mosso, *Offices and warehouses for the company Vittor Tua Ski at Occhieppo Superiore*, 1963-64, Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese



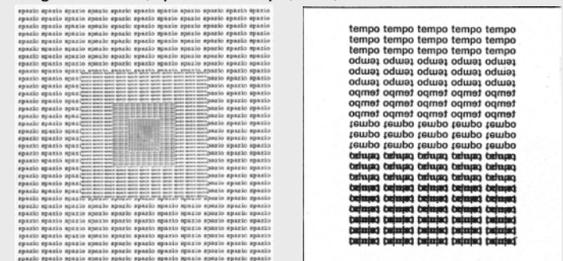
## Futurist hemilife

Juan Abelló Juampere

A typical *Futurist Life* existed and was even depicted in a film of this title made in Florence in 1916. The idea for the film was conceived by Marinetti and others and it was directed by Arnaldo Ginna. But there also exists something that I would define using a term from physics and pharmacology as "Futurist hemilife", i.e. how long a radioactive material or a substance in an organism lasts before its degradation. Among the avant-gardes Futurism has the longest hemilife; much was written about a Second Futurism and at times about a third up to the forties and the Second World War. But even in the post-war period Futurist traces were measurable in the blood of some Italian artists, some of whom are still alive. With regard to the Biella region we have already seen Nicola Mosso who was part of the

group of the Second Turin Futurism, whose leader was Filia. However, he was not alone. The painter Franco Costa, born in 1903 in the Cervo valley which crosses Biella and died in 1980, joined the Turin Futurist group of Oriani, Diulghe-roff, Allimandi, Mino Rosso, and Filia in the twenties and exhibited as a Futurist at the Biennale of Venice and at international-level shows. In the post-war period it was Ugo Nespolo, born in 1941 in Valle Mosso in the province of Biella, who subscribed to the lessons of the Futurists, not from the formal point of view -*omnia tempus habent*- but in very up-to-date ways creating a kind of "house of art" and of applied arts, strong in the *auctaritas* of Fortunato Depero. And finally Arrigo Lora Totino, born in 1928, son of a Biellese wool manufacturer and internationally famed concrete and visual poet is also mentioned as an interpreter of the "words in freedom" and "the gymnastic poet". For further proof note that two episodes in the 1916 Florentine film by Ginna were called *Declamazione futurista* (Futurist declamation) and *Ginnastica futurista* (Futurist gymnastics).

Arrigo Lora Totino, *Spazio and Tempo*, 1966, wordtuctures



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The best history of contemporary Italian architecture  
is not that of constructed buildings or of realised projects...  
Giuseppe Pagano, 1938

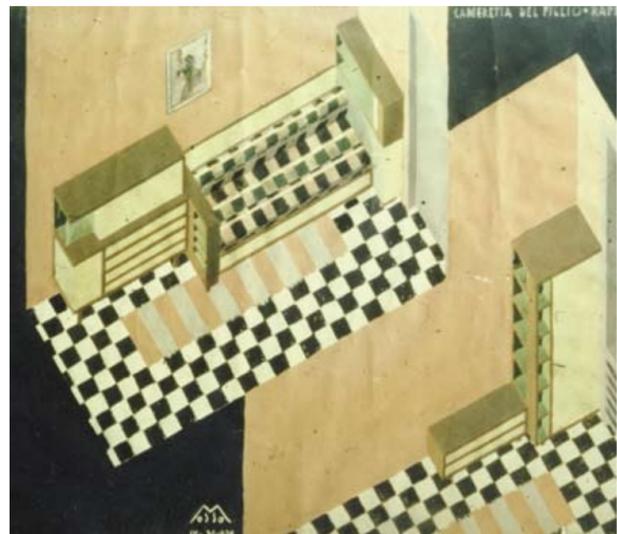
## Futurist furniture and fittings

Laura Castagno

One distinctive quality of Nicola Mosso's architectural projects, starting from his earliest work, is that he saw furniture as "structure", as a device for the division, scansion and articulation of domestic, waiting and work spaces -an approach which in his mature work became true mastery of "interior decoration", giving real sense to this overused expression. Pertinent to the topic, particularly persuasive compositional examples are to be found in three 1935-36 projects: the room designed for his son Leonardo and the living rooms of the Mosso and the Barberis houses. An antecedent can be seen in Le Corbusier's modular furniture, exhibited in the *Esprit Nouveau Pavilion* in 1925. Therefore, not individual pieces of furniture made to be placed against a wall or rigidly positioned but instead elements that can be stacked and oriented in a variety of ways, to such an extent that they we could think of them as "toy building bricks". The pieces for his son were made by the Cavagnoli company and then painted grey, dark green and olive green by expert furniture lacquerer Pietro Ciravegna. Additional notes of colour come from the orange and grey striped rug, placed on the black and white chequerboard floor (of Viennese

inspiration), an orthogonal grid which was the precursor of a "variable structure", the basis for a "standardized project" for rooms for teenagers, a definitive version of which was shown at VII *Mostra dell'Artigianato*, the fair for artisan-made furnishings held in Florence in 1937. Mosso's "Futurist" leanings and Neoplastic influences are visible in his pictorial talent, the use of painted walls, the lacquering and finishes applied to furniture, and the colours of linoleum floor coverings. For example, the red-black contrast he often used is a typical Futurist device, which can also be found in Depero's *Cabaret del Diavolo*, Pannaggi's *Casa Zampini*, many of Dulgheroff's works, and in furniture Filia designed in the early thirties. It is a culture and sense of colour which had their roots in his studies at Turin's Academy of the Fine Arts, but which are rationally magnified and neo-plastically declined in the way space is handled. The Rationalist component in his work becomes legible not only in the taut technical perfection, but also in the highlighting of constructive logic, in his projects' modularity and ability to be produced as series, as sets of options or alternatives compatible with different spaces, following Le Corbusier's master lesson.

Nicola Mosso, *Son's bedroom*, 1936, pencil and gouache sketch on paper Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese





Giuseppe Pagano's cell in the judicial prison at Brescia, 1944, from *Costruzioni Casabella*, no. 195-198, 1946

## The Pagano mystery

Valeria Garuzzo

In the twenties and thirties, the Piedmont was characterised by a lively cultural and cosmopolitan milieu. The Piedmont *intelligentia*, which had always had close ties with that of the French, was in fact intoxicated with that *Esprit Nouveau* "in the arts, literature, science and industry", stimulated by Le Corbusier homonymous magazine. However it was always open to Central European influences through its economic and industrial contact with Switzerland and Germany. The people of Turin and Biella lived strong social and political contrasts especially in the more industrialised and developed areas. An emblematic ideal place for "high" discussion was the cultural lounge of the entrepreneur from Biella, Riccardo Gualino, a haunt for artists and intellectuals. Technological innovations and Tayloristic principles of scientific management had driven Gualino in a quest for essentiality and even taste, as he himself states in *Frammenti di vita*: "Our era of steel and glass, of haste and daring, of sobriety and confrontation, may find in itself profound roots of aesthetic renewal". The Polytechnic of Turin guaranteed high level scientific technical studies that attracted students from all over Italy, especially the North East, including Giuseppe Pagano Pogatschnig, Umberto Cuzzi, Ettore Sottsass Senior, and the Swiss Alberto Sartoris, all of Central European background. In 1928, the Italian National Exposition of Turin began a new chapter for Turin: some of the best recent graduates of the Polytechnic had the chance to establish themselves for the first time in the design of the pavilion. Among these was the young Pogatschnig, Italianised as Pagano, born in Parenzo in 1896, veteran of the Great War. He revolved around editing the magazine *L'Architettura Italiana*, whose editor-in-chief Piero Betta conducted a measured debate from 1926 on modern architecture that Pagano continued in more radical tones in the magazine *La casa bella* (then become *Casabella*) and *Domus*, of which he was editor-in-chief. Appointed technical director of the Exposition, his pavilions again revealed a hybrid language: accents learnt from the German masters Behrens and Hoffmann; Déco stylisms; already "modern" locations. Thus emerged his qualities, which were quickly perceived by Gualino who commissioned him with the design of his Office Building in Turin, the first Rationalist building in Italy, characterised by "laid down windows" and "Loosian" lankness. Pagano started his career in Biella two years before, working for Gualino's brother-in-law, the industrialist Guido Alberto Rivetti, nurturing a trusting relationship with the two entrepreneurs that was to endure even after he moved to Milan in 1931. He was the curator of a number of settings at the Milan Triennials in 1931, 1933 and 1936 and at the Paris World Exposition in 1937. He was the designer for the Physics Institute of the University of Rome in 1935 and the Urban Plan of E. 42 with Piacentini; of the Green Milan Plan with Albini and Gardella in 1938 and the Main Building of the Bocconi University in 1938-41. It remains today a political "Pagano mystery", especially for his complex transition -the subject of great debate among the scholars Cesare De Seta and Riccardo Mariani- from extreme Fascism, aggressive and "moralistic", although strongly anti-rhetorical, anti-1900s and anti-Picentianian, to relations with the Resistance, which lead to his arrest and his transfer to Mauthausen where he died of bronchial pneumonia in 1945.

# Sensorial geometries

Maurice Leswa

In the preface to *Gli ambienti della nuova architettura*, edited by Filia and published by UTET in 1935, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti lists the distinctive features of the "new beauty" the Futurists proclaimed: "fervid with polychromatic flames, with mirroring walls, large windows embracing the landscape, a wealth of contrasting or matched woods fabrics metals, this beauty enters, imposes itself, caresses our lives and becomes intimate, almost carnal...". Yet the "carnal" would seem little inclined to couple with the "rational". But in another contribution to the volume cited, it is the declared "Rationalist" Italo Lorio that notices that there may be "intimate poetry even in a bare geometric setting" and that "geometrism has a charm of its own", especially when the "beauty of material" is "shown forth in all its qualities and characteristics". Rather than material, let us speak of materials, at least as concerns Nicola Mosso's work, including projects in the Biella area, and even those constructions which are apparently most Rationalist and "geometric". Like the 1936 Palazzotto Eredi Ripa, facing a park in Biella: starting from its exterior -albeit solid and squared-it declares its propensity for polychrome polymaterialism with facing made of shaped, coloured (yellow and pink) Italgres bricks and flesh-coloured granite window jambs.

But it is inside that the sample book of materials, natural and artificial, expands and exhibits high tactile and sensorial values, from the staircase parapet that is innovatively minimal in style but made of walnut wood given a traditional high-gloss finish, to then proceed between blue buxus and ivory linoleum; yellowy Tunisian marble and others veined marbles; turquoise Termolux window glass and rose-coloured crystal. Yes *madamin*, that's the list and it is *colourful*. As it is in other settings in the Biella area, Palazzo Fogliano for example, from the "hard" bathroom with black and antique rose mosaic tiles, contrasted with its brushed stainless steel inserts and wainscoting.

Nicola Mosso, *Main facade and staircase of the flat in Palazzotto Eredi Ripa at Biella*, 1936, finishing in yellow pink profiled bricks door and window frames in pink granite, on the right, detail of parapet in walnut wood, Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto Pino Torinese



# Combing Mill complex

Valeria Garuzzo

The Combing Mill building for the Rivetti woolen industry is believed to be one of the first examples in the Biella area of an industrial structure rationally designed by a professional, rather than improvised within the ambit of a family firm. "The design of these building, constructed in 1939, attempted to resolve some of the technical and aesthetic problems of the textile industry with modern criteria, especially regarding the need for flexibility; or the capacity to organise the work in such a way that it could be continually updated and extended as necessary". This was now in 1942, just after the building had been finished, *Casabella Costruzioni* emphasised its most important characteristic, its *flexibility*. Thanks to such flexibility, its large multi-purpose spaces, fallen into disuse, are likely to be effectively and easily reutilised even today. The same year, Pagano wrote that industrial architecture was considered by many to be a "beneficial plague, (...) like a very necessary but rather vulgar source of income". Expressing himself in almost Futurist terms, he said it must instead be "a work of art, an expression of life, a manifestation of the spirit...". In fact, architectural expression "can quite happily develop from the technical rationality of the machinery and human work, which is sufficient material for artistic inspiration", for which "our industrial world is not yet prepared". Constructed according to the precise, rational logic of production, the Rivetti Combing Mill is a concrete expression of this in architectural terms. It is made up of a tall five-storey building, where the production cycle is carried out "by gravity", beginning with the first processes at the top, and then working downwards towards the ground floor to finish up in the building shed for the combing process; which requires a horizontal work space. The highest building, stretching along the road, has two wings containing the

block for the stairs and lifts; while the building sheds extends nearly to the Biella-Novara railway line, along with other buildings used for logistics. The high building is built of reinforced concrete, with its floors supported by mushroom-shaped pillars, to eliminate the use of any beams which could obstruct the machinery. The horizontal windows allow uniform interior lighting. A semi-artisan style of building system was adopted for the sheds, which rises from the foundations on "hollow S.A.P. type blocks", which then abut on the supports for the head beams in a style reminiscent of Pier Luigi Nervi. The vertical windows are fitted with strong Termolux glass panes, which can be easily darkened to throw a diffused light. Again in 1942, in *Casabella Costruzioni*, Pagano had some studies published of the urban environment of a big woolen mill near the Oremo river, at the crossroads of the provincial road to Ivrea and Pollone. These projects were accompanied by a textual commentary on the new town planning laws passed during the same year, setting up the Town Plans, which were intended to protect the rural and urban environment and the landscape. According to zoning principles, the location of industrial buildings was expected to be kept away from the town. The Pagano mill buildings set out to provide an example of industrial town planning, imagined with almost Futurist enthusiasm as "an aesthetic complement to the rural green of the landscape". They were rationally formed according to an "elementary, poetic functionality, which determines the logical simplicity of honest, rural architecture". They could be varied to allow for their extension, and also for some projects for the village, planned as a group of workers dwellings of an extensive semi-rural nature", very similar to some other big 19th century complexes thought by some to



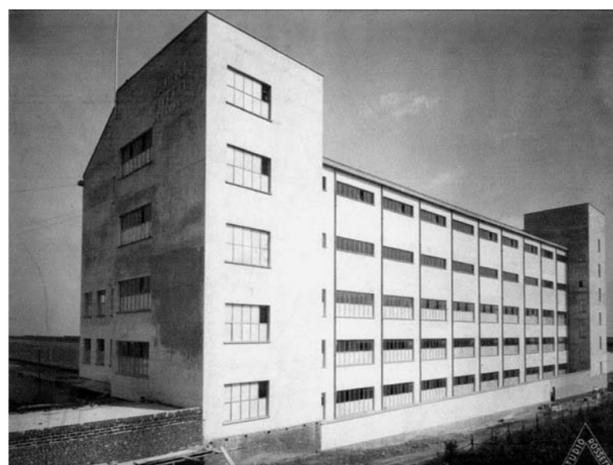
Giuseppe Pagano, *Interior staircase in the Rivetti Combing Mill at Biella*, 1939-42, Photo by Rossetti Studio, Courtesy of Impresa Ricca Clemente e Figli, Biella

have a paternalistic logic. This village near the company, with its houses organised hierarchically for workers, office-workers and managers, and with meeting places, a church, shop and boarding school set out to be an island in the greenery "far away from the town (...) in peaceful harmony with the rural landscape". With such a vademecum, Pagano reminded in-

dustrialists of the importance of undertaking rational, well-programmed and structured projects which considered the factory as an "expression of life". With references back to the example of Behrens, the architect and the technical management would have had to follow a programme which was "aesthetically unmistakable, from the factory to the sales office, from

the product to the workers' housing, from the work-bench to the advertising window display". This organisation also had to be extended to free time, and was to be considered as "a social mission", because "the enthusiasm for work depends to a large extent on the aesthetic and hygienic conditions of the environments in which people rest and enjoy themselves".

Giuseppe Pagano, *West front and interior of the Rivetti Combing Mill at Biella*, 1939-42, Photo by Rossetti Studio, Courtesy of Impresa Ricca Clemente e Figli, Biella



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Rationalism  
is only  
one part  
of Futurism  
”

Angiolo Mazzoni, *Futurismo*, 1933

# Biella's Bauhaus

Valeria Garuzzo

Biella is the home of little-known works by Giuseppe Pagano, however very typical of his entire architectural output -including his first still-eclectic creations, his Rationalist phase, and his later organicist phase- regarding every aspect of project design. Pagano came here in 1925, just after he graduated, to carry out a little work in the house of the industrialist Guido Alberto Rivetti, Gualino's brother-in-law. According to Francesco Carpano, he perhaps came here after having been recommended by a contractor, and perhaps also due to his numerous university companions from Biella, including Nicola Mosso and the Lora Totino brothers. The same year, at the villa of count Oreste Rivetti, he completed the work of another architect by applying a sober neo-renaissance style, which well demonstrates the model of "architectural honesty" pursued by the architect from Parenzo. According to Alberto Bassi and Laura Castagno, furnishings designed by Pagano for the Ski Club's premises in 1929 were an "exemplary operation, which showed how much his grasp of the design process had matured". There were strong, almost Futurist contrasts in the colours of the surfaces of the wooden furniture, with its pure geometrical shapes in black and sealing-wax red, and the red and yellow of the floor; to balance the simplicity of the furnishings. In 1930 he was commissioned by Gualino and Rivetti to carry out two projects for student accommodation in Turin and Biella. Economy, industry, education and art have always been held to be basic indivisible aspects of Biella; as today in the work of such an institution as the Cittadellarte, created at Biella by Michelangelo Pistoletto, which organises residential training courses for artists and whose aim is also similar to that of Pagano: "to operatively bring art intervention in every sector of civil society as a way to responsibly and profitably contribute towards addressing the profound social changes taking place today". The first design for the Biella Boarding School,

followed by two others, reflected Pagano's own background, with roots in the enlightenment structural Rationalism. Cesare De Seta highlighted how much Pagano had studied Choisy -leading the problems analysed by Viollet Le Duc regarding structures, means economy, and types of construction, thought out as groups of simple forms, and contemporary needs- to radical solutions. In 1932, Edoardo Persico explained in *Casabella* how Pagano had analysed the needs of collegiate life extremely clearly, by sub-dividing spaces and distinguishing entrances for the boarders, day-boarders and external students -with dormitories for younger students and single rooms for older students, as well as collective spaces and services- and by containing all the activities within a double T-shaped symmetrical plan, which was already been widely tried. Covered by a sloping roof, the Boarding School's brick facade was broken up by a long line of windows, while the stairwells were characterised by eccentric vertical windows out of line with the general plan. But Rivetti wanted something more economical. So Pagano began to draw up a second design in 1933-34, with the hindsight of his experience as a journalist, and from his study of various publications and reviews. This time, his inspiration came from the Bauhaus building by Gropius. Designed for about half the previous number of residents, each environment was arranged within a "windmill" plan, with the dormitories and double rooms in two separate wings. The services and staff facilities were in the other two wings; with all four converging at the staircase. He wanted the front of the building to have a different appearance, with plastered facades and a flat roof without any overhanging ledges, also to allow for a possible additional storey. The design was completed by an integrated study of the outside sports areas. The importance of a work's client was clear to Pagano, who wrote in *Casabella* in 1933 that "it was not only architects who guide the direction of architecture, but



Giuseppe Pagano, Pella Hall at Biella, already Boarding School for the Associazione per l'Incremento dell'Istruzione Professionale nel Biellese, 1931-35, Photo by Antonio Canevarolo

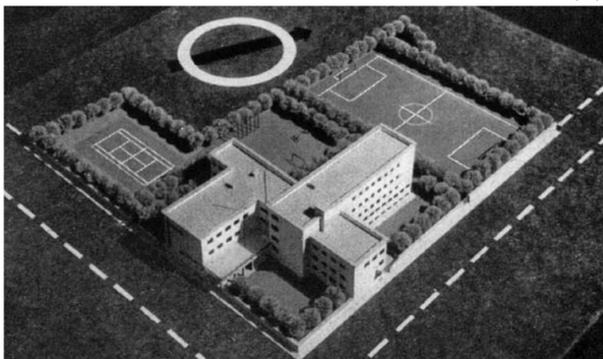
those who choose and employ them". Rivetti wanted a central covered hall as a focus for the common areas; in fact, the building is a closed court type building; with the first two floors for communal and collegiate life, connected by the large, central atrium; the dormitories and bedrooms were on the top floors. The external walls are of load-bearing brick, with the inside courtyard supported on reinforced concrete pillars. Some aspects of the building recall certain solutions by Dudok, who Pagano admired. As at Hilversum,

"clear coloured polished details in green and azure majolica" were added near some of the building windows. All the fitting components were studied in detail: doors and windows were made from wood and characterised by a folding top, except for the "iron-framed" staircase window. The balustrade for the main staircase was made from hollow iron, with little balls along the handrail in order to stop boys sliding down astride it. The basement was equipped with modern services, including a pressure air-conditioning

plant for the central hall aimed at avoiding stale air entering from surrounding rooms. At present, the Boarding School is used as offices for Biella City Council, including, among other services, the UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano (Street Furniture Office). Another of Pagano's works in Biella is the Casa Carpano, which is characterised by a distributive system and a constructive load-bearing masonry system: the plan is a L-shaped plan, with a storage courtyard. The staircase and landing are laid out diagonally according to established eclectic practice. The facade, broken up by regularly arranged windows without any decoration, is similar to Casa Boasso in Turin. This was described in 1931 in *Casabella* as being "simple and unpretentious, as minor architecture must be". The furnishing, now dismantled, for Mrs. Carpano's attic accommodation, gave Pier Enrico Seira: "an impression of sober, spartan comfort. The valuable fittings are carefully sized, with the attractive Murano glass chandelier designed by Pagano, with its cluster of lights, well displayed in a corner of the sitting room". The remaining light fittings were mass-produced: "lights of the 'Philinea' type (...) which do not require any reflecting supports. In the entrance they were mounted vertically, directly on the wall; in the bedroom, they replaced the lampshade over the bed-side table, and were fixed to the bed's headboard, and in the dining-room they were fixed lengthwise along the wooden panelling...". As often, Pagano used green tones for the doors and walls (as for the doors and ceramic tiles in the Boarding School). The maple wood table in the dining room, with a shelf in dark pear wood, now replaced by black glass, and the wooden chairs varnished black, with curved leather seat, were seen by Bassi and Castagno as an "organicist" turning point in the use of more comfortable and welcoming rounded forms. In furnishing the Casa Carpano, "this attention to greater comfort seems evident, where Pagano's final style comes to light, with his love for the materials united with expressionist type colours, and dissolves the rigid Rationalist schema in warmth". Gone were the reds and blacks of the Ski Club, now replaced with the soft "light greens" and clear maple of the wall. He wrote in 1936, the same year as the 6th Triennial: "The homes we live in define our spiritual world, our practical sense of life, and the moral worth we give our lives (...). The level of an individual's aesthetic sensitivity, and the technical capacity of a civilisation can be more easily learnt from an apartment than from an official document". He applied the same architectural principles of "honesty and morality" to his design for the Villa Caraccio, set out on a panoramic site overlooking the city of Biella: "the building, enclosed in an almost mountainous park, needed no facade or other architectural luxuries, but instead had windows with views, and a healthy respect for the trees". It was divided into functional areas: the rooms for domestic staff were on the ground floor near the entrance and kitchen, with the guest rooms in a separate area; the sitting room and dining rooms looked out over the terrace, with the bedrooms and a study/lounge on the upper floor. In the basement were the technical services and a big meeting place "for merry feasts near the wine-cellar".

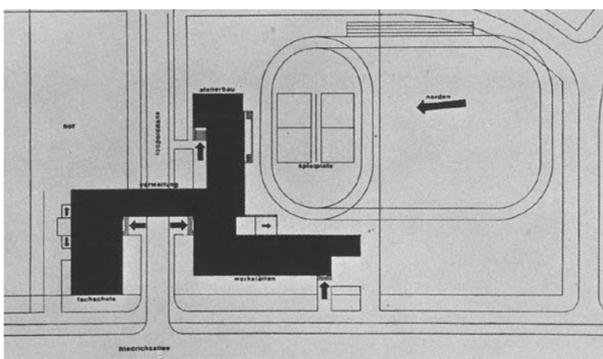
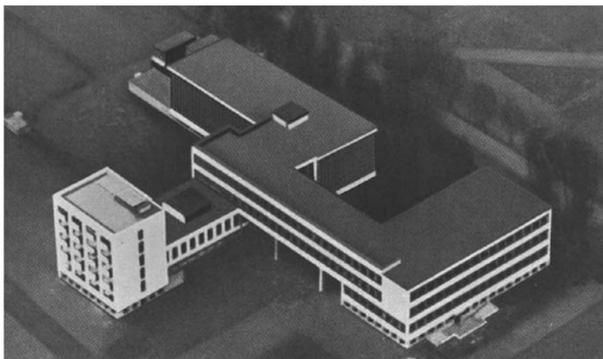
“ That inferiority complex which still weighs down industrial architecture must disappear ”

Giuseppe Pagano, *Costruzioni Casabella*, 1942



Giuseppe Pagano, Second Design for the Boarding School at Biella, 1931-35 from *Costruzioni Casabella*, no.195-198, 1946

Walter Gropius, *Bauhaus building at Weimar, Aerial and plan view*, 1926



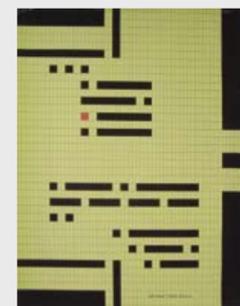
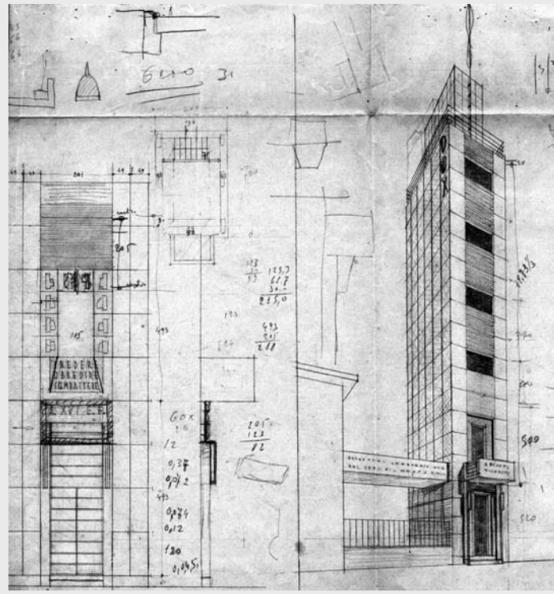
## Said the Duce

Ciccio Nero

"I understand architecture", said Mussolini, and Paolo Nicoloso has used his words as a chapter title in *Mussolini architetto. Propaganda e paesaggio urbano nell'Italia fascista* (Einaudi, Turin 2008). It starts: "In political terms, in the first fifty years of the 20th century no country invested as much in public architecture as Fascist Italy". This was also true in Biella, but of no benefit to Giuseppe Pagano, who in the thirties was such a good Fascist that he was commissioned to do work in Milan on the legendary "lair" in via Paolo da Cannobio, which became the Scuola di Mistica Fascista (School of Fascist Mystique), and on the

offices of the newspaper *Popolo d'Italia* in via Moscova, places closely linked to the Duce's career and therefore particularly "delicate". In Biella it was the architect Federico Maggia who was given fascist party commissions: a Workmen's Club, the People's Theatre, the Lictorian Tower, and nearby, the House of Fascism at Chiavazza, a Lighthouse of the Empire on Mount Mucone... Designs and constructions of merit making skilful use of materials and technique, by a 1900s "Rationalist", descendent of a family that had designed buildings in the area since the 1700s, whose archives are now at Fondazione Sella. Maggia's "Fascist" buildings are indubitably among Biella's noteworthy 20th century edifices and explain why Pagano gave a magazine article he wrote the title "Mussolini saves Italian Architecture" (*Casabella*, no. 78, June 1934).

Federico Maggia, *Design for the Lictorian Tower at Biella, Detail of the entrance and perspective view*, 1938-40, drawing in pencil on paper Maggia Fund, Fondazione Sella, Biella



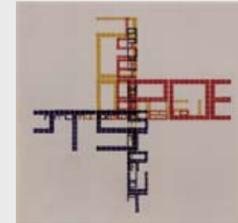
Sandro Maria Rosso, *Espressione Morse in giallo*, 1970, oil on canvas, 80x60 cm, Rosso Family Collection, Biella

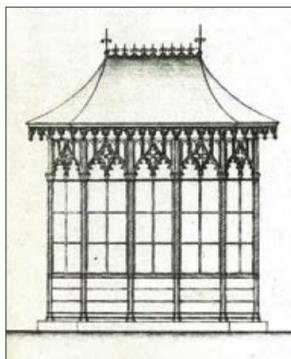
## Rational alphabets

Maurice Leswa

It would seem that the Biella area was also fertile in the 1900s for the flowering of a "poetic rationalism" or a "musical constructivism" or however you prefer to say it (after all the relationship between mathematics and music has been attested to since ancient times). Two decisive accounts of this fact have been provided by the works of Sandro Maria Rosso and Leonardo Mosso, which can be attached to the minutes of the collateral cultural programme of the XXIII World Congress of Architecture. Rosso, who was born in Vercelli in 1918 and died in Biella in 1979, is especially noted as a printer of art works, an activity he began in 1946 with his wife Maria Teresa in a shop in Biella Piazza, which over the years became a reference point at international level for research and graphic editions. His skill in these areas was recognized in 1970 with a teaching appointment (Photographics) at the Brera Academy of the Fine Arts in Milan. His own artistic works are much less well-known, so much so that a local paper, *L'Eco di Biella*, defined him as an "ascetic in a glass cage" who "only paints for himself" when reviewing his one-man show in 1968. That same year he began his suite entitled *Espressività Morse*, his masterpiece for its revelation of his extraordinary compositional talent, both architecturally (he also had an exhibition at the Zurich Polytechnic) and harmonically speaking. In fact from then to the end of his life he created a long series of abstract "musical paintings" which were also developed as graphic interpretations of classical and avant-garde musical scores as well as the electronic scores by Luigi Nono. Rosso was also a journalist, photographer, ceramicist, jewellery designer, poetry lover, patron of the arts. We have already met Leonardo Mosso, an architect and son of Nicola Mosso, about ten years younger than Rosso. He too is a multi-faceted personage -designer, sculptor, teacher, scholar, and collector of architecture and applied arts. His interests include relationships with electronic music (he has worked with composers like Ennio Zaffirì), dance, the theatre, visual poetry. The author of "theoretical alphabets" and "writings-structures", of top quality "graphic illustrations in black and colours, in the groove of the abstract sign language tradition from Bauhaus to Concretism to Op Art" as Marco Rosci wrote. He is the inventor of systems of joints and wooden and metal "variable structures" and for years has been experimenting with *Light Structures*, performing visual scores that activate new spaces, on the border between poetry and technology.

Leonardo Mosso, *Poesia struttura musica*, 1978, serial writing-structure, silkscreen and gouache on paper, 21x21 cm Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese





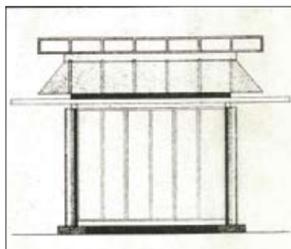
City of Turin Art Office, *Design of pavilion for newspapers*, 1879

## Building furnishings

Elisa Facchi

Stresa, Lago Maggiore, 24-26 September 1982: the *Street Furniture convention* takes place. *Street furniture policies by the local authority*, which for the first time in Italy establish the state of the art and the prospects of this old and new discipline. The convention is organised by the City of Turin, which is now right at the vanguard in this sector of public design. It is not just an occasion for theoretical *bavardage*: Enzo Biffi Gentili presents the results of the work carried out from 1978, based on a study of the historical colours of the city and a *Systematic survey of the street furniture elements*, headed by Giovanni Brino and Umberto Bertagna and others. New works projects for Turin are illustrated, such as those assigned to Achille Castiglioni and Ettore Sottsass. It is important to understand today how that "aesthetic regulatory plan" maintained that, in some way, "reaction is revolution". As Biffi Gentili points out in the convention, it is important to take inspiration on the one hand from Maurilia, the city of memories, and on the other from Fedora, the city of desire, and the quotation from Calvino in *Le città invisibili* (The invisible cities) heightens the cultural tension in attempting to provoke a short circuit between the past and the future. It is exactly that which we are striving to achieve in these pages: remembering from one side these and other illustrious "precedents" from Piedmont, and from another indicating current developments in Biella. Ettore Sottsass, then, with the just established Sottsass Associati, had designed a poly-functional kiosk -which could have been a pavilion for newspapers, a fruit or flower stand, a tram stop, a bar or a urinal- and an advertising board or column, small pieces of architecture in cement that paid homage to the 1900s Piedmont tradition of "Rationalism". Many of these pieces, which were slightly "adulterated", were then installed. Then the metallic snares of the multinationals took preference in Turin. Biella intends to revive the Sottsass design in a newer version with even greater physical and aesthetic solidity, using brickwork. As far as the Colour Plan is concerned, let us remember that its value was recognised in Stresa by international experts such as Tom Porter and Jean Philippe Lenclos (who in that same year published their books *Colour Outside*, The Architectural Press, London 1982 and *Les couleurs de la France. Maisons et paysages*, Editions du Moniteur, Paris 1982). Lenclos writes that we are dealing with a phenomenon of "clairvoyance". Already after the publication in 1980 of *Colore e Città* by Brino and Rosso, appeared the Hoepli volume *Colore-luce, applicazione, basic design* by Jorrit Tornquist, who was also active in Turin, a living example of the "latest avant-garde". However the Light Plan by Castiglioni and Cavaglia was never carried out; Biella is going to re-animate it in a different way. Finally Biella can state that "the decoration is reborn", with the arrival of "historical" figures such as Manuel Cargaleiro, as well as young designers that appear to share the same intention expressed by Paolo Portoghesi in Stresa: "it is necessary to liberate oneself from the spirits that seek... to not consider decoration".

Sottsass Associati, *Design of multi-functional kiosk for Turin*, 1980-81



# Bus stop

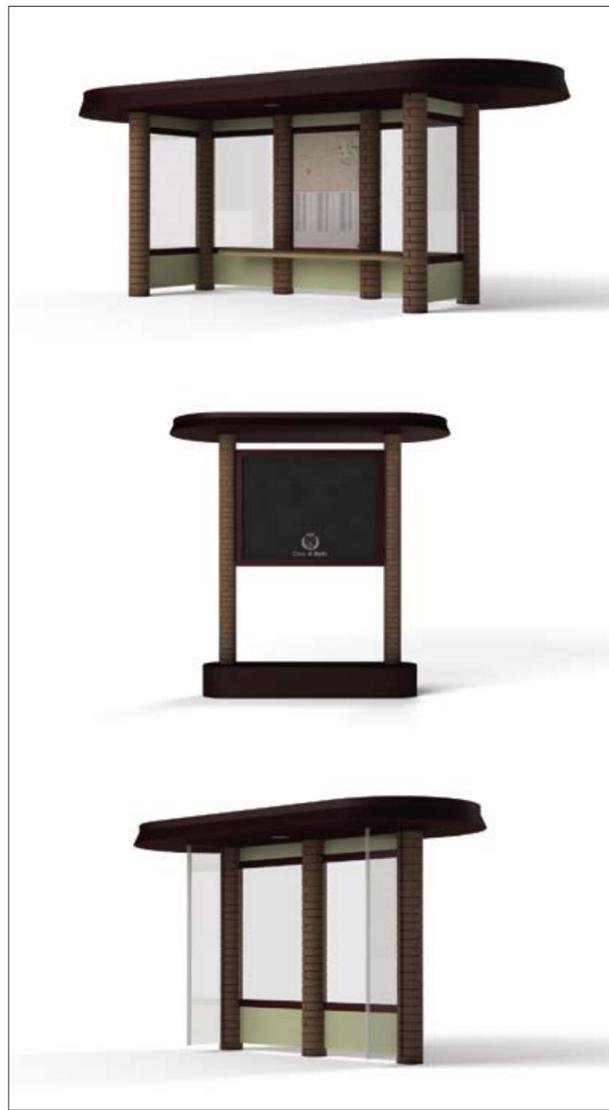
Chris Redfern / Sottsass Associati

In every corner of the globe, I think one can safely say that you can find some sort of shelter to wait for public transport. Whether it would be placed at the side of the driest African gravel tracks, on the lakeshore in a striking Norwegian landscape, relaxed under towering cypress trees, or distinguished in a big polished city streets... the situation does not change: a person must wait for his chariot to come. In fairness, it is a very civilized and peaceful act, to wait by the side of a symbol, a sign or under a structure, protected from the wind and the rain before the coming of a saviour or companion to take you away for a long or short voyage. But technology has developed. Mode and type of transportation have changed. Can we say the same for bus stops and shelters? The answer could be that they probably have changed very little with respect to them. Conveyances for public hire are as old as the first ferries, and the earliest public transport was water transport, for on land people walked or rode an animal. This form of transport is part of Greek mythology -corpses in ancient

Greece were always buried with a coin underneath their tongue to pay the ferryman Charon to take them to Hades. Some historical forms of public transport are the stagecoach, traveling a fixed route from inn to inn, and the horse-drawn boat carrying paying passengers, which was a feature of canals from their 17th century origins. The omnibus, the first organized public transit system within a city, appears to have originated in Nantes, France, in 1826 and was then introduced to London in July 1829. When I was very young, public transport was the only way of getting around. Waiting at signs or under shelters for long periods of time became a natural routine of life. A "downtime"? Maybe yes, maybe not! The true is that waiting at a stop offered the opportunity to live so many different experiences, depending on where I was or who I was with. There was always the primary goal of not waiting at stops for long periods of time, if the act of waiting for a bus could be avoided, all measures were taken to do so. This was due to many issues, one being the fact that the bus

shelters in those days were grey and quite depressing and also because there are so many decidedly more interesting things for young boys to do after school, like play football or meet girls. As far as I am concerned, what I can tell is that in many cases I was alone due to the fact I was an "out-of-towner", so it became a form of contemplation or meditation, thinking about all kinds of wonderful things. It is this type of gesture and act that played an important decision in the idea for the urban furniture for Biella, fostered by past memories. In 1998, for example, I travelled around India with my girlfriend. We spent our spare time looking and experiencing some of the most beautiful temples and pieces of architecture on this earth, obviously I was warmly advised to do so by Ettore. We were on the way to Mysore from Mangalore and decided to stop off at Belur and Hassan. I have visited many beautiful places, seen many beautiful things, but one temple in particular has left an impression with me. Looking at it, I felt something inside me. Almost like a power beyond this world, dominated by a compelling silence, a perception of sensations, so difficult to explain in words. It was the imposing temple of Halebeedu, which was constructed over a span of one hundred and ninety years and remained incomplete. The material used for the temple is steatite, also known as soap stone, which is soft and easy to carve when taken out from the earth but gets harder over prolonged exposure to the atmosphere. But the most impressive aspect of the temple was its visual weight -the visual lightness of the wall heaviness- its overhanging roofs and the detailed carved supporting columns. The deity of the temple is Shiva in the name of Hoy-saleshwara who is worshipped in the temple's two shrines even now. There are stories of the *Mahabharata* and many mythological stories carved on the outer wall. But it was the overall impression and feeling of contemplation and meditation that we wanted to try and maintain in the concept and design for the "waiting" structures and supports for information for the city of Biella. The concept was to maintain a simple, light but powerful architecture based on a symbolic roof supported by and enriched with columns coated with natural material modules, the ceramics, typical handmade works archetypical for both East and West. Such columns are formed from the harmonic repetition of a single circular brick from a type of "cotto", the columns then become the main presence and existence to which all the elements are connected, like the glass windows, maps, seating and side panelling in painted steel. The physical and aesthetic visual and solid identity of the shelters is maintained throughout the other urban structures for Biella, such as the large and small supports for information and advertisements. The small support for information is based on two simple columns and an overhanging roof which has a seating base for people to sit and shelter from the rain. The larger support also has a seating base but is characterized by its large information surface which is weighted proportionally to the base. The colours and materials represent a combination which have been chosen according to the *genius loci* of the city, to fit in with the old and new parts of Biella, and will have iconic references which can be recognised for transport purposes but not overwhelm the cityscape and the local architecture. Neither the functional iconography will disturb its so much traditional habitat...

Sottsass Associati, *Urban street furniture structures for the City of Biella*, 2008 **Terminus**, **Support for information panel**, **Bus shelter**, brickwork, metal, glass, beechwood display, lighting fixtures, Courtesy of UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano, City of Biella



## Urban seating

Juan Abelló Juàmpere

I see that the inhabitants of Biella want to restore material dignity to several elements of urban furnishings considering them to be building artefacts similar to the case described above of the structures designed by Sottsass Associati and their brick details. Well done. However aesthetics always has to be weighed against economics and not all construction materials, stones for example, are affordable today. The Piedmontese well know this and in the past they often used sur-

rogates. I am reminded of the artificial marble of Rima in the Valsesia of the Walser, a "secret" recipe that from the 1830s provided the opportunity to sell this "adulterated" product throughout Europe. It was used to decorate churches, villas, and buildings in the East and North as far away as Russia and Scandinavia and in the South and West as far as the Maghreb and even here in Spain. Even in the thirties this offence was still being committed. As a "true expert" in the field I well know that the Renzi company's "latrines" (mentioned above) were in artificial stone (fake Breno stone and false granite with marble granulate and cement at times coloured with oxide paste). And I have learned, and am pleased with the retaliation, that now it is Biella that is importing benches from the Escofet company in Catalonia, where I am writing from. Escofet worked for Gaudí and its benches are in cement disguised as granite like the "philosophical", super-serious paral-

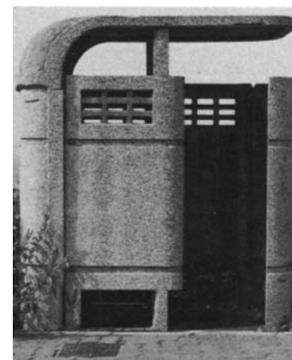
lelepipeds *Socrates* by Jordi Garcés and Enric Soria, past winners of the FAD award in Architecture as well as that of the City of Barcellona for the renovation of the Picasso Museum, which according to the critics is characterized by "secreto y elegancia". Another analogy is the clever "urban seating" *Sit* by Diego Fortunato, an Italian *émigré*. His origins are visible in the "Italian comedy" spirit of his projects which seduce with a languid, soft appearance but when you sit or lie down you realize how hard it is.

*Seat from the Sit range in the belvedere in corso Carducci at Biella*, 2008 soft acid treated and waterproofed cast stone, **Diego Fortunato** for Escofet 1886 SA, Barcelona, Photo by Antonio Canevarolo

## Strategic retreat

Maurice Leswa

The public urinals remaining in Italy today, with their martial air, where manufactured in the thirties by the renowned Società Anonima U. Renzi of Turin and are still in use here and there in a few public gardens and along wide avenues. The martial air is especially apparent in a model that resembles a sentry box in oxidized conglomerate which has always had a certain fascination for me with its highly formal value. The latrine is of such high quality that it made me suspect that it is the unsigned work of a master. To keep the record straight it must be stated that the insinuation about it is said by some to be the work of Giuseppe Pagano (the attribution is Giorgio De Ferrari's, originating from an oral testimony of Augusto Cavallari Murat and found in the book *Giuseppe Pagano* by A. Bassi and L. Castagno, Laterza, Bari 1994). Moreover this sublime Renzi urinal absolutely must be included among the major results of the research on the relationship between architecture and sensoriality and more specifically the smells, scents, body odour or what have you that have recently found an important reference text in our country (A. Barbara, A. Periliss, *Architetture invisibili. L'esperienza dei luoghi attraverso gli odori*, Skira, Milano 2006). In the synopsis of this interesting volume it says that "the renewed interest in odours originates in the idea that the future will have ever less exciting room formally but without a doubt much more dedicated



Società Anonima U. Renzi, *Turin, Urinal* 1930s, may be attributed to Giuseppe Pagano, rare "half size" model in the style of a military sentry box in concrete and cement

to perceptual and emotional involvement. The sense of smell is perhaps the least known and thus the most innovative of the senses". And the *petite madeleine* in this aromatic future, which will revive a restless past at least for those who are getting on a bit, will be one of the surviving and rare Renzi "pagans". This is because as the poet says, "The rose in bloom / was never so lovely / as when in the swollen urinal / at dawn loved the sleepless sentinel!" (Sandro Penna, *Una strana gioia di vivere*, 1949-55).

“ **Just observe: today's architecture has no smell** ”  
Gonçalo Byrne, D, 2008



Carlotta Petracci, *Rienzi*, 2008, photo taken near a public urinal by Renzi 1930s corso Massimo d'Azeglio in front of Valentino Park in Turin

“ **To the fresh urinal at the station I descended from the fervent hill...** ”  
Sandro Penna, *Appendice alle poesie*, 1927-38



# The subalpine rainbow

Enzo Biffi Gentili

"Yellow Turin seems to have become a kind of stigmata for the metropolis. In reality, however, through fog and crises, the yellow fades into grey and the colour withers into greyness. An image that reflects a frame of mind, as Turin today is, in too many respects, a shapeless city, amorphous, devoid of reference points, almost without personality, as though it cowers from recognition, a city that welcomes crisis as a mask and refuses to translate its passions and contradictions into landmarks". This is an old piece from Ezio Mauro, currently the editor-in-chief of a large Italian newspaper *-la Repubblica-* capturing the context in which the new Colour City Plan was developed (E. Mauro, "Ridiamo a Torino i suoi 22 colori", in *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, 23 December 1978). The Plan was promoted by myself and managed by Giovanni Brino, lecturer at the local Polytechnic, who commemorates it better than any else in the article to the side. Allow me, then, just a few words to underline that that Plan, both "reactionary" and "revolutionary", aimed at intervening in both the dignified city centre and the suburbs of a subalpine capital afflicted with a sad monochromy (for this latter aspect, I also commissioned the services of my Austrian friend the artist Jorrit Tornquist). The experimental and "heroic" phase of the Plan we nurtured reached its

conclusion in 1983, followed by the "standardisation" and emigration of its forerunners. Giovanni Brino has subsequently designed colouring and street furniture projects of historical and modern areas in other locations throughout the Piedmont, as well as Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Abruzzi, Lazio, Calabria, Sardinia, France and Switzerland. He has also become a consultant for the City of Marseille for the restoration of the facades, and the Ministry of French Culture for the restorations of Villa Medici in Rome. He has received two awards in the Farbe-Design International competition in Stuttgart (one in 1984 for the Turin Colour Plan and the other in 1987 for the restoration of the Artists' Walk in Albissola Marina). In 1997 he was awarded the Prize of the City of Padua as project leader in the competition for the colour plan of the city. Jorrit Tornquist in turn has started an operational *Grand Tour* with extraordinary results, the most striking of which is the chromatic project carried out on the ASM Brescia waste to energy plant in 1997-98, an unforgettable landmark for anyone travelling along the Milan-Venice motorway. As for my achievements, my most recent return to the scene of the crime is here in Piedmont, in Biella. Appointed in 2006-07 as a consultant for street furniture, I have found myself "in the ring with the shadow

of the past" with regards to colours. In fact, a "protocol" had been established and applied indiscriminately all over to historical buildings and settings, which had derived from the research carried out by Brino in Turin as well as his subsequent academic activities over the years, even though the debt owed has not always been declared. And yet we never thought of transferring historical chromatic ranges, both "natural" and "discreet" due to the characteristics of the materials, to new buildings and to "marginal" areas. The *ton sur ton* of the suburbs therefore becomes a "dishonest dissimulation". In the meanwhile, Brino and Tornquist, at the time, in Turin went through the theme by reviewing the lesson of Bruno Taut -with his "battle for colour" in Magdeburg and the workers district of Berlin. Taut had already become a strong reference point under Fascism, both for architects like Enrico A. Grifflini and critics like Edoardo Persico, as his architectural work was seen "as the opposition of the lower classes to bourgeois taste" (E. Persico, "Gli architetti italiani", in *L'Italia letteraria*, 6 August 1933). Other auctoritates of "modern" colour schemes for buildings can also be found in the period between the two world wars, in Biella itself. Documentary evidence, never more persuasively produced until now, is contained in the article *A Futurist turning* by Leonardo Mosso on page 2. However the first draft of the project for the Casa Cervo by Nicola Mosso at Biella is not the only rediscovery of a "constructive" function of colour in the Italian architecture of the thirties. Let us re-read, for example, what Giuseppe Pagano wrote about a masterly work of the time: "The colour element -an element that is to architecture what orchestration is to music- has returned here to claim its rightful place and true value. For a long time now, its use had been forgotten, biased and neglected, so much so that today its resurgence causes the very same amazement as something unexpected or encountered for the first time" (G. Pagano, "I benefici dell'architettura moderna (A proposito di una nuova costruzione a Como)", in *La casa bella*, no. 27, March 1930). This is the Novocomum by Giuseppe Terragni, another high-rise complex in Como, characterised by the clear hazelnut colour of the various vertical sections, the orange of the horizontal levels of the slabs, overhangs, balconies and recesses, the azure of the iron balustrade, finished in a polymateric polychromy, later *effacée* in the fifties with a vulgar overcoat of stone checkers... In the light of these references, the first building re-colouring projects for Biella were decided, starting from the "Gromo Cridis" school which was entrusted to a renowned fashion designer, Nino Cerruti. This was not, however, a "trendy" appointment. It was a choice consistent with both the background in scientific research into colours and the background in textile art, whose main exponent in the 1800s was Michel-Eugène Chevreul, chemist and managing director of Manufacture des Gobelins, inventor of "simultaneous contrasts" for dyeing textiles, whose research became fundamental -also thanks to its practical translation in the *Repertoire Chromatique* of his pupil Charles Lacouture- for the history of the contemporary art *tout court*. Cerruti proposed two solutions for breaking from the greyish "concrete building box" of the school: the first showed fascinating similarities to the *palette* of Taut; the second, covered here, and the one that was adopted, with the *palette* of Nicola Mosso in the Casa Cervo. Let us turn now to Como of Terragni, the town that was to see a House of Fascism, by the same architect, that the BBPR regarded as the apex and signature work of a quest for new relationships between ethics and aesthetics in one of their splendid historical review of "artistic forms" (Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti and Rogers, *Stile*, supplement to *Domus* no. 108, December 1936). The first project for the Biella Stadium was also of the "Fascist" style, currently under restoration. In the original design, shown to the side, there are, in fact, leaf hints at abstract lictor's fasces, all traces of which vanished but that were restored by us, democratically, drawing instructions once again from the inexhaustible Futurist urn on the aesthetic and "musical" use of the "Tricolour" (one of illustrious founders of the movement was also involved, Giacomo Balla, born himself in Piedmont, in Turin, a biographical fact that has been forgotten by many: even Balla, therefore, supports us in saying that Biella is *bella*).

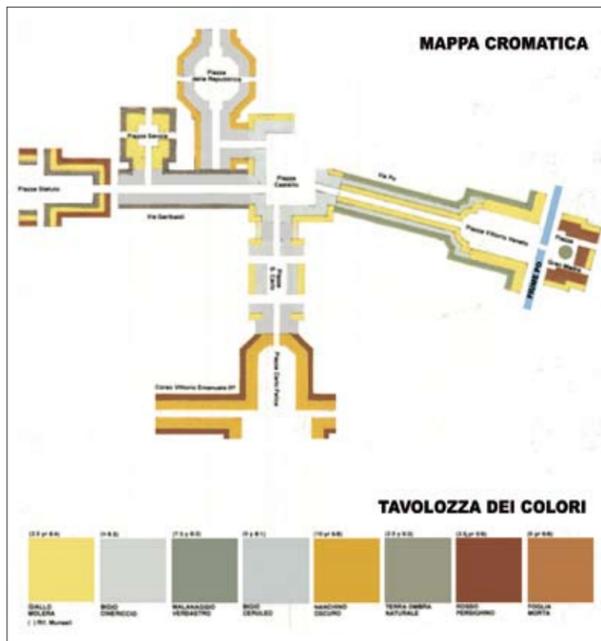
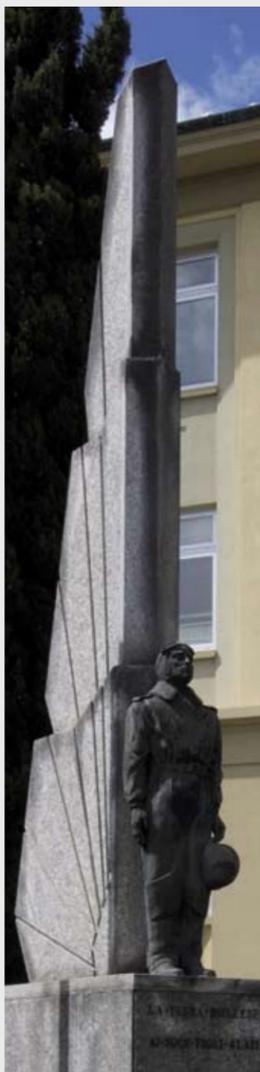
## Chi vale vola

Elica

A bus stop sign in Biella has been placed at the edge of a lawn on which a memorial to the Italian Air Force stands. The majority of the bus passengers, students at a nearby school, queue in all weather conditions, trampling the grass. And what about putting a couple of benches there? The choice not to originate in the setting. The Biellese memorial, a bit late, is a quote from the one to Francesco Baracca, a World War I flying ace, for the square in Lugo di Romagna, created by the great Fascist sculptor from Faenza, Domenico Rambelli. It was begun in 1927 and finally installed in 1936. Duke Amedeo of Aosta, the hero of Amba Alagi, was present at the inauguration ceremony. He too was a war pilot noted for sorties in Africa that won him the silver medal of military valour and in fact, the Biellese square is named for him. *Tout se tient* and so *Airline*, a finned aluminium stool is chosen. The footstool has a honey-combed internal structure made by the hundred-year-old German firm Runge and is dedicated to the pioneers of flight. It is marketed with the slogan: "Crazy pilots love to sit on it". In truth this rhetorical-ironic project is one of those cases in which "the literal or almost literal quotation vanishes in the creation of new poetry", according to Giorgio Barberi Squarotti.

Giovanni Masoero, *Monument to the Italian Airforce in piazza Amedeo d'Aosta at Biella, "Biella's Land to her Flying Sons"*, 1967  
Associazione Nazionale Arma Aeronautica, Photo by Antonia Canevarolo

Runge Design, *Airline*, steel bench in the form of an aeroplane wing for the bus-stop at the Italian Airforce Monument at Biella



Giovanni Brino, *Synthetic plate from the Turin Colour Plan*, 1978, photo-engraving coloured with pastels, 29,7x42 cm

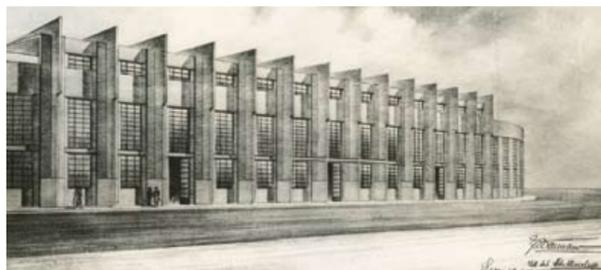
Nicola Mosso, *Design for Casa Cervo at Biella, Perspective view, Tab. no. 44*, 1933 drawing in pastels and gouache on paper, 49,5x57 cm, Nicola Mosso Collection at Istituto Alvar Aalto, Pino Torinese, Photo by Studioelle



Nino Cerruti, *Model of colouring for "Gromo Cridis" primary school at Biella* 2007, rendering by Alberto Rainero, Courtesy of UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano, City of Biella



Aldo Vannacci, Aldo Macaluso, Mario Mencarelli, *Lamarmora Stadium perspective view* 1935, drawing in pencil and charcoal on paper, Courtesy of Technical Office, City of Biella



Enzo Biffi Gentili and City of Biella Street Furniture Office, *Model of colouring for the Pozzo-Lamarmora Stadium at Biella*, 2008, rendering by Alberto Rainero Courtesy of UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano, City of Biella

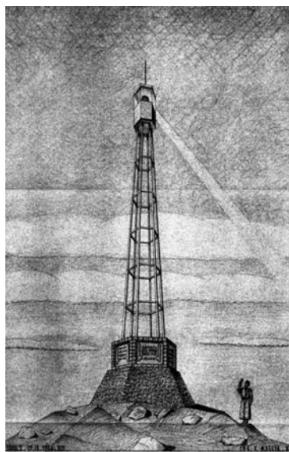


Colore e città. Il piano del colore di Torino 1800-1850 cover of the volume by Giovanni Brino and Franco Rosso Assessorato alla Edilizia del Comune di Torino and Idea Editions, Turin 1980

## Paint it Turin

Giovanni Brino

The Turin Colour Plan, promoted in 1978 by the then Town Councillor for Building, Enzo Biffi Gentili, and directed by the writer, was the first recorded example in the world of reconstructing the historical colours of a city from precise documentation found in the archives and other iconographic and literary sources. Documents proving the existence of a colour plan drawn up between 1800 and 1850 by the Consiglio degli Edili (Building Council) -the body in charge of the city's urban planning- were in fact discovered in the City of Turin's Historical Archive. This plan not only established the colours of the main streets, characterised by repetitive facades, but also of secondary streets, and of single facades, according to precise architectural and environmental criteria. The colours prescribed in the plan's "palette": including *Molassa* yellow, *Nanchino* (Nanking yellow), *Persichino* (Peach blossom), *Foglia morta* (Dead leave) etc. really imitated stone and brick materials. These colours were reproduced and codified in the courtyard wall of the City Hall, according to the management criteria of the new industrial culture, taken over from the Savoy military. Subsequent research has demonstrated that the 19th century colour plan had planted roots in the Turin Baroque. This was envisaged by its founder Vittorio Amedeo II as a *multi-mass media* (according to the brilliant theory of Jeffrey Symcox), in which architecture, town planning, colour, light and even music were integrated to become the *Theatrum Sabaudiae*, a place of religious, military and political demonstrations promoted from the Sun King emulor. The colours of Baroque Turin, evoked by the iconography of the period, were however limited by wars and plagues to the main environments of the court; such as piazza Castello, piazza San Carlo, via and piazza Palazzo di Città, piazza d'Italia, etc. The 19th century colour plan adopted the colours of the Baroque epoch as its own, and extended them, with suitable variations, to other environments that had been decorated in the meantime, such as via Po, or created *ex novo*, such as piazza Vittorio, piazza Gran Madre, piazza Carlo Felice, piazza Statuto etc. The 1978 Colour Plan, which is still in force thirty years after its birth, has re-established the historical colours of Turin's main streets and squares, as can be verified by walking from piazza Castello through piazza San Carlo to Porta Nuova; along via Po to piazza Vittorio Veneto; along via Garibaldi to piazza Statuto, and through via and piazza Palazzo di Città, and via Milano, towards piazza della Repubblica. At the same time, the Plan has led to the conservationist restoration of all the historic facades, including those in the Art Nouveau and Modern Movement styles, to safeguard the connecting fabric of this multi-coloured 19th century Baroque city.



Federico Maggia, *Design for erection of the Empire Lighthouse on Mount Mucrone, Perspective view*, 1936 drawing in pencil on paper, Maggia Fund Fondazione Sella, Biella

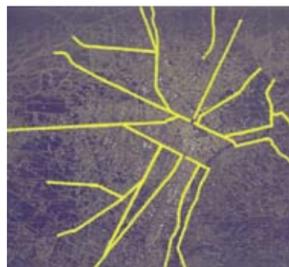
## Light plan Light plane

Archi-Group U.P.S.

"My dream is nourished by abandonment / and regret. I do not love roses / I have not picked myself. I do not love things / that might have been / but were not... I see houses...". These early 20th century lines are taken from *Cocotte* by the Piedmontese poet Guido Gozzano, which are a fitting epigraph to this article, written some years ago by a group of Turin architects and republished here for its topicality. (L.P.)

"Those who arrive by plane in Turin at night enjoy a unique sight: the colours of the lights portray the city like a vast and extended work of Land Art. A long, broad, radiant sign stretches between the plain and hills. Like a gigantic cobweb, the great white avenues, with their 'cold' light, stand out against the 'warm' yellow colours of the residential areas, while the coloured lights are those of artists' works dotted around in the various squares and on the Mole Antonelliana. Since 1982, the innovative general lighting project, which was the work of the architects Achille Castiglioni and Gianfranco Cavaglia, has been a hallmark of a change in the look and life of night-time Turin for the public administration and the people alike. Once the plane lands, the traveller is guided by the system of coloured lights and is led safely to the city centre. During the day, he or she is guided by the support poles along the avenues, which are coloured according to the direction. Night-wandering tourists can roam the city safely on the sidewalks which, unlike in other cities, are lit even more brightly than the avenues ('cars already have headlights', as Ettore Sottsass pointed out). The late Achille Castiglioni was one of the most brilliant creators of lighting but, as Cavaglia points out, 'Castiglioni's method was unforgiving' so Turin started out from scratch and redesigned its lighting, in the sense that it chose the colour of light, since the subject is light and not the lighting unit. The result was that the city now has rational and coordinating illumination, which has also made the most of its historic systems, placing the colour of light and the efficiency of technology at the heart of a plan created for those who visit the city and those who live in it every day. According to Enzo Biffi Gentili, who at the time was the Deputy Mayor and the Councillor of the City of Turin who promoted the project, together with the Street Furniture and Colour Plans, this lighting project, which was tied to the electricity company budget, 'was to be an immense plan, and a massive intervention by the administration', but one that could not or would not metabolise its 'systematic complexity', and it was not implemented". (from "Fantaguida di Torino. Ufficio Progetti Smarriti", in *Torinosette*, supplemento to *La Stampa*, 18 February 2005).

Achille Castiglioni, Gianfranco Cavaglia *Design for general lighting of the City of Turin*, 1981, rendering aerial night-time view



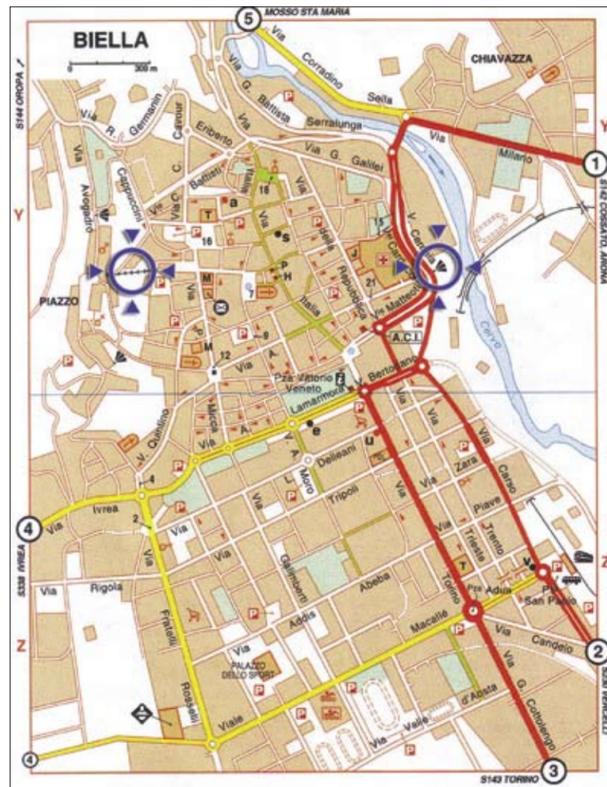
# Illuminating signs

Enzo Biffi Gentili

One wonders if Achille Castiglioni had in mind some fascinating historical precedent, and recalled the dream of our greatest historic avant-garde movement, when he was drawing up the guidelines for the City Lighting Plan for Turin (see the story to the side, written by Archi-Group Ufficio Progetti Smarriti). In 1933, the Futurists Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Angiolo Mazzoni and Mino Somenzi drafted their *Manifesto of Aerial Architecture*. It is much less known than the one on Aero painting, which had appeared in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* of Turin on 22 September 1929 in an article entitled *Prospettive di volo*. In the 1933 manifesto they prophesied that "the single city built along continuous lines will show the sky its parallelism of deep blue gold orange air-roads and dazzling aero-channels...". Achille may well have been aware of the manifesto, for according to Vittorio Gregotti, he and his brother Pier Giacomo had a "relish for quotation". Indeed, to give an emblematic example, "no Italian object has managed more than the Sanluca armchair of 1960 to capture with such wisdom the Futurist experience, and that of Boccioni in particular, in such an unusual manner. No one has managed to make such a clear link between the specific nature of his own cultural roots and an approach of absolute modernity." And this was always an approach that "tended towards the grasping of a fantastical image" (V. Gregotti, *Il disegno del prodotto industriale. Italia 1860-1980*, Electa, Milan 1982). This intermittent avant-garde-style memory had Futurist, but also Dadaist echoes, even though they were ironically extolled and aesthetically enhanced, as I attempted to show in my book *La sindrome di Leonardo. Artedesign in Italia 1940-1975* (Allemandi, Turin 1995). And yet these echoes should not make us consider as "irrational" Castiglioni's general approach, and that of Achille in particular, to the Light Plan of Turin, which was studied together with Gianfranco Cavaglia. But this is what happened when the aforementioned Futurist manifesto was assessed: "With the *Manifesto of Aerial Architecture*, Marinetti made a clear break between the Futurist ideal and the architecture that was so important for him, be it referred to as rational or functional... Our architecture... is strongly bound to the principle that all aesthetic expression derives directly from the practical necessities that give rise to it... But Futurism starts out from the opposite standpoint: its first thought is a decorative thou-

ght, and indeed even theatrical and spectacular (...). We lean towards engineering, Futurism towards literature..." (P.M. Bardi, "A Proposito del Manifesto dell'architettura aerea", in *Quadrante* no. 9, 1933). A man of letters by training, I have a legitimate concern, and I must therefore try to explain the reasoning behind my preliminary work on drafting the Light Plan for Biella. This is a city that -*mea culpa*- was unknown to me, and that, before staying there, I got to know by using an instrument that is fundamental for every tourist, and indeed for every professional: a map. Well, in that little map I immediately noticed the central symbol of a Funicular Railway and those, radiating out, of some belvederes. These were the first places I went to visit. With a strange, alienating effect, the significance of these focal points in the city was actually far greater in the cartographic representation than in reality, and indeed they were hard to find -and, especially at night, hardly perceptible or even enjoyable when I reached them. I was thus attracted by the idea of a reverse process- "rendering" the virtual world in the real by means of lighting, and thus putting into practice at least one of Castiglioni's original intuitions. But at the same time, I tried to avoid criticisms like that of Pier Maria Bardi against the Futurist manifesto, in which he claimed that "allegory is imposed upon functionality". Even though, for example, some might consider as an "allegory" my first project, which was for the 19th century cable car railway that connects "Biella Piano", the lower part of the city, to "Biella Piazzozzo", the upper part. This was drawn up with the municipality's Street Furniture Office (UAU) and involved picking out in light blue the metal inspection steps between the rails up and down the hill. It is true that a "stairway of light" might symbolise any sort of Ascension, in any civilisation, ranging from the Judaic-Christian Jacob's Ladder in *Genesis* 28, 11 ff, to the Freemason's mystic Ladder of Kadosch, from the 30th Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Masonry (I find this allusion to the Great Architect of the Universe inevitable when faced with the celebration of a world Congress of colleagues...). Even so, our stairway of light was not designed so much as a symbol but as an iconic and indicant sign. It is part of a new urban image and communication, and a highly visible landmark -and one that can be seen not just from an aeroplane- as a result of the very special and dynamic orographic cha-

acteristics of Biella and its conurbation. And indeed it might be called a work of "public applied art", for it is a sort of rectified ready-made but one that, again taking from the teachings of Castiglioni, is "aestheticised" and not "anaesthetised", as would be in the case of the ultimate "anartist", Marcel Duchamp, or again, as one of the rare examples in Italy of urban and territorial graphics. But there is more, for we read that Castiglioni and Cavaglia's Plan also referred to the "colour of the light" and to the "efficiency of the technology", and now, just over twenty years later, this ambition has found new and reliable solutions, such as in the use of LEDs. To ensure energy savings, ease of maintenance, and durability, Philips Color Kinetics iColor Accent strip lights will therefore be inserted into the risers of the steps going up the cable railway track. These are based on the spectacular colour-changing technology of RGB LED diodes. So, even though our "sacred staircase" will almost always appear in "celestial" light, it will also be able to provide special effects for exceptional events. To conclude, here we find ourselves entering the critical area of what is termed "urban design", a discipline that, after its exciting debut, has become rather disreputable in the eyes of many. When it focuses on public lighting, it is often accused of tending towards mere decoration or even towards the carnivalesque. This is a real risk, which needs to be monitored, but also accepted. Because, even though I have never adhered to "post-modernism", I find that, in this often trivial world, the hypothesis put forward by Robert Venturi, one of post-modernism's highest exponents and theoreticians, is very convincing: "it is perhaps from the everyday landscape, vulgar and disdained, that we can draw the complex and contradictory order that is valid for our architecture as an urbanistic whole". In the opinion of Manolo De Giorgi, Venturi was "alone, or solitary, in culturally tackling the dilemma of the aesthetics of public spaces". And today so many of us say that the question of "taste" is agonising...



Funicular Railway and belvedere in corso Carducci shown on the map of Biella original taken from Guida Michelin, Edizioni per viaggiare, 2004

“  
**Colour is born wherever light continues to desperately resist the ruling darkness**  
 ”  
 Simon Vestdijk

## Urban photo-writings

Enzo Biffi Gentili

Worrying about good taste: I've already confronted this problem on other occasions (*Provare gusto*, in the book *Antiaestetica*, Edizioni La Baitta, Matera 2001). I made a friendly criticism of the author, Franco Garofolo, for reconstructing an identikit of the person of taste, who must be "full of discretion", merely because, according to Garofolo, good taste is "inexpressive", "measured", "moderate", and refuses "bright colours", high tones and strong lights. In other words, good taste would be *eleganza*; but certainly only a handicapped type of elegance under such restrictions. As was too often the case in Turin, it was certainly discrete and silent: the elegance of the *madam*: the young lady in her *beige* and *grey twin-set*, at most posing elegantly in her *ton-sur-ton* style under the *abat-jours* lamps of her sitting-room. But this was not the kind of woman who liked to frequent a person such as Carlo Mollino: he preferred a more scantily-clad kind of woman. I'm touching now on what is relevant in this context to the culture of the project -and thinking beyond Mollino to such important "excessive" subalpine architecture as that of Paolo Soleri and Toni Cordero. We have to recognise that their singular, splendid taste blossomed in that *vague terrain*, very difficult for many to explore, that exists between *good* and *bad taste*. But the same Garofolo ended up admitting that "a science of taste is impossible, since only examples of taste exist" (for instance, in plain words that scarcely do us justice, we may say that "Not everyone likes peppermint" as the Mayor of Turin, Sergio Chiamparino, said to justify some of his disputed changes to the urban furniture). To return to Biella, I have already begun on the same page to develop the subject of certain public lighting projects, envisaged as exercises in reading and re-writing characteristic phrases, which stretch from the Funicular Railway to the belvedere: *urban streetsign photo-writings*. In my opinion, this illuminated handwriting had to begin at the same elementary, traditional learning stage as is set out in educational training manuals for handwriting; that is, from "acquiring the ability to trace downward strokes and fine lines" (C. Pa-

scoletti, *Imparare a scrivere. Volume 2*, Vannini, Gussago 2005). So, we began to put "downward strokes" in the rungs of the Funicular Railway's fire-escape, and to insert other vertical characters in the elements of street furniture alongside Biella's belvederes: on the viale del Carso, we put posts by Jean-Michel Wilmette for iGuzzini; on corso Carducci, and poles

by Enrico Marforio for Ghisamestieri, with multi-coloured decorative lights. By so choosing "bright colours", the vexed question of "taste" was again raised: one can minimise it by adopting as far as possible an objective "impersonal" criterion. In this way, *Red, Green, and Blue*: the "primary" colours of our electronic era, shine in the Biella night.

Enzo Biffi Gentili and City of Biella Street Furniture Office, *Plan for piling with decorative lights in primary RGB colours for the belvedere in corso Carducci at Biella*, 2007, posts *Arona* by Enrico Marforio for Ghisamestieri, below Photo by Antonio Mantovan for *Il Biellese*, bottom Photo by Antonio Canevarolo

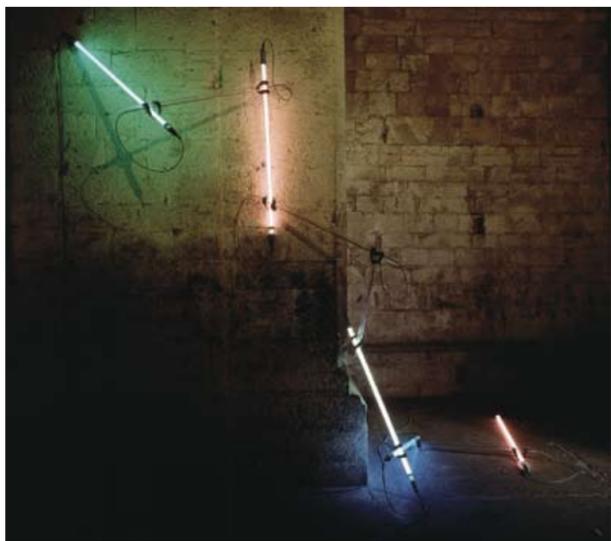


# Light pencil Light saber

## Uwdesign

It's no mystery that architecture also nourishes itself on "quotes" and "borrowing", nor that its close connection with visions of the future, amplified by futuristic and high tech currents, are often, in their pop and visionary versions, knowingly taken from science fiction. The city of Biella's lighting projects, created from the concept of Enzo Biffi Gentili, consultant for the local Street Furniture Office, can inspire many associations with the *imagerie* of science fiction, above all for those installations which can be considered as applied public art, even if they have often been created from mass-produced lighting units. Probably, the Turin origins of MIAAO's artistic director have inspired his predilections for what he has described as *urban identification "photo-writings"*. Nevertheless it would be superficial and mistaken to assume that the *Luci d'artista* (Artists' Lights) or the numerous neon environments from Mario Merz have influenced him much. The probable or certain sources are more "disciplinary". From the theoretical and applied research points of view, a "card indexing" of neon advertising signs, promoted by himself, inspired by an influential text, little-known in Italy - such as that of Rudi Stern's *Let There Be Neon* (Harry N. Abrams, New York 1979) - goes back, indeed, to the times of the street furniture survey carried out at the beginning of the eighties. It's even easier to recognise Biffi Gentili's "authorities" when we look at his activities as exhibition curator, because he often refers to them. For example, regarding the use of light by his former partner in exhibition design, the late Turin architect Toni Cordero, he wrote: "Cordero uses 'vulgar' materials and industrial technologies. His competitive talent, ready to accept the risk of challenging the shadows of the great architects of the past that hang over us, such as Antonelli, Juvarrà and Guarini, is expressed in an unusual approach to the theme of distributing energy and lighting technique through re-assembling varied equipment". This re-assembly is made up of transformers, wiring allowed to be left in view, discotheque projectors, flashing emergency lights, and even neon; to create complex, extreme assemblages. These are also adopted for exhibitions of sacred art, such as the exhibitions in the *Diocesi* cycle at San Filippo Neri, the seat of MIAAO in Turin.

Leonardo Mosso, *Light Structure*, 1996, plexiglas, stainless steel, neon light transformer variable configuration installation, Photo by the artist



Another Turin architect and artist, coming from Biella - who we have already met in these pages - is Leonardo Mosso, with whom Biffi Gentili is on familiar terms and of whom has written many articles, one of which says: "Since 1990 he has created *Light Structures* in two versions: metal structures with square sections... and structures from plastic tubes with a circular section, containing neon as well. The joints and wiring of these structures with luminous hearts, have made spatial multi-directional developments possible, with stable installations arranged vertically in columns, etc., or open, almost dancing, highly capable of transforming to adapt themselves to every spatial conditions. Their distribution of energy and light, in different colours, from deep turquoise to banana yellow, from salmon pink to traffic light yellow, in this way become the construction materials and the framework of an integrated system which is very varied and flexible". By way of illustration, we are reproducing a *Light Structure* by Mosso (1996), where the fluorescent light seems to have been prescribed by the RGB code. We'd also like to remind you of the lighting installation by the same artist, set up in the city centre car park in piazza Vittorio, Turin, which has "upped the norms" of quality for *Luci d'artista*. These artists' lights should decorate the city by colouring and interrupting its architecture, enriching it with new intelligent information. But without wishing to subtract from the aesthetic appeal of some of these artworks in themselves, they appear more "wandering" than "vague", because of the frequent decisions by the city authorities to move them around different streets Xmas after Xmas. This has compromised one of the distinctive characteristics of site-specific installations; that they should be to be customised for a precise, given space. Biella's "photo-writings" are "permanent installations" however, which are not ephemeral, but have a well-defined function. Their "job" is to indicate and celebrate those areas of interest in the city that are otherwise difficult to identify, and also to give "instructions for use" for strategic areas of the cityscape, such as panoramic views or gardens. They radiate out from the historic city centre, and are updated as the area's "identity documents". The choice of the range

of colours and lights, as also happens in other sectors that the BAU project has been involved in, could seem arbitrary and provocative, but in reality it has been almost forced on us by the need to escape from that comforting and rather slavish vogue for *lumière d'ambiance*, even when lit by "stylish" lamp-posts, unfortunately used and abused for the sake of evoking an atmosphere of once upon a time, drenched in nostalgia, but justified at heart by no more than a *recherche du temps perdu*, owing more to Madame Bovary than to Proust. The colours selected derive from the rigorous use of the RGB colour code. For those unfamiliar with this work, The RGB code sub-divides colours obtainable from light beams into the three primary colours: red, green and blue. These create white through additive synthesis or when mixed by being superimposed. A basic colour system for today's society, this latter being the mother, and also the slave, of a myriad parallel realities made up of virtual images reproduced digitally. In fact, it's the basis of the colours reproduced on the screens of televisions and monitors. Concerning the specific project illustrated in this article: the arrangement of luminous posts indicating the entrance to the garden paths in via Carso, next to Biella's Railway Station, these lighting systems for the "communication trenches" in public areas use neon as a fluorescent light source. Housed in slots in extruded aluminium cylindrical cases, and protected by sheets of polycarbonate, they create blades of light, which in our case appear multi-coloured because of the red, green and blue coloured filters which have been inserted. If we now return to the "lateral visual thought" dear to us, inclined to seeking out *homographies*, the first thing that occurs to us when looking at these lights (which, for your information, were designed by the French architect and designer Jean-Michel Wilmotte and produced by iGuzzini: the two people responsible, among other things, for one of the projects to illuminate the Louvre in Paris), is something much farther than Biella in space and time, and much nearer to the collective imagination fed by the "mass culture" of the cinema. Similar types of "science fiction" references have already been proposed with negative intent by the predictably conservative clique of critics who follow nearly all innovative initiatives. We shouldn't be surprised, because we share the opinion of our old expert aesthologist Gillo Dorfles: "once again I have to repeat what has been happening for at least fifty years: that the public always wants what they're already familiar with..." (G. Dorfles, *Conformisti*, Donzelli, Rome 1997). An obvious association shared by "pastists" and "Futurists" alike, aroused by the sight of Wilmotte's illuminated posts, are the laser swords, the *Light Sabers*: the weapons used in the *Star Wars* saga by the combatants from the two factions in conflict for the future of human society. These consisted of a hilt, with a blade in the form of a beam of energy, which appears to be

a luminous ray about a metre in length. In the first episodes of the saga, after encountering technical problems with the film equipment being used at the time, it was decided to use the same RGB colours mentioned above - red, green and blue - for the coloured lights of these weapons. Laser swords are one of the emblematic symbols of George Lucas's masterpiece, and are in turn, basic complex elements of that store of science fiction knowledge referred to at the beginning of this article, actually in relation to the project's culture. They are a legacy it should be remembered, of popular culture, including the "sword and cape" genres of adventure stories so dear to the old literature of entertainment. This know-how, even if popular, is so basic that it has been the fount of inspiration for one of the greatest exponents of contemporary architecture today: Rem Koolhaas. His dedication to it, is an extreme form of quotation, close to the boundaries of "plagiarism" (on this subject, please refer to the article *Celestial spheres* on page 3 of this publication). It must be said, to underline the coherence between the projects, that the relation between the "cosmos" and Biella underlined by the BAU project, is not exhausted by these kind of futuristic *Excaliburs* planted in the ground. Another important installation will be the one to redecorate piazza del Monte, in a part of the Historical Centre that is a little "run down". This will be equipped with play equipment for children, and transformed into *UFO Place*, with a "space-base" erected in the centre. All our insistence on direct or indirect illusions to spaces in the stars, has been justified. The relation between the culture of the project, and images from science fiction, is actually the main theme of the *Afterville* project we have designed, which has been approved by the Foundation of Turin and Province Order of Architects, of which this journal is to a certain extent the official organ. The project has also been translated into a cycle of related cultural manifestations for the XXIII UIA World Congress of Architecture to be held in Turin from 29 June to 3 July 2008. But we're also architects, rather than merely science fiction cultists, therefore we want to conclude, as we must, in a much more professional way. The lighting devices for paths in public areas designed by Jean-Michel Wilmotte for iGuzzini are not called *Light Sabers*, but *Light Pencils*. The title of this "training romance" for the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano (Biella Street Furniture) project, deals therefore with luminous *pencils*: instruments for writing. They are absolutely relevant therefore to the aim of learning by means of the basic tracing of points, lines, downward strokes, to create an urban calligraphy which represents a very persuasive theoretical suggestion. Translated into practice, as in the example of the via Carso project, we're re-founding a discipline, which was once celebrated in Turin and everywhere; but now is slandered, sometimes with good reasons.

“

**Colour can become mortally emotional**

”

Roman Opalka



Enzo Biffi Gentili and City of Biella Street Furniture Office, *Plan for lighting with decorative lights in primary RGB colours for the gardens in via Carso at Biella*, 2008 lighting fixtures *Pencil* by Jean-Michel Wilmotte for iGuzzini, Photo by Marco Comba for *Il Biellese*

Darth Vader with *Light Saber*, promotional image for the film *Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith*, 2005



## Maddalena Margherita

### Elisa Facchi

Among the objectives of the first *Policy Guidelines for the Street Furniture of Biella*, which were presented to the public in April 2007, the expression "public applied art" often appears. This partly takes from the concept of *Art Public* which, as the late Vera Comoli Mandracci wrote, referred in 19th century France to street furniture. As the scholar tells us, it was then extended to include the applied arts as a discipline

that carefully respects the constraints of the project, the environmental context, and the history of the surroundings. This made it different from Public Art - which is the ultimate frontier of a "pure" art, and which thus attempts to attenuate its pathological autism - and made it willing to act as though on probation, rather than under licence. So let us take a look at an operation in the Biella area which has taken the *genius loci* into close consideration: the installation of a luminous glass circle on the Ponte della Maddalena - the bridge that crosses the Cervo river in Biella. In formal terms, its "punctuation" is theoretically and chromatically consistent with the "exercises in luminous calligraphy" that characterise the initial, elementary stage of experimentation of our new "urban script". On the other hand, the circular luminous *ductus* provides an opportunity to evoke the spirit, or "spectre", of the place. History tells us that Margherita Boninsegna

-the wife of the heresiarch Fra Dolcino, head of the pauperist movement of the Apostolic Brethren- was burnt at the stake close by the Ponte della Maddalena, on the first day of June 1307. Unable to resist the coaxing words of the charismatic Dolcino, and possibly even more attracted by his call for a society in which men and women would be treated equally, the beautiful Margherita had unhesitatingly abandoned her native Trentino to follow Dolcino on his wanderings, preaching in the valleys of Vercelli and later on Monte Ribello, in what is now the province of Biella. Here, however, he and his followers were shunned by the local inhabitants and forced into isolation, living a life of privations and pursued by the unrelenting anger of, and excommunication by the Pope. During Easter week in 1307, the people of Biella were roused to battle by the promise of plenary indulgence, and they tracked them down and killed them. All the survivors were

condemned to death. The last was Dolcino, who was tortured and left to die in agony at Vercelli. He thus had time to see his companion being burnt to death. And we are told that the beauty of Margherita, so dazzling as to appear witchlike, shone brighter even than the flames. Seven hundred years later, in October 2007, a multicoloured luminous circle consisting of porphyry-like blocks was lit, partly to recall that fire. The red, green, and blue *Porfido* blocks, designed by Pier Filippo Ferrari for Fratelli Martini, are made of non-slip tempered glass. As rough as the skin of witches.

Enzo Biffi Gentili and City of Biella Street Furniture Office, *Plan for lighting with decorative lights in primary RGB colours for the Maddalena bridge at Biella*, 2007 *Porfido* lighting fixtures by Pier Filippo Ferrari for Fratelli Martini, Photo by Antonio Canevarolo





Nino Cerruti, *Proposal for new flag green background for zebra crossing on public land at Biella*, 2007, rendering by Bellissimo, Courtesy of UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano, City of Biella

## Recent weaves

### Enzo Biffi Gentili

Biella has been a city of art and the textile industry for centuries. It would be strange, after so many declarations of love, of intent of respect for the *genius loci*, not to derive some design results. In the previous pages, we have already mentioned some colouring work on a primary school by Nino Cerruti, a *très cultivé* stylist whose aristocratic family factory dates back to the 1800s, the century in which the chromatological theories of Chevreul were affirmed, which blossomed from the textile arts. However, the new "urban stylist" work of Cerruti is not solely limited to one building, it is spread throughout Biella, not quite like a "leopard's spots" -it is other Italian stylists that indulge in this type of vulgar livery- but more like "Zebra's stripes". This, in the sense that the zebra crossings of city will be progressively repainted with a flag green background colour, chosen by Cerruti to also simulate a virtual extension of the urban green areas. Thus, now we would be able to say to the people of Biella: "Cet été, osez le chic des rayures" (This summer, dare the stylishness of the stripes). This expression refers to a Parisian fashion advertisement, but is also the *incipit* of a highly sophisticated essay by Michel Pastoureau (*L'étoffe du Diable. Une histoire des rayures et des tissus rayés*, Seuil, Paris 1991) in which all types of "stripe" underline constitutional ambiguity through the coexistence of "debasement" and "liberating" symbolic values (and ambiguity, as we well know, is the main characteristic of pure or applied art, of the Cerruti stripes and those of Daniel Buren, who is also now active in Biella, commissioned by the Fondazione Zegna, another aristocratic factory). In the synopsis of the book by Pastoureau, we also read that an analysis of the "stripes" in the cloth allows us to ponder "plus largement sur l'origine, le statut et le fonctionnement des codes visuels au sein d'une société donnée" (more widely on the origin, the status and the use of visual codes at the heart of a given society). That which we are endeavouring to do is not only to think of a "designer" city but also a "graffiti" city, meaning the experimentation set up in the "territorial and urban graphic" specifications sector, so rarely visited in our country. This is naturally applied, on the one hand, to fabrics -for *dehors*, clothing and buildings- and also, on the other, to other formats of greater material substance, such as tiling and mosaics. The first work of this type that is being carried out is that of another big master, Manuel Cargaleiro on the Rivetti Swimming Pool, whose new majolica and mosaic vestment will also represent a demonstration of poetic composition talent in urban *lettering*. The *lettering* in a city could in fact become a "navigation tool" for visitors and stimulate a "sense of belonging" in the citizens, as maintained in an important historical account of these types of intervention (P. Baines, C. Dixon, *Signs: Lettering in the Environment*, Logos, Modena 2004). This is a thesis that, with the help of AIAP, the Italian Association planning for visual communication, and with the competition for young graphic studios, we would like to prove.

Carlo Ravizza, *Detail of ceramic inserts on external walls of the changing rooms from the Rivetti Swimming Pool at Biella* 1956-58, Photo by Antonio Canevarolo

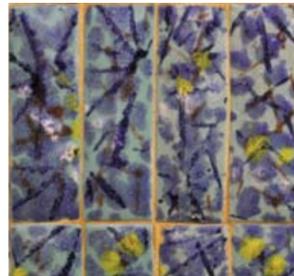


# A mosaic swimming pool

### Luisa Perlo

At the end of the fifties, the "very industrial population" of Biella -at the foothills of the Alps- "was, for the first time, faced with the issue of swimming and of being able to use indoor and outdoor pools all year round". Thanks to the initiative of Guido Alberto Rivetti, a sports and mountain lover and a champion of a notion of patronage which today has only very few heirs, the Rivetti Municipal Swimming Pool opened in Biella in 1958. A modern sports complex, it was donated to the city by the well-known wool manufacturer -who in the twenties had also brought to Biella Giuseppe Pagano- as a memorial to his son Massimo, who had died in a car crash. Designed by

Carlo Ravizza, *Details of mosaic decorations from the Rivetti Swimming Pool at Biella* 1956-58, Photo by Antonio Canevarolo



Milan-born engineer Carlo Ravizza in 1956, with unusual "open-mindedness in the choice of materials", it was hailed as "one of the grandest sports complexes in Italy". "The central feature of this public building is precisely that it does not look like one" writes Ravizza in 1959; "both in the choice of materials and in the abundance of colours, every effort was made to create a welcoming atmosphere, where each detail reveals a personal touch". "As you walk in, the large wood-panelled wall, with its arrangement of *appliques*, immediately dispels any sense of coldness from what was once called 'the baths'; bright colours and huge windows, running all the way down to the ground and creating a visual connection between the green outdoors and the indoor pool, contribute to dispelling any impression of cold or mere functionality". To this day, despite the fact that the original overall balance was compromised by a recent extension, it is still possible to admire the sophisticated decorative solutions chosen by the designer. There are at least ten different mosaic and ceramic facing systems in place, using a variety of colours; the external changing rooms are decorated with polychrome majolica fragments inlaid in the cement mortar, while unique pieces include the entrance door die-cast aluminium handles. The diving board, in reinforced concrete, is a fully-fledged abstract sculpture, to which water reflection effects impart a dynamic rotation. With its free-form pools and jutting diving board, the Rivetti Swimming Pool can be compared to a similar plant built in Monza by Giulio Minoletti (who also designed the interiors of ships Andrea Doria and Leonardo Da Vinci). If Minoletti commissions Antonia Tomasini and Antonia Campi to create, at the bottom of the swimming pool, an "inhabitable" ceramic mosaic sculpture, which is surprisingly reminiscent of later creations by Niki de Saint Phalle, Ravizza is in no way inferior and for the aerial poolside sculpture he chooses the organic-dynamic language of Carmelo Cappello, a forerunner and promoter



Manuel Cargaleiro, *Majolica and mosaic decoration with visual-writing composition for the facade of the Rivetti Swimming Pool at Biella* 2008, rendering by Alberto Rainero, Courtesy of UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano, City of Biella

of public art. Born in Ragusa and a pupil of Marino Marini at the ISIA Institute in Monza, Cappello is at the climax of his success: the Venice Biennale will soon reserve him a personal hall and in 1959 he will take part to Documenta 2 in Kassel, the most important art show of post-war Europe. Everywhere, as well as chlorine, you can breathe in that typically 20th century atmosphere of "synthesis of the arts", which was then -in that same Milan where Ravizza worked- enjoying its best years, under the thrust of the Concrete Art Movement. In 1955, with an exhibition titled *Experiments in the Synthesis of the Arts*, at the Galleria del Fiore, the Concrete Art Movement announced its merger with French group Espace -connected, through its founder, André Bloc, to magazine *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, created and directed by him, and to Le Cor-

busier- giving up once and for all the highly-criticized "easel painting" in favour of that integration of the arts, architecture and design which in Milan, once again, was to bear its most renowned fruits (just think of the co-operation between Spatialist Gianni Dova and Marco Zanuso). Soon, this avant-garde spirit will live again in the Rivetti Swimming Pool, through an intervention on the facade of the contemporary extension (which was unfortunately built to those standards of "mere functionality" which Ravizza so disliked) to be carried out by Portuguese artist Manuel Cargaleiro. The master of contemporary *azulejo*, who did the ceramic facing of the Champs-Élysées-Clemenceau station of the Paris Metro, will return consistency and dignity to the complex designed by the engineer of his same age, and on that occasion Biella will celebrate their shared 81st birthday.

“  
Of all the arts  
applied to architecture  
mosaic is the one  
that best reveals  
its 'temperature'...  
”

Maurice Culot, *Printemps de la mosaïque*, 1992

## Dedaws dehors Director's chair

### Alberto Bassi

Biella is a leading city in the production of clothing fabric, therefore the BAU project promotes the research and production of fabrics also for outdoor furniture; for example for the furniture of *dehors*: a self-evident truth. As a type of seating, the "director's chair" has been chosen, treated here by a leading specialist like Alberto Bassi, the author of *Design anonimo in Italia, Electa, Milano 2007*. (L.P.) Opening, closing, re-opening, re-folding, and putting away quickly. Folding furnishings were created for these functions: they're useful because space is sometimes scarce, or because they need to be kept at hand

in far away or nearby places; without taking up a lot of space, and can then be folded up and put away until the next time. Objects with functional uses, often born out of economic necessity, folding furniture communicates ephemeral and transient impressions of the fleeting moment. This is why their materials, solutions and finish is often less important than the complete answer they furnish to a limited, temporary need -being both necessary and serviceable. In the big family of folding objects, seats were among the first in design history, as well as having the longest useful lives. To begin with there were the 19th century military campaign chairs

which then equipped the armies all over the world, more or less to colonize it. The Anglo-saxon production and design culture was always foremost in this case, with its ingenious mechanical solutions to close and conceal the mechanisms and their artifices. Besides, it is known, especially the English have been in the forefront of patenting a formidable mixture of functionalism, mechanical artifice, aesthetics and comfort in the furniture design, as well as indulging themselves with precious essences and shining brass. Then, when mass-produced at bargain prices, these items became even simpler and more cheaply finished, as in the case of camp chairs. Here, wooden components are joined to cheap materials for seating and back-rests; especially fabric, which, among other advantages, could give dignity to interiors, as well as be suitable for open air uses. These were indeed the first chairs to be without rigid materials for the seat and backrest, provided instead with light, thin and de-structured substitutes that were also soft and both ergonomic and economic. Canvas seats appeared, on both warships and cruise-ships, alongside the deck chairs that would have bright futures as the irreplaceable furnishing for sea-bathing on beaches as yet uncrowded by the mass tourism then being born. In this ample history, with thousands of tributary streams that cannot be explored in this brief note, the director's chair, or the seat for the film director, is worthy of note. Its reputation *coram populi* was naturally due to its success in the more or less Hollywood-style world of cinema, and to its acceptance by leading directors as well as by common actors. This was helped, among other things, by the existence in the USA of a leading manufacturer like Telescope, which began production in 1903. If this company could not boast the original designs, it made a substantial contribution to their commercial success. The history of the origins, and the development of the design, production and consumption of director's chairs therefore intersects with the more general history of folding chairs. Some peculiarities of these can be identified, such as the X-structure



Michel Bouquillon, *La Regista*, 2007, seat in nylon and batilane, rendering of design Serralunga, Biella

to the left  
Jan Dranger, *Down-up*, 1984 steel seat painted with epoxy resin powder and cotton fabric Joint srl, Milano, Photo by Bitetto and Chimenti

of the legs, the metal connections, folding arms even, and the different height of the models. But there is the fabric above all, which after a certain period, whether used for the backrests or seats, was designed to be detachable, not only allowing its finish to be varied, but also for the user to wash and clean it. The director's chair is substantially a collective effort: the work of different authors and of the subsequent improvements made to it, which have harvested a rich crop of patents, beginning in 1883, with the *Folding camp Chair* of Sylvanus C. Hopkins of Boston, Massachusetts: stripped down to the essentials, without arm-rests. Then there were numerous 20th century examples, including the *Folding Armchair* by

George Goldwin from Chicago, Illinois in 1927, which introduced reclining armrests; and the horizontal closure of the *Collapsible Chair* by G.T. Grondin of Collinsville in Connecticut in 1930. This is a "definitive" type and form of seating, which is highly suggestive, and has inspired many important architects and designers to accept the challenge of redesigning it, with varying results. From time to time, these projects have made it more valuable, and updated its material -the "non-fabric fabric" for example- and every solution. We'll personally continue to be intrigued by the simple efficiency of the folding archetype, with its metal joints in view, which can be shown off in grey-green canvas, or, in excess, in marine stripes. *Less is more.*

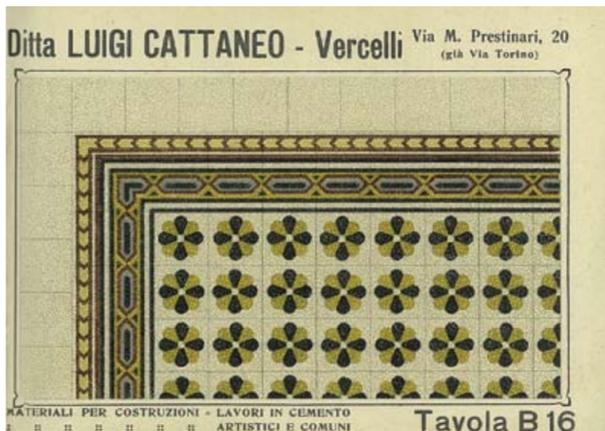


# Ornament renaissance

Enzo Biffi Gentili

"Each of his works, clad with either old or newly-made enamel, is a precious jewel radiating light from its heart. Technical knowledge and creativity adorn his work in a spontaneous gesture of happiness. I'm sure many artefacts celebrated today will be covered by dust tomorrow, or will be considered irrelevant, or destroyed completely by time. Not so the works of Manuel Cargaleiro". These are auspicious words for the Rivetti Swimming Pool in Biella the great Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza said to enhance the figure of the painter and ceramicist Manuel Cargaleiro (see the article here by Luisa Perlo). Born in 1927, and converted to Abstract Art during the fifties while he was gradually stylising the ornamental elements of his work, Cargaleiro was almost immediately recognised at a European level as a champion of ceramic decoration for architecture. Awarded with the Diploma of Honour in 1955, at the age of 28, by Geneva's International Academy of Ceramics, he has carried out innumerable works in Portugal, France, and Italy. As regards Italy, at the end of the nineties in Vietri sul Mare, a town on the Amalfi Coast with an ancient tradition of ceramics, which dedicated a museum to him, he relaunched the tradition of *riggiole* -as local inhabitants are used to call tiles. To those who may want to know how the architectural ceramic works of a Portuguese, inspired by Vietri's traditions, are relevant to Piedmont's territory and design culture, the answer is "quite a bit". Among the most important ceramic decorations in "Vietri-style" during the *post bellum* second half of the 20th century, are those of two internationally renowned Turin architects: Carlo Mollino and Paolo

Soleri, who is still living and working in the United States. Regarding Mollino, you need only to think of the Lutrario Dancing Hall dated 1959, where its imposing corridor leading to the dance-floor sparkles with reflections from a variety of decorative Vietri-style *riggiole* arranged in a sumptuous mural work, in free pieces. Paolo Portoghesi highlights how important was the project from Lutrario in order to understand the relation of Mollino with the tradition, to make it running again, thus granting as allowed to build "by fragments". Mollino himself, who was also a Professor of Decoration at Turin Polytechnic's Architecture Faculty, stated he wanted publicly reverse the Loos' *diktat* on ornamentation as a crime since 1949, claiming that "decoration -a gesture which is useless in the most precise meaning of the term- is among the most delightful signs of man's gradual alienation from the animal world; a sign of civilisation". (C. Mollino, "Utopia e ambientazione I-II", in *Domus* nos. 237 and 238, 1949). Regarding Soleri, his Italian masterpiece, the Solimene factory, built in 1954-56 at Vietri sul Mare, is an incredible "architecture with backbone for the repetitive production of the clay vase" (A.I. Lima, *Soleri. Architettura come ecologia umana*, Jaca Book, Milan 2000). The factory, whose facade is clad in a flickering texture of terracotta discs, has a characteristic interior design, with a muscular floor arrangement of "samples" of *riggiole* assembled in a *patchwork*. Soleri is still producing ceramics today in Arcosanti, his "ideal city" in Arizona. Few people know that Piedmont is the homeland of the first "applied artist" to relaunch "architectural ceramics" as a craft at an international level in the 19th cen-



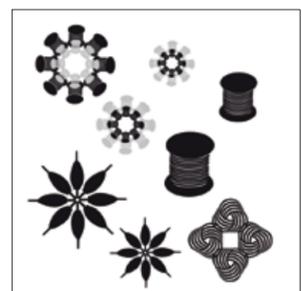
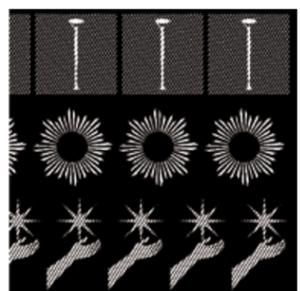
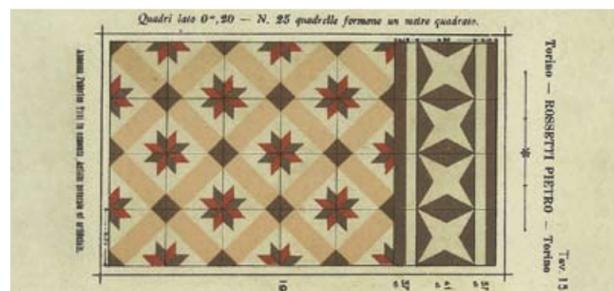
Decoration for mosaic floor tiles, from *Catalogo Pavimenti*, sample album from the Luigi Cattaneo Company, Vercelli 1924

ture; Giuseppe Devers. Born in Turin in 1823, and already considered in France, after his transfer there, as a "modern Luca della Robbia" at the age of thirty, Devers was able to offer, as Prosper Merimée claimed, "precious resources and potent decorative motifs for our architects" (*Moniteur Universel*, 8 July 1853). Then, after returning to Italy in 1871, he took up the first teaching post in ceramics at Turin's Albertina Academy of the Fine Arts, under the rubric of "Industrial Painting". Apart from ceramics, various other new "artistic industries" were being created in Piedmont, and began to flourish between the period from the end of

the 19th century to at least the twenties. These new "artistic industries" were devoted to the production of various types of wall and floor tiles, including marble grain decorative tiles for floors, with extremely varied multicoloured decorative motifs, made of simple concrete, Portland cement and flakes of natural marble. Similar products were made in Turin, at the factory of Pietro Rossetti, and at the Luigi Cattaneo company in the Vercelli province, which then included Biella. Their "Venetian mosaics" popularised the taste for "popular" mosaic wall decoration, which would enjoy an extraordinary new architectural *climax* in the fifties

-reconstructed critically in research carried out by writers working with Luisa Perlo and Francesca Comisso (*EccentricCity. Arti applicate a Torino 1945-1968*, Fondazione per il Libro, la Musica e la Cultura and MIAAO, Turin 2003). But to return to ceramics today, at the gates to Biella, in Vergnasco, are two important industrial companies: Ceramica Vogue and Gabbianelli, which collaborates in the intervention of the Rivetti Swimming Pool. These "aesthetic factories" are fundamental for Italian ceramic design history, and also for the present vogue for "new ornamentation". They also draw on the work of skilled graphic artists such as Gabbianelli, which produces the *Stellina* line, by Italo Lupi. Its "brightly coloured" *Astratto* line was designed by Mario Piazza, the previous President of AIAP, the Italian Association planning for visual communication. AIAP's present President, Beppe Chia, is the author of the article below, and helped us a great deal in affirming that "decoration has been reborn". Even if printed characters are used, as in Cargaleiro's masterly urban décor to reface the Colégio Militar-Luz station on the Lisbon underground; and now, with a "calligraphic" approach this time, in the writing on the "ceramic temple" of Rivetti Swimming Pool. Textile arts above all are the *imprinting* on Biella's identity: some solutions by young graphics studios invited by the city to suggest textile external decorations are therefore published in these pages as an iconographic add. Among these, the examining commission, presided over by Beppe Chia, has decided to award Mauro Bubbico's system of *Baufont* icons, which has shown it can generate infinite textile textures for the city...

Decoration for tiles in simple cement, from the catalogue *Disegni per pavimenti* sample album from the Rossetti Pietro Company, Turin 1890



## Urban textures

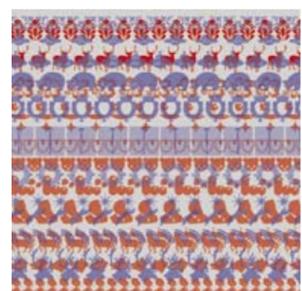
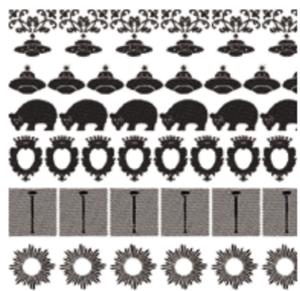
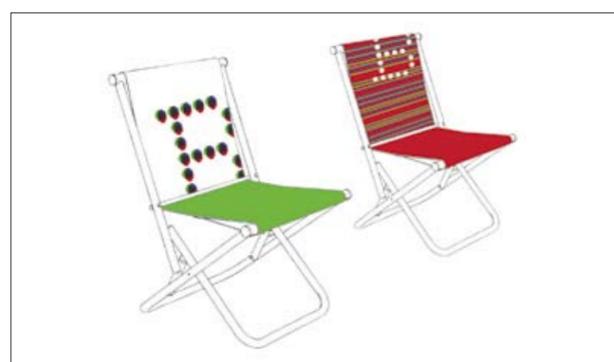
Beppe Chia  
AIAP President

Our country has an extraordinary environmental, architectural and artistic heritage that is upheld by a structured *visual identity system* that identifies it and suggests reading and practical courses, making it a shared community experience. This is a demand that has only arisen recently. Monuments and landscapes have had a lone voice for centuries: we can but wonder if the plaque, the caption and the tourist logo are not simply palliatives of degradation and fast consumerism. Many cities have to come to terms with chaos, information redundancy and desertion. These are the challenges to which a visual identity system must respond, offering precise information as its goal, extolling the peculiarities of the locations, articulating on different times and scales. But what methods should the public administration employ to invite designers to construct complex visual

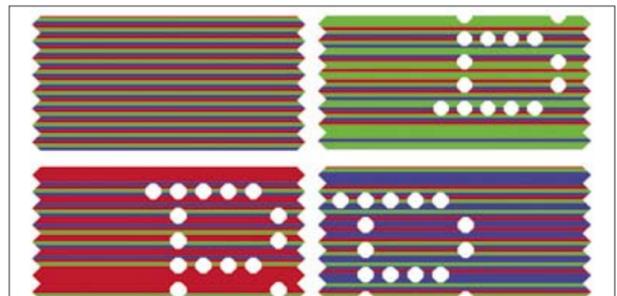
identity systems? AIAP has been researching this field for years (as can be seen in "SocialDesignZine" and "Progetto Grafico") and offers the public administrations advice on how to interface with project designers. The BAU project is a case in which it has been possible to discuss and construct a course that lives up to the expectations of the citizens and the work of the designers. Let's see how. First issue: the list of design elements for the construction of the visual identity of a city is too long. Therefore, "only" seven issues/places that are of particular significance to Biella have been identified: the BAU logo, the street toponymy, the tourist signs, the archigraphics of the library entrance, placing *Piedmont* poetry *in situ* in corso Carducci, the design of outdoor fabrics, the Skate Park. Another question: what design culture can tackle such asymmetric

themes that require the knowledge of different human sciences and design specialties, of bureaucratic logic, the mastering of various dimensional scales, the adoption of a variety of material and immaterial formats, the provision of extremely variable execution times? The usual choice made by public bodies is that of entrusting projects that require diverse know-how to a single resource. We, however, have selected five "young" studios each with experience in tackling certain areas; all sent to gain direct experience of the reading of the places, to come into the city, to eat and sleep there and to participate in guided tours and to gather information. Another question: can a city recognise itself in a "closed" visual identity system, equipped with a rigid application manual? Is an urban and cultural complex equivalent to a shop where each artefact is coordinated? Are there other tools for managing a large sign production machine? The commission presided over by myself in Biella has found itself up against these doubts. Each designer has designed his system like a semantic unit composed of seven interlinked subsystems, however individual solutions were imposed on each of these systems for originality and/or applicability. These excellences were rewarded, abandoning the idea of a "single visual thought". And as such the *Biella è Bella* logo, the street toponymy, the tourist signs and institutional elements that endure the tests of time have been assigned to Diversi Associati; the "poetic" and signage archigraphics and the design of outdoor fabrics to Studio Bubbico; and finally the Skate Park has been awarded to the Meat collective. Biella has opened an avenue, it is now good, as well as *bella*...

Diversi Associati, Proposal for use of fabric for dehors designed as part of the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano project, 2008



Designs for fabrics for urban textile applications worked out as part of the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano project, 2008, proposed by Architects, Mauro Bubbico Studio Grafico, Bellissimo (top from left), Mauro Bubbico Studio Grafico (above) Diversi Associati (below)



“  
I'm the lovely flower of the tapestry  
I'm going back, and I'll never give up  
”  
Christian Morgenstern, *Galgenlieder*, 1905



Enzo Biffi Gentili and Bellissimo, *STRIKE!* 2006, cast stone, iron, glass, 3M light pipe system, 3M fiber light, injectors, work of applied public art created for the Franco Center at piazza Marmolada in Turin, Photo by Ernani Orcorte

## Graphic erections

Carlo Brawzaglia

It was once known as "archigraphics", a term that referred to graphic operations that entered the world of architecture. In a proliferation of signs, billboards, and wall posters, but also metropolitan writings and various forms of Street Art, it is a process that is hard to define precisely today, partly because it is not only the institutional practice of archigraphics that lies at the heart of a very contemporary passion for graphic design on an environmental scale. The rapid spread of billboards, sometimes as large as buildings, has undoubtedly had some influence on the level of commercial communication. But it is equally doubtful that it was mainly tag writing, with its love of scripts -Graffiti Art, in monetary terms- and then the more recent spawn of street artists working on mural paintings, pasted photocopies or stickers, which reshaped the boundaries of graphic design on the large scale. As Robert Venturi and Las Vegas show, we must not forget commercial signs; the ancient practice of wall decoration, an unbroken tradition that is always capable of renewing itself; and the explosion of the trade-fair phenomenon in the nineties, with its exhibit design taken to ever more spectacular dimensions. Lastly, one final consideration can do no harm: the proliferation of "functional" signage itself acquires aesthetic and environmental value. In terms of problems -and design has always been a matter of problem-solving- it is precisely the encounter between signage and the need to characterise internal or external spaces that provides the most effective examples of this rediscovery of huge dimensions. This can be seen in some of the earliest works, such as those by Paula Scher/Pentagram New York (Bloomberg), the German Büro Uebele (Osnabrück University) and Moniteurs (BMW Headquarters), the French Ruedi Baur (Cinéma-thèque Française), and the Japanese Masayoshi Kodaira (Fukutake House). Whether they use painting, wood, or LEDs, large-scale works characterise spaces, following the logic of an identity expanded to an architectural dimension in order to amplify the perceptive impact on the observer, and to define places, levels, and directions; in other words, branding the spaces and directing the flows of their use. Since design, with graphics leading the way, has always dealt with identity, we find that architectural intervention does no more than propagate the visual codes of its patron, whether public or private. This means that this sector has also been one that has required a canonical concept of corporate identity to be overcome and more flexible guidelines to be adopted, as we can see in Biella. Otherwise, the application of a large-scale identity would run the risk of rather disturbing rhetoric.

Architekturburo D3, Kathrin Gruber and Richard Veneri, *Plaus Station*, 2006 archigraphics on painted steel sheet 240x1300 cm, Photo by Robert Fleischanderl





Anonymous, *Oropa Sanctuary and Sacred Mountain*, late 1700s pen and sepia ink drawing on paper watercolours, 70,5x49,4 cm, Maggia Fund Fondazione Sella, Biella

## A house of the Madonna

Elisa Facchio

Just a quarter of an hour's drive from the centre of Biella, in the deep, short Oropa valley, between the valleys carved out by the rivers Cervo and Elvo, stands the Marian Sanctuary of Oropa. At a height of 1200 metres, it is the most important in the Alps, and it is home to a Black Virgin. Today, pilgrims arriving at Oropa are greeted by a majestic complex of monumental buildings arranged on three terraces dominated by the Basilica Nuova. But the home of the Madonna d'Oropa has not always been so imposing, for the sanctuary we see today is the outcome of over 1500 years of architectural additions and alterations. The first part of this house of Mary was a spacious sacellum that, according to tradition, was built by Saint Eusebius. Appointed Bishop of Vercelli in 345, he had it made to contain one of the three effigies of the Virgin he had recovered during his exile in Jerusalem. Legend has it that the wooden statue, whose face and hands are painted black, was sculpted by Saint Luke, though scholars attribute it to a later date. The first documentary evidence of Oropa refers to the enlargement of the house of the Black Virgin in the 13th century. This was when the church of Santa Maria was built, by hermits of the priory of that name, next to Saint Eusebius's votive chapel. The new church was as long and as wide as the nave of the Basilica Antica, which was built over it in the 17th century by appointment of the House of Savoy and some aristocratic families of Biella. Even though it had just been built, plans were already being made to enlarge it in the second half of the century. The most prestigious of these designs was one made by Guarino Guarini in 1680. Even so, until the 19th century, construction work mainly concentrated on buildings to house the pilgrims. Pietro Arduzzi designed huge cloisters around the basilica, Filippo Juvarra completed the monumental Porta Regia on the Southern side, Francesco Gallo built another two courtyards with accommodation below the first terrace, and Bernardo Vittone and later Pietro Giuseppe Beltramo completed the monumental flight of steps. It was only in 1877 that the site once again became the focus of long-awaited and disputed works: plans from the previous two centuries created by illustrious architects such as Luigi Canna and Alessandro Antonelli, as well as Guarini, were dusted off and in the end a design made in 1774 by Ignazio Amedeo Galletti was chosen by the commission, and a new basilica was built above the Sanctuary. This church was consecrated in 1960.

Filippo Juvarra, *Drawing of plan and perspective views for the completion of the Porta Regia at Oropa Sanctuary* 1700s, pen and ink drawing on paper watercolour, 65,1x44,8 cm, Ris. 59.20, c. 6 Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Turin No Unauthorised Reproduction



# The temple of the lost opportunities

Paolo Portoghesi

Architecture, like human beings, may enjoy a happy destiny that allows them to make the best use of those opportunities that come their way. Or they may suffer the sad fate of being thwarted by obstacle and changes when favourable opportunities arise; leading to an absurd waste of their bold creative energies. Take Guarini, Juvarra, Gallo, Vittone, and Antonelli, the architects involved at the Sanctuary of Oropa at least from the beginning of the 17th century. Finally built according to the hundred year old design of Galletti, the Sanctuary could be defined as a temple of lost opportunities. Among Guarini's designs for centrally planned buildings, his design for the Oropa Sanctuary is the only octagonal one; which developed the idea of overlapping "pagoda-style" horizontal layers - five in this case - to the point of paradox. This is an example of the consistency of Guarini's method, which aimed to form a unitary spatial organism, by means of a composition process consisting of first separating its parts from each other, as if they were self-sufficient; then recomposing them by means of a perspective effect, with the help of a flow of light whose reflections unite, cross, intersect and overlap the different layers. In epistemological terms, it could be said that Guarini wanted to simultaneously affirm the holistic principle by which the totality is more than the mere sum of its parts, and the reductionist principle that sees nothing more in the whole than the sum of its parts added together. In his works that were actually built, like St. Lorenzo and the Chapel for the Holy Shroud, this method of constructing the form appears obvious, but seems led astray when interpreting the engravings of the treatise in which the self-sufficiency of the parts produces a paratactical and confused assemblage. In reality, Guarini's compositional operations: rotating and transforming the geometrical matrices from one layer to another, and alternating expanded and compressed areas, should not be understood as unconnected stratagems aimed to enrich the image, or as overlapping kaleidoscopic figures, but as parts of a musical process. This process is not held together in the memory, allowing the notes to be combined in succession; but in a process of visual interpretation locating adjacent spatial coverings and overlaps in a unique image in which light is the real construction material. The variations of a theme which occur over time in music, here occur in the single instant of vision

and the eye's movement. The effect on the observer inside the building is prolonged, making it continually clearer and more understandable; at the same time allowing a sort of geometrical recomposition. At present, when de-constructivism is in fashion, Guarini's method can be understood as its contrary. His uneasiness can also be seen in the dark tones and dramatic contrasts expressed here in a less ephemeral or clamorous way, with an inverse process that does not refuse, but reaches an Aristotelian catharsis. After Guarini's failure, Filippo Juvarra in 1725 introduced into the building complex what is perhaps the most precious jewel that remains of his work: the Porta Regia which forms, from the background of the lower courtyard, more of an actual facade than a door. In the context of the pre-existing first order of columns, introduced with their vertical drafting, and the oriflammes outlined against the vault of the sky, its chiaroscuro of great intensity and elegance recalls aspects of the mysterious "El Chasne" temple at Petra, sculpted in the fantastic pink stone of the area. Gallo and Vittone were less fortunate than the maestro from Messina, and have left no significant sign of the period they spent working in the Sanctuary. Both worked on the steps in front of the Porta Regia; leaving us designs for works that were not carried out: Gallo, for the South facade, and Vittone, for the reconstruction of the church on the axis of the complex of buildings. If the building design by Vittone shown in tables 79 and 80 of the *Istruzioni diverse...* recalls Guarini's conception of an evaginative circular presbytery, it can on the whole be distinguished from Guarini's concepts when it rejects its metamorphic spatiality in favour of a form recalling certain aspects of Santa Maria della Salute Church in Venice; and prefiguring the clear, compact spatiality of Rivarolo Parish Church in the Canavese area. Therefore the Oropa project was an example of Vittone's "resistance" to the Neoclassicism which dominated the European scene by then. Instead he was led to renounce the more clamorous aspects of Baroque spatial research, and to re-affirm the line of Baroque classicism that had been practised without useless recantations by Bernini and Longhena, and then by Juvarra and Piermarini. From Bernardo Vittone, the poet of load-bearing space and "longed-for light, we pass on to Luigi Canina: the archaeologist without passion

who confined himself to offering his philological wisdom and international fame. In August 1844, the Bishop of Biella appointed Canina, a member of the Roman court of Maria Cristina of Savoy, the benefactress of the Sanctuary. The architect went immediately to visit it, and on returning to Rome, had a meticulous model made; now conserved in the Sanctuary, which was subjected to the judgement of Pio IX, and displayed in Rome in one of the rooms of the Galleria Borghese. Of the 15,000 liras it had cost to create it, only 10,000 liras were refunded later by the queen, Cristina. The construction began without delay in 1848, but the following year, on 23 March 1849, the celebrated defeat of the Piedmontese at Novara caused the king, Carlo Alberto, to abdicate. The times were not therefore propitious for such ambitious works, and only in 1877 was there talk again of a new church. The idea of reviving Canina's project was refused by a commission including Camillo Boito and the count Carlo Ceppi. In the meantime, Alessandro Antonelli had appeared on the scene, at first with a project showing the negative aspects of Canina's design. Antonelli's project had been "thought out to instruct a student, and then developed for his own study and enjoyment". He then participated in a sort of competition in 1876 that ended by reviving the by-now century old project of Galletti, but even the genial Antonelli had not done his best. The horizontal development of the building was interesting, with two bell-towers behind its arcaded wings, and the cruciform plan was very clear. However, its excessively conventional proportions negated that upwards flight which transfigures the slender structures of St. Gaudenzio and the Mole, atoning for the mechanical nature of their composition. The surreal interpretation of Carlo Molino perfectly suited this type of rigid, creaky harmony. "His architecture makes us imagine a serious gentleman, severely dressed, immobile and staid, but false and hollow within; bearing mysterious gifts, who has climbed to the edge of a very high cave to contemplate far away, the void... The sight does not move his calm and terribly impassive face to a smile. There's something unclear - first of all, how did that gentleman get up there? Something is suspicious, inasmuch his clothes are hardly suitable for such acrobatic speculations, but his attitude is so absolute that his extremely personal situation is almost admissibly legitimate".



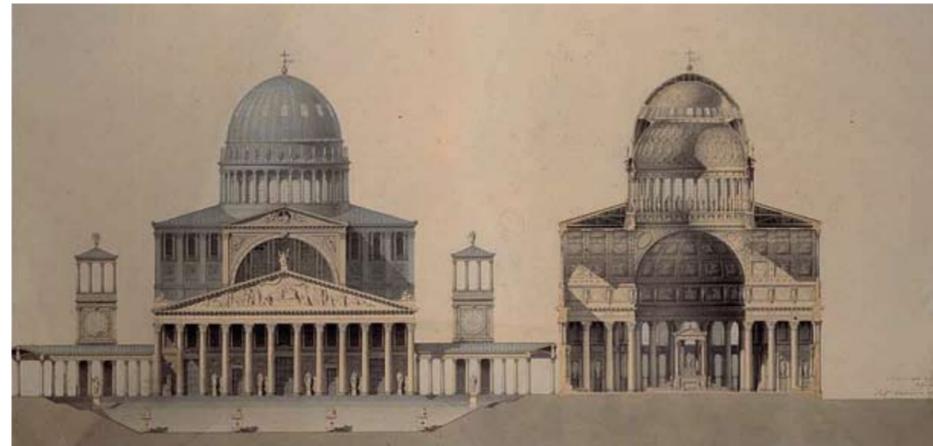
Guarino Guarini (attributed to), *Facade of the Church of the Madonna Ss.ma d'Oropa* late 1600s, pen and sepia ink drawing on paper, watercolours, 67,3x41 cm, Maggia Fund Fondazione Sella, Biella, Photo by photographic laboratory of the State Archives, Turin Courtesy of Ugo Quarelo

“  
**The last phases of the Baroque development are the true inheritance of the epoch we are growing out of**  
 ”  
 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 1941

Filippo Juvarra, *Setting for the Second Coronation of the simulacrum of the Madonna*, 1720, brown ink drawing on paper, 109x68 cm, detail, Museo dei Tesori di Oropa Courtesy of Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Oropa, Photo by Alfiero Staffolani



Alessandro Antonelli, *New Basilica for Oropa Sanctuary, Perspective and cutaway views*, 1876, black ink drawing on paper watercolours, 59,9x 86,7 cm, inv. fl/5721, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Courtesy of Fondazione Torino Musei



## Joyful mystery

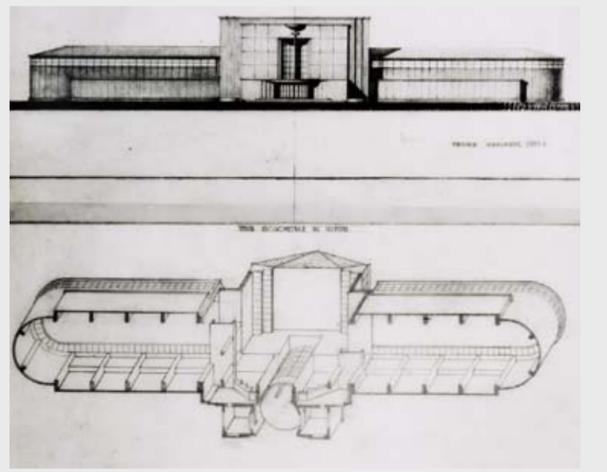
Luisa Perlo

"When it was learnt that through Germano Caselli's initiative it had been decided to create a sort of sculpted diorama illustrating the fifteen mysteries of the rosary, with an adjacent open-air theatre, in the living forest of Oropa", wrote Emilio Zanzi in Torino's *Gazzetta del Popolo* on 3 July 1932, "many admirers of the Sacred Mountain feared that the best of apologetic intentions might pave the way to a manifestation that was sure to be edifying but would also be in questionable taste". There was no reason for Nicola Mosso, already subsumed as a torchbearer of modernity, to be troubled by

such thoughts when in November 1931 he signed an ambitious Futurist architectural plan for Oropa: the Pavilion of Sacred Art with adjacent open-air theatre. According to the documents in his archives, the project, like the Cossato Railway Station built at the same time, can be traced to Engineer Italo Migliau, who as Director of the Biella-Oropa Electric Railways, financed the first -and only- of the three sacred representations called for by the editor of *Il Biellese*. Those involved in creating the "Joyful Mysteries" were Mosso himself, architect of the five stations (devoted to Jesus' childhood), as well as landscape planners Teonesto Deabate and Massimo Quaglino, and the sculptors Roberto Terracini, Gerolamo Pavesi and Antonio Zucconi, who made the painted gesso figures. It was a confrontation with the past marked by a good dose of stylistic caution, except in Mosso's "freer" Rationalist ticket office. According to Luca Spanu, who wrote

his degree thesis on this little known episode, people liked the diorama's "naive realism", and it was crowned with success. But what had happened to the avant-garde dream? It would guarantee Mosso, who went on to design valuable examples of funerary architecture in Oropa, a place in the prestigious *carte des refusés* of the Sacred Mountain, alongside illustrious predecessors like Guarino Guarini and Alessandro Antonelli.

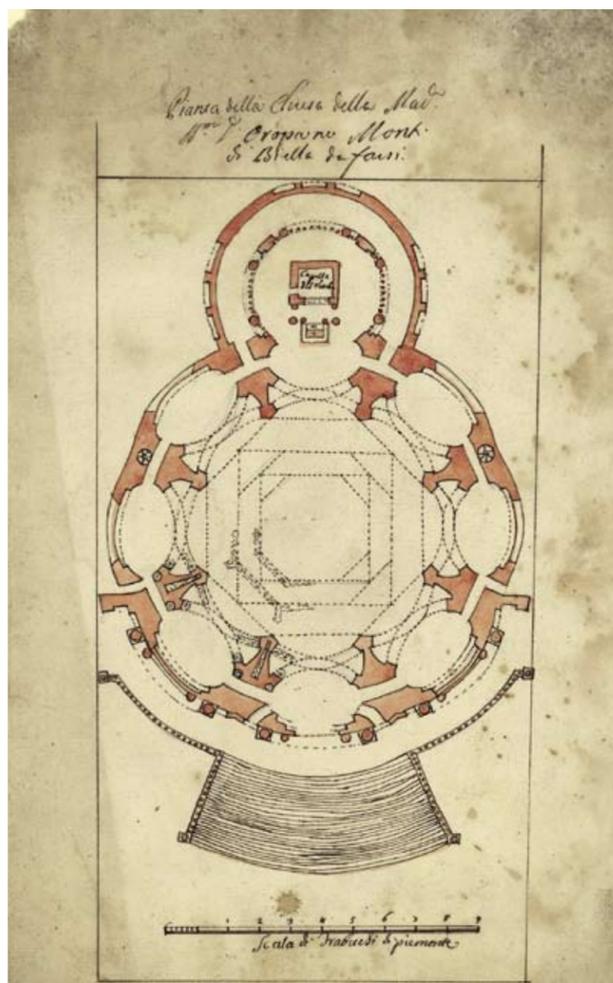
Nicola Mosso, *Pavilion of Sacred Art and open air Theatre at Oropa, Main perspective and axonometric view of ceilings*, 1931, drawings in pencil on paper 56x56 cm each, details, Nicola Mosso Collection, at Istituto Alvar Aalto Pino Torinese



# Guarini expertise

Ugo Quarello

The architect Guarino Guarini (Modena 1624-Milan 1683) was a multifaceted man: priest, theologian, scientist, mathematician, artist and mystic; culturally complex and restless. His designs for the church of Oropa are the ultimate, perhaps final expression of his typical architectural structuring which is highlighted in his verticality, the composition which he geometrically based on a key-number, in his use of light and shadow as construction materials, tension towards transcendence. Eight is the key number on which the design of the Church of Oropa was developed, as well as that of the twin structure of the church of St. Lorenzo in Turin and the unfinished cupola of St. Anne La Royale in Paris. Paolo Portoghesi offers an eloquent description of the geometry of Oropa: "The octagonal central outline proposes new modulations in a more stretched out development of the flat and conical surfaces. The cupola is conceived with some similarities to the Chapel of the Holy Shroud, from the overlapping of three octagonal prisms, the corners of each are supported on the mid point of the sides of the prism below". The work was entrusted to the Theatine priest, as we can deduce from the *ordinati* of the "administration council" of the Sanctuary on the 18 May 1680. However it was not considered appropriate for the church and the project was abandoned after only two years. The Guarini designs -plans, elevation and section drawings- remained in the archives of the Sanctuary until they were sent by the Beltramo architects (father and son), "diligent surveyors of the Sanctuary", to the architect Gaspare Maggia and were inserted, in the first half of the 1800s, in the family archives. The archives were then donated to the Sella Foundation in 1987 by the engineer Federico Maggia. During the Guarini Symposium in 2006, Lodovico Sella, president of the Foundation, authorised their temporary transfer to the State Archives of Turin on my request, in order to compare and reunite them with the few photographs and many awards kept there. Let us return to 1680 however, date of the inscription of the elevation-section by Gio Abbiati, six years after in the posthumous work *Disegni d'Architettura civile et ecclesiastica* (Civil and ecclesiastical Architectural Designs), commissioned by the Turin Theatine brothers of Guarini to the printer D. Paulino, amid the "rami" (copper plates) carried out by various engravers under the direction of the author: was it the hand of Guarini that drafted the original design? I share the view with Daria De Bernardi that it was Guarini himself, or one of his collaborators, who asked for the engraving of the plates. The plans have the characteristics of a preparatory design and there are two inscriptions: "Pianta della Chiesa della Mad. SS.<sup>na</sup> D'Oropa ne' Monti di Biella da farsi" (Plan of the Church of Mad. SS.<sup>na</sup> of Oropa in the Mountains of Biella, to be carried out and) and "Scala di Trabuchi di piemonte" (Trabuchi Scale of Piedmont). The elevation, mutilo to the right, represents the front view of the building; it shows characteristics of greater definition and bears a single inscription in calligraphy "Scala Trabuchi". In the 1686 edition, the elevation is half elevation and half section. The elevation part is in accordance with the Sella Foundation design, except for the closure *cupolino* (the design that depicts the section and interior view of the church did not reach the Foundation). What, at this point, does the note "to be carried out" mean? Why was this written and by whom? Did



Guarino Guarini (attributed to), *Plan of the Church of the Madonna Ss.ma d'Oropa*, late 1600s, pen and sepia ink drawing on paper, watercolours, 41,3x26,2 cm, Maggia Fund Fondazione Sella, Biella. Photo photographic laboratory of the State Archives, Turin Courtesy of Ugo Quarello

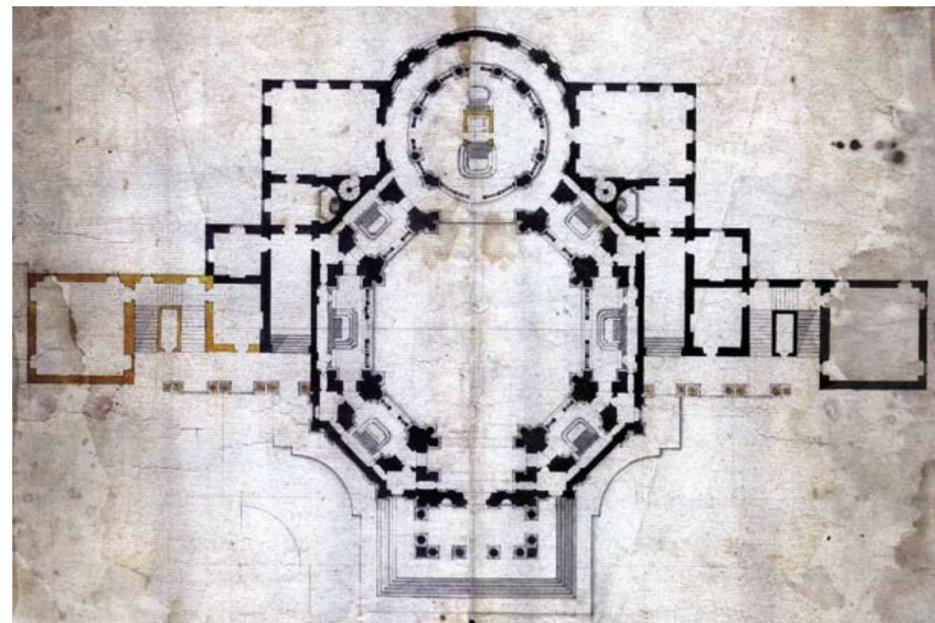
“  
**Guarini, Antonelli... bullets fired into the sky against formalism**  
 ”

Guido Canella, *Fantasia*, 1961

it refer to the building to be erected or to the *rami* and printing? The most persuasive response for me is that this is the first indication of the hand of the Master himself, dictated to a collaborator for executing the subsequent drawings due to the fact that, in those years, he was very busy in the completion of the cupola of St. Lorenzo and in the drafting of the treatise *Caelestis mathematicae*. If the notes on the Oropa drawings are not made by the hand of Guarini, they are also not by that of Bernardo Vittoni, responsible for reorganising the Guarini writings, as the engravings used by him for *Architettura civile* in 1737 are those of Abbiati. I have involved an expert in graphic assessment, Margherita Cristofori, who has analysed the different autographic letters by Guarini that are kept in the State Archives of Modena and

Turin. The comparative assessment, according to the Ottolenghi graphonomic method, has refuted the hypothesis that the note may be the hand of the Guarini, but has demonstrated that the two inscriptions on the plan are of the same hand. A compilation of the lettering of Guarini is also being carried out, forming part of the typical "cresciana" 1600s graphics, a work from the calligraphist Massimo Polello, in the hope that, along with the graphic expertise of Cristofori, it may prove useful for scholars. My hypothesis, founded on these analyses, is that the Master would have drawn the plan by hand and given the task of extracting the elevation and section from the plan to one of his three close anonymous collaborators -already identified and named X, Y and Z- by the scholar Augusta Lange- under his direction.

Bernardo Vittoni, *Plan of the Church of Oropa to be constructed at the centre of the Sant'Anna Pavilion*, 1750, drawing in pencil on paper, 46,6x56,6 cm, Maggia Fund, Fondazione Sella, Biella

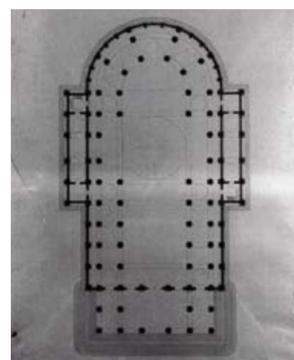


# Canina contested

Liava Pastoriu

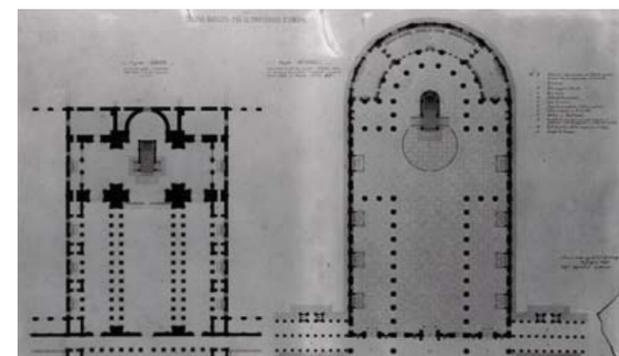
Here in Turin we are still wondering if the skyscraper Renzo Piano was commissioned to design should be taller than the Mole Antonelliana, the symbol of the city. Soon to be erected, the building was commissioned by a bank. But even Alessandro Antonelli, the architect of the day for several intangible Mole, had quite a few problems with his contemporaries getting them to accept the constructive exhibitionism of his works. The archives are an inexhaustible supply of information and intentions on architectural disputes which reveal the continual correspondence between architects and politicians, administrators, colleagues, friends, and family; rivers of ink consumed to reinforce the importance of the innovative value of projects, to ask for support or confirmation, to denigrate a colleague, hoping or openly suggesting oneself in his stead. There is no need to be surprised by this. Today we basically see the same complaints being aired, only with more modern tools -emails, text messages, newspaper interviews, appeals to professional associations, filing of complaints. That healthy batch of letters is nonetheless valuable material which helps us to understand the importance of the debate over time and perhaps to discover some curious hidden detail, some tasty morsel of gossip in affairs like the "duels" of Canina and Antonelli, rivals at Oropa. Who was Luigi Canina? He was born in Casale Monferrato and graduated from university in Turin in 1814 and soon after moved to Rome where he became an architect of Casa Borghese; he was involved in the enlargement and renovation of the Villa gardens and the remodelling of the Palazzo. He was also admired as an archeologist, historian, theoretician of architecture and restoration, professor, engraver, organizer of artistic culture, important state administrator, member of all the Academies of Europe, and much decorated by chivalrous orders. Canina's work was essentially designed architecture. As Augusto Sistri wrote, his designs were "academic projects that can be considered the intermediary link between architectural doctrine and operative concreteness; important because they refer to the period when Canina's allegiance to being an architect was total" (A. Sistri, "Classicismo e classicismi nei progetti accademici di Luigi Canina", in *Luigi Canina architetto e teorico del classicismo*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 1995). Among his innumerable studies there is one that stands out -a round church of about 75 metres with a pair of free-standing columns in the centre holding up a cupola of the same diameter as the Pantheon's. "It appears to be a visionary edifice, Piranesian, but the young architect was possibly not able to completely control his rough draft. The columns were over thirty metres high and the doors, due to the rejection of the contrasts of scale of *architecture terrible* à la Boullée, should have been ten metres wide and twenty metres high". Rereading the works of Canina it seems that his intention was to render the mass of erudition on ancient architecture more cohesive. The epilogue to this attempt was the unfeasible Oropa project. It was the 1840s and the most effervescent debates in Europe were, as is well known, about styles and Canina, a contemporary of Antonelli's, took part in these debates dealing with sacred architecture. The Sanctuary of Oropa near Biella was the perfect playground for these discussions; it is a building which many architects in different eras have tackled, with alternating luck. Canina was appointed to carry out the project by the widowed Queen Maria Cristina in 1845. However, the work begun in 1848 soon came to a halt due to defects in the design found after building had begun and because the queen decided to put more money into the restoration of Altacomba. Canina and Antonelli did not get on well and had little contact with each other. They were considered among the outstanding exponents of local architectural culture and in fact kept an eye on each other, ready to take advantage of one another's failures, which is what Antonelli did when he proposed his own plans for the sanctuary of Oropa in place of Canina's right after Canina's death in 1856. But even Antonelli had no luck at Oropa and in 1877, in a type of design contest of the time; he saw the architect Ignazio Amedeo Galletti's design chosen over his. Canina was probably considered rather conceited by his Turin colleagues, a thing that happened to many professionals who reached certain renown. A student of Talucchi's and Bonsignore's, in 1843 he turned down the chair in architecture at Turin which had been held by Bonsignore saying, "Neither for reasons of interest nor of health would it be good for me to choose to take

the chair left vacant by Bonsignore at the University of Turin (...) because for interest I would greatly compromise myself in having less than what I can obtain working here; for honour I would still be compromised passing from being a master of architecture in the principal countries of Europe, who are pleased to have me as their consultant, to a teacher of young Turin students". Canina also stood in Antonelli's way professionally, blocking his proposals for the Cathedral in Casale Monferrato. The controversy between the two included almost every design and it did not die down over time. A design for an exercise by the young Canina, who proposed knocking down the Cathedral of Turin to make way for a new cathedral double the size of the San Giovanni Cathedral, was scathingly criticized by Antonelli ten years after the fact. Differently from Canina, Antonelli, who for his part proposed knocking down Palazzo Madama, left an important legacy -the Mole. It is a work that provides a response to every town's demand for a symbol to identify with and which "raises the profile of Turin". Thank goodness.



Alessandro Antonelli, *Oropa Sanctuary Plan of the Basilica*, 1876, black ink drawing on paper, watercolours 83,8x58,5 cm, inv. fl/5720, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin Courtesy of Fondazione Torino Musei

Alessandro Antonelli, *New Basilica for the Oropa Sanctuary, Plan of the Canina and Antonelli designs*, 1876, black ink drawing on paper, watercolours, 59,6x87 cm inv. fl/5719, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin Courtesy of Fondazione Torino Musei



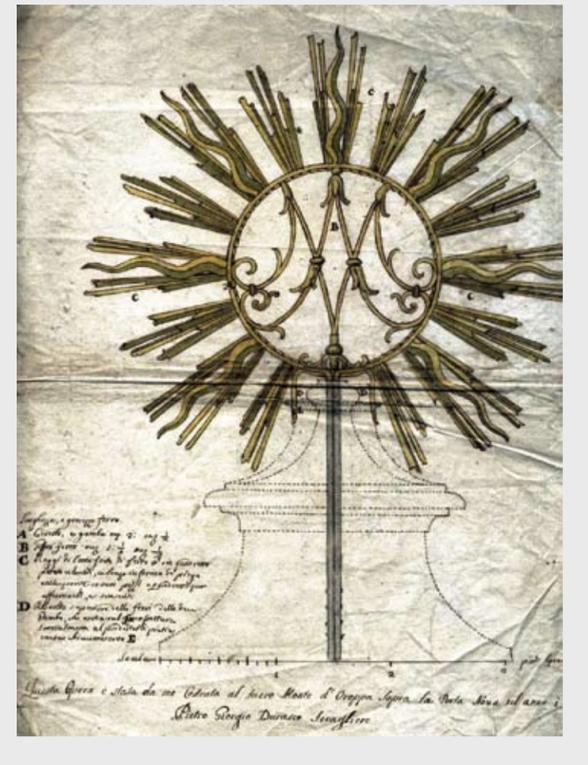
# Sacra MINIMA

Father Giuseppe Goi d.O.

This page is decorated like the previous one with architectural design sketches, linked to a major art; and coded with the accurate drawing of a smith, condemned to the minor arts. From the architect to the locksmith? Yes, but without any judgement on our part of its greater or lesser value. This is why at Oropa, one

may be moved more by some figures in cheap terracotta by d'Errico at the Sacred Mountain, than by Juvarra's bombastic Porta Regia at the Sanctuary. And also, passing to the 20th century one may admire religious articles produced for internal trade, like the indecently eccentric works of the designer Ambrogio Pozzi. We're not Zappatist priests. Here in Turin at San Filippo Neri, designed by Juvarra, we preserve the Altar Cloth, masterpiece by Piffetti; but our last purchase for MIAAO is a 1971 etching by David Gilhooly, the Californian Funk artist, dedicated to a large board -devotedly.

Pietro Giorgio Durasco, *The emblem of Oropa mounted above the Nuova Porta* 1729, sepia ink drawing on paper, watercolours, 51,1x33,1 cm, detail Maggia Fund, Fondazione Sella, Biella





Alberto Pozzallo/Studio Kha, *Little Treasure of Oropa*, 2008, photo of the store of mutilated, stolen and recovered terracotta pieces coming from the Chapels of the Coronation and of the Nativity of Mary Courtesy of Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Oropa

## The grand ceramics theater

Elisa Facchi

First a house, then the life of the Madonna. The Oropa Sanctuary, covered from the architectural point of view in the two previous pages, is in fact annexed onto the Sacred Mountain, built between 1620 and 1720 and divided into twelve chapels populated with polychrome terracotta statues depicting the story of the life of Maria. The two extraordinary complexes were registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003 along with other Piedmont and Lombardy Sanctuaries and Sacred Mountains. Creators of the inanimate "sacred representations" and the statues of the Chapels were artists such as the d'Errico brothers, Pietro Giuseppe and Carlo Francesco Auregio, 'the Galliani', Enzo Biffi Gentili, in these *Afterville* pages and with the exhibition held at MIAAO in combination with the XXIII UIA World Congress of Architecture in Turin 2008, entitled *The Grand Ceramics Theater*, has made a particular eccentric homage to the Baroque architecture and sculpture of Giovanni d'Errico, the ultimate "moulder" of fictile figures, among those who took part, together with various master painters, in erecting the mystical scenography of the Chapels of Oropa Sacred Mountain. Scenography is the most appropriate term in this case: a great Italian art critic, unfortunately no longer with us, Giovanni Testori, entitled one of his fundamental studies on the art of the Sacred Mountains *Il gran teatro montano* (The grand mountain theatre) (Feltrinelli, Milan 1965), which, according to Enzo Biffi Gentili, is the inspiration for *The Grand Ceramics Theater*. In his text Giovanni Testori writes that Giovanni d'Errico's sculpture is a "true carnal scandal or carnal shame", it is the product of a "visceral encumbrance"; it presents itself as a "plebeian intrusiveness", accentuated and softened by a "grim, wild irony: an irony that borders on mockery, but also very close to mercy". Therefore, "the plasticator's rage" of Errico manifests itself with "mountain, animal-like, earthy and even tribal violence" and "he renders everything traitorous, extreme and animal-like with his hands". Then times will change: after d'Errico, other sculptors softened that plastic fury and, according to Testori, Varallo, Oropa and other Sacred Mountains passed from the "sacred drama" to the "lithurgic ball". Impressive and very up to date. However, aside from the "literary" interpretation of Testori -which endorsed, according to Barbara Zandrino, the transformation of the artistic work into a verbal work and art critique into the novel- also another illustrious scholar, Lionello Venturi, in his chapter dedicated to the Sacred Mountains in his history of art entitled *Arte popolare in Piemonte e in Lombardia*, can lead, although from a different point of view, to consider the work of d'Errico as a prophetic anticipation of some of the results of contemporary ceramic sculpture. A daring yet persuasive thesis that by Biffi Gentili, if we examine the artefacts of the new Italian "figurative" school -even the deadly Madonna by Bertozzi e Casoni can be considered, in turn, as a *Black Virgin*- and that of the American school, whose leader was Robert Arneson (and here the old expression "popular art" by Venturi is not used in a diminutive sense, but almost predictive of Pop or Funk declinations).

Robert Arneson, *Portrait at 62 Years* 1992 bronze, edizion 2/3, 183x60x60 cm detail, Courtesy of Brian Gross Fine Art San Francisco, Photo by M. Lee Fetherer © Robert Arneson by SIAE 2008



# Naughty poses

Elisabetta Boviva interviews Enzo Biffi Gentili



Giampaolo Bertozzi and Stefano Dal Monte Casoni, *Scegli il Paradiso*, 1997 majolica, 196x190x85 cm, Photo by Bernardo Ricci

**The Grand Ceramics Theater exhibition put on by MIAAO, marks your big comeback, together with Luisa Perlo, as a curator of exhibitions of the ceramic arts. Some controversies will probably arise, as it already happened in the past: I remember the erotic and local one I was involved in after some ignoble ceramic works were shown in an exhibition; and a national political one, which arose after you showed an earthenware head of Mussolini at the *Alta temperatura* and *Alta gradazione* exhibitions at Castellamonte, in Piedmont, in 2004-05. But that was a little provincial town. Now, three years later in Turin, an international capital of design culture, will you manage another provocation? Perhaps. The first provocation is "disciplinary": it is an exhibition of the applied arts, which are still neglected as usual despite so much investment in the Turin, 2008**

Luigi Ontani, *Pilato Pelato dei Pelati*, 1996 majolica, Ø 70 cm, carried out by Bottega Gatti, Faenza Courtesy of Davide Servadei



World Design Capital events. There's a big difference between the harsh, original objects on display and the *narcissism* and *déjà vu* which dominates most similar exhibitions here south of the Alps. Luckily, we've been supported by the organisers of the XXIII World Congress of Architecture, who I'd like to thank. Presumably they have recognised one of our presiding geniuses, Giovanni d'Errico, a moulder and an architect who was great at Varallo. **To tell you the truth, I noticed your irritating approach -putting Baroque religious ceramic statues next to the most ambiguous contemporary American and Italian artworks. What "guiding thought" links the Oropa valley and California; or terracotta works in the Sacred Mountain Chapels, with Funk Art ceramics? Though this arrangement may not seem judicious, and in my opinion it was stimulated by a series of disturbing associations. Let's try to stir up**

Paolo Maione, *Lumacone*, 1996 polychrome earthenware, crystalline glaze 50x45x32 cm, Courtesy of Sperone Westwater, New York, Photo by Gianni Carini



## Ciau pitociu

Elisa Facchi

There was a time in Castellamonte, in the Canavese Piedmont which borders the Biella province, when the *Pitociu* swarmed above the roof tiles. A few remain today: terracotta idols of the benevolent sneer, half a metre tall, and a "grotesque talisman that adorns the roofs of the house or the garden... a superstitious guardian whose grimace and mouths are entrusted with the task of exorcising evil spirits... or to reclaim goodwill from the underworld in which the forces of good and evil are in conflict representing unknown destinies and paths" (P.P. Benedetto, "Ceramica fiabesca",

in *Il tempio ceramico*, Musumeci, Aosta 1997). The *Pitociu*, a modern *lar familiaris*, represents popular art and craftsmanship from a tradition from the 1800s and protects the houses where it is kept. An emblem of the little people and the image meaning continuity and change as skilfully researched by Fritz Saxl of the Warburg Institute of London and the University of Reading, it assumes an apotropaic and conciliatory function much akin to masks and totems, with specific connotations of the symbolic and caricature depiction typical of a fairy-tale and fantasy tradition, prematurely comical and Funk. The *Pitociu* can also be registered figuratively as a "Gnome" in the fantasy genre, and placed alongside the statues of the Sacred Mountain of Oropa on the virtual stage that we have set up in these pages, it does not seem out of place. In fact, in examining the functions, both the *Pitociu* and the Sacred Mountain's Saints must have had a

some more: as you know, one of the first to deal with the ceramic statuary at Sacred Mountains was Giovanni Testori, who wrote about "bad smells from Valsesia" concerning Varallo. Look up the word *funk*, originally from jazz, in Wikipedia: "in Afro-American slang means generally a bad smell, such as that coming from the body in a state of excitation", and a sort of expressionism in art which is "dirty" and "attractive" at the same time. For Testori, 16th and 17th century clay figures became bodies. Gaudenzio Ferrari and d'Errico intensified that carnality by adorning statues with real hair and beards. Even today the exponents of the Californian school, such as Arthur Gonzalez, attach human and animal hair and skin to their terracotta figures, some of which are religious, and are both sacred and execrable. In addition, Testori believed in the "scandalous" function of the sacred. According to Garth Clark, one of the leading critics of ceramics, Arneson aimed at "sacralising" the object, even when it was connected to intimate bodily functions... **This is suggestive, I agree; and a little disgusting. The decision of keeping aloof from the "deodorised", "entertaining" design dished up by the last generations of "dandies" is evident. But even concerning art, you seem to me to share a certain love for the "degenerations" typical of Testori, and you support West Coast Funk, even if it's rude, against Pop Art's slick and better known works.** Certainly. By the way, remember that Arbasino included Testori among the "grandchildren of Gadda" as a writer; although the latter's private life was cautious and without excesses. Yet even Carlo Emilio Gadda, when invited to a night-club in Rome -according to an anecdote in Arbasino's *L'ingegnere in blu*- began to ask hesitatingly, with his typical reserve, trembling and fears, about the suitability or not of the place. Among other questions, he asked "Will there be any of those coarse saxophonists playing?". When the reply was affirmative he had no more doubts and said "Let's go in then". He was one of ours. **Excuse me, which "ours"? I accept the fact that many of the Californians, beginning with the late great Robert Arneson, the head of the school, are programmatically "indecent". But the Italians who you've invited to *The Grand Ceramics Theater* seem "refined" by contrast.** Yes, but they're very "equivocal". Think about the virtuoso, hyper-real, true-to-appearance "hyper-aesthetic" of Paolo Schmidlin, the champion of a kind of "ceramics incarnation", certainly more refined and aristocratic than the "plebeian" aggression of many Americans, but it however "repels" even when the subject represented is not repellent by nature. Besides, a connection between his ceramics sculpture and that at Sacred Mountains has already been suggested by a very "sensitive" critic like Edward Lucie-Smith. **But there's still a difference between those American artists and these Italians...** This regards two different stages in the history of art and ceramics. The Californians, with Arneson, were the first to promote an "outrageous" neo-figurative school, which is still active today; and at the same time, to get recognised as "artists". In fact, at the first exhibition of Funk Art held in the atmosphere of the first Berkeley sit-in in 1967 (a horrible or tremendous year according to your taste); the exhibition curator Peter Selz invited several ceramicists. Such a rare occasion was unheard of in Europe (even if not in America: Peter Voulkos, an "abstract expressionist ceramicist", had already been included in contemporary art museums, with his students

at the Otis Institute, California, where he taught in the fifties). In Italy, in the sixties and seventies, figurative art was intolerable; it was necessary to wait for the eighties, and above all, for the nineties, before an anthropomorphic ceramic sculpture re-emerged in our country too. These works were characterised by a sophisticated thematic and technical affectation. Some of our "ceramicists" managed like this to be included, individually, in the so-called "major arts": for example: Bertozzi and Casoni, who exhibited at Sperone. And "respectable artists" like Luigi Ontani managed to produce outstanding innovative works in the majolica tradition at Faenza. **So now, Bertozzi and Casoni, with their celebrated Madonna, in *Scegli il Paradiso*, and Luigi Ontani, with his *St. Sebastians* and *St. Bernards*, and Livio Scarpella with his *Shrines*; can all be considered as bearers of the tradition, whether transfigured or "disfigured", of sacred statuary, as at Sacred Mountains? You see?** And not only these: think of the *Oracles* by Paolo Maione, or of Faenza, of Nero and of certain works by Alberto Mingotti, like his candid vermilion bust of a bleeding heart: a kind of ex voto religious object (I'm devoting a wall at MIAAO's Higher Gallery to such contemporary religious objects with those from Oropa, but always mixing the languages. In this way, I'll put some Baroque paintings next to a cyclist's jersey that poor Pantani donated to the Oropa Sanctuary, which they keep and exhibit). **How will all this be judged in what is now the Capital of Architecture, but also of Arte Povera in the past? It'll probably be judged as "grotesque", but I won't be offended. As you know, I called one of my exhibitions in the past *Viaggio attraverso la ceramica grottesca* (A trip through grotesque ceramics), and I'd already made references to Funk Art in the catalogue. *The Grand Ceramics Theater* also develops my reflection on an important tendency in the contemporary applied arts. Look at the "monsters" by Clayton Bailey shown at the exhibition. It's no coincidence that *The Grand Ceramics Theater* is promoted by the City of Biella, since the Sacred Mountain at Oropa is in its territory, and the Church of St. Sebastian is among its most important monuments: decorated by extraordinary grotesques. On the whole, everything is carrying on. **Best of luck...****

Paolo Schmidlin, *Ecce agnus*, 2006, polychrome terracotta, 54x67x60 cm Courtesy of Marena Rooms Gallery, Turin, Photo by Tommaso Mattina



Pablo Echaurren, *Presepe p-Artigiano* 2005, red earth and third-firing gold carried out by Sandra Baruzzi and Brenno Pesci, Castellamonte, Courtesy of SAA Turin, Photo by Francesco Radino



Alberto Mingotti, *La mano sul cuore* 2001, enamelled and painted terracotta 68x57x30 cm, Courtesy of Il Politico Rome, Photo by Giorgio Liverani

**“**  
**The continuous lurch between affectation and triviality...**  
**”**

Enrico Alpi, *Podestà of Faenza Il barocco e la sua influenza sulle arti minori ed in ispecie sulla ceramica*, 1929

# Californian funk



Robert Arneson, *I Have My Eyes on Me Endlessly*, 1992, bronze edition 1/3, 203x30x30 cm  
Estate of Robert Arneson  
Courtesy of George Adams Gallery, New York, and Brian Gross Fine Art, San Francisco

## Uncle funk

Luisa Perlo

If Pop Art is cool, Robert Arneson is hot. Born in Benicia, California, in 1930, he was a student of the famous ceramicist Antonio Prieto, at Mills College, Oakland who had already taught Peter Voulkos: the first American "to take Picasso's ceramics seriously" according to Neal Benzra. The promoter of a plastic revival enriched by abstract expressionism, he was a crucial influence in persuading Arneson to give up his "conventional" work and way of life. A ceramicist by chance, and a heretic by vocation, Arneson immediately showed his impatience with disciplinary restrictions. *No Deposit, No Return*, dated 1961, was a bottle made on a lathe, sealed with a cheeky beer bottle top. "I was going to be an artist. I wasn't going to be a potter" he would say twenty years later. The scatological sculpture *Funk John*, was more a reflection on the specific nature of pottery, rather than just a provocation. This first "toilet" by Arneson, which generated significant effects and controversy, is a symbol of his teaching at Davis University. It was obscene, like other works that followed, as well as a genial analysis of "Western Civilisation". Arneson would produce more Funk icons: the toaster, the typewriter with fingers instead of keys, the brick. In 1971, *Smorgi-Bob, the Cook* was the first work which turned his sarcasm against himself: portrayed as the cook at an excessive banquet. It was the first of a long large size series, including "sexualised" busts on pedestals, and self-portraits with distorted features portraying ironically the history of western sculpture. He was consecrated in the mid-sixties, when the Post-modern sensitivity recognised his greatness. Other conflicts, and the diagnosis of a tumour, led him to a darker existential vision in works based on political and environmental themes, until his death in 1992.

Joe Mariscal, *Joker*, 1985  
terra sigillata, slip, 53x51x53 cm



Luisa Perlo

In the fifties and sixties in California, extraordinary seismic phenomena took place in the terracotta world, where pottery was emancipated from its "minority" status by Peter Voulkos. His revolutionary plastic research, in the words of Richard Marshall, liberated a "generation of artists from restrictions and traditions imposed by ceramic history and technique". He maybe freed more than one generation. If his presence at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, "signaled the beginning of an upheaval in contemporary ceramics", his transfer to Berkeley, in 1959, made San Francisco Bay the epicentre of a renewal to make ceramics the distinctive language of an entire artistic scene. From his arrival onwards, San Francisco began to have a notable fascination for young ceramicists, faced in North California with a consolidated tradition of studio pottery. One of these was the thirty-year old Robert Arneson, the future leader of Funk Art. *Funk*, a widely used term, defines a type of rhythmic, improvised, rude but authentic jazz. Literally meaning a bad smell, the word assumes sexual connotations in Afro-American slang, defining the piquant, seductive scent of the aroused body. In

the fifties, it described the assemblages of a group of artists linked to the Beat movement -Bruce Conner among them- gathered around the Six Gallery of Wally Hedrick. Funk Art revealed itself as an anti-authoritarian and anti-cultural movement (after all they were in the homeland of student revolt and the Summer of Love). It reacted against the self-centredness of abstract expressionism, encouraged *in situ* by the authoritative teachings of Mark Rothko and of Clyfford Still. It celebrated the most unpleasant and grotesque aspects of day to day objects. Harold Paris, in the pages of *Art in America* in March 1967 summed up its philosophy as: "It's a groove to stick your finger down your throat and see what comes up". Despite the stink, it was a Professor Emeritus, Peter Selz, at the great eponymous exhibition at the Art Museum of the University of Berkeley, who consecrated it soon afterwards, tracing its Dada and Surrealist roots. Funk Art is commonly described as: sensual, irrational, organic, visceral, or irrev-erent; and its prerogative: sense of humour, vulgarity, absurdity, or irony. The work *Funk John*, in 1963, was idiomatic: inspired by a cup of water, defined by Arneson as "the ulti-

mate ceramic". Funk artists did not accept the world as it is, as did the aseptic Pop artists, or the European Nouveaux Realistes. Funk is characterised by a relation with the object which is not merely one of sampling. Among the diverse materials used in this respect, ceramics alloy the highest coefficient of invention -including linguistic invention- in antithesis to the anti-form and Minimalist developments taking place on the East Coast. New York was light years away, with its galleries, reviews and parties. Few exhibitions were organised in San Francisco, and artists' works were shown in studios to colleagues and rare collectors. What the system did not do, schools did -at last once. Davis University was the authentic cultural broth for Funk. At the beginning of the sixties, it was mainly a school of agricultural sciences with an ambitious art department. Arneson came here in 1962 with the responsibility to start up the ceramics program. Other exponents of Funk were teaching there, like William T. Wiley, Roy DeForest and the sculptor Manuel Neri (who in 1955 organised the first reading of the outrageous *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, at the Six Gallery). Bruce Nauman, one of the first students of the graduate program of art - with Arneson and Wiley as teachers- described the campus like this: "They had some old World War II barracks and they gave you, like, a bedroom in the barracks or something, and somebody else painted in the kitchen. They were big rooms, and it was really nice... It wasn't at all like a more organized school. (...) So you did have the encouragement of being in school". The epicentre of the ceramics department was Temporary Building 9, a metal building which was torrid in summer and freezing in winter. Arneson's studio was always open, and students could come and go. David Gilhooly was among them, and immediately enrolled as an assistant. "Working 16 hours or more a day in TB-9" wrote the artist's wife, Camille Chang, "the group hardly knew that the rest of the art world existed at all". Arneson transmitted the idea of a ceramic art liberated from the strait-jacket of disciplinary purism, without renouncing completely his functional role. In one of his frequent challenges to "cup making" Gilhooly created his first frogs, which would give shape to his *Frog World*. Funk, and that which followed it after the end of the sixties, when it had exhausted its potential to break with the past, formed a unicum in art in America, and probably in the world. In the following decade, Arneson's turn to "Statuary" remained grotesque, but was dense with illusions to the classical tradition. It was a vehicle for his obsession for self-portrait, and for his ironic homage to colleagues and masters -including Picasso and Bacon. It would be decisive in defining, in this university outpost, the direction of the figurative wave of ceramic research in the Bay area at that time and afterwards. Its antipodes represented in *The Grand Ceramics Theater* are on display at MIAAO, including the world of solemn dolls by the Canadian Marharet Keelan, and the bizarre *Demon Gargoyle* by the "crackpot" Clayton Bailey. Before settling in California, in 1968, Bailey had been the organiser at Vermilion, South Dakota, of the Funk Art Festival. Then his motto was "think ugly". Although at the beginning he dismissed the "ripped and torn" forms recalling Voulkos, the exhibition of Funk John at the Alan Stone Gallery in New York persuaded him to reveal his authentic personality. The results were the multi-coloured urinals and chamber-pots, like the *Small Breasted Nitepot* of 1965, with breasts "that titillate and frustrate the user, causing erotic stimulation". When Roy DeForest coined the term Nut Art to define an art made up of "phantasmagoric ideas and fantasies", the natural evolution of Funk, Bailey was its "worthy" representative. In 1969 Bailey founded the "Psycho-ceramic" church, whose objective was to spread "crackpot ideas", as well as to occasionally celebrate weddings: the further developments of which can only be imagined... Those artists continuing what can be considered as a tradition by now, are ex-Davis students such as Tony Natsoulas, the author of "larger than life" ceramic torsos in camp style, the monumental Lisa Reinertson, Arthur Gonzalez, devoted to the Baroque and the Pinocchio of Collodi, and the "outsiders" Claudia Cohen, with her "magic realism", Joe Mariscal, who has united references to his original Mexican culture to the language of Funk, and the younger Edith Garcia, inclined to experiment with artistic varieties of promiscuity...



Margaret Keelan, *House*, 2006  
terracotta, stanniferous enamel  
58x17x17 cm, detail  
Photo by Scott McCue



Claudia Cohen, *The Flaming Heart of the Suburbs*, 2002, polychrome terracotta and mixed media, 82x32,5x29 cm, detail

Arthur Gonzalez, *Sin Eater*, 1992, ceramic, cowhide, wood, slate, oil paint, rope, metal  
66x44x24 cm, Private Collection, New York



Tony Natsoulas, *Cajun Cardinal Kilchrist*, 2002, earthenware, slab built, 102x122x48 cm



Lisa Reinertson, *Mother and Newborn*, 2005, terracotta, 79x53x18 cm  
Courtesy of John Natsoulas Center for the Arts, Davis

“

Oh... how the senses become drunk on themselves!

”

BBPR, *Stile*, 1936

## The converted batrachian

Father Giuseppe Goi d.O.

Having been charged to write a few lines on a curious aspect of the work of a leader of the Funk movement: David Gilhooly, and not being well-versed in this subject, I resorted to a "basic" instrument: the *Contemporary Art Dictionary* by Martina Corgnati and Francesco Poli (Feltrinelli, Milan 1994). There, to begin with, under the heading Funk Art, I note that this is "a disagreeable art, characterised by the elaboration of very free works, along with ironic, kitsch elements, and materials such as ceramics, imitation leather, plastic and objects from everyday life. It also refers to sex

and religion...". All this applies specifically to the work of Gilhooly, who has already created an extraordinary *Frog World*. I also read that, according to the critic Suzanne Foley, his froggy ceramic universe "is virtually a parallel to that of man, and has had some surprisingly parallel religions...". For several years, Gilhooly, having abandoned the frog kingdom in 1996, now demonstrates, in works carried out with skilful mastery on paper (*Portfolio of Christ*, 2003) and in formally sophisticated, gilded assemblages, that the theme of religion has become dominant, and "crucial" for him. Not bad.

David Gilhooly, *L.O.G. Lamb of God*, 2000, plexiglas and found objects  
127x89x11 cm





Graphic picture from the catalogue *Funk Art*, edited by Peter Selz, University Art Museum, University of California Berkeley 1967

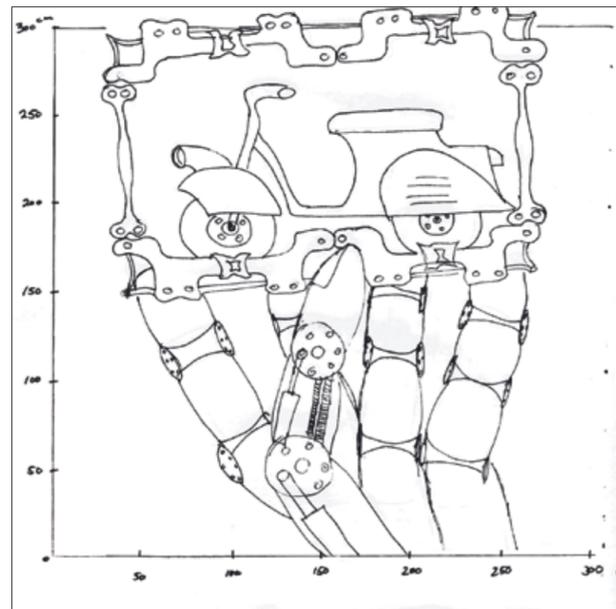
## Bugella pivella

### Doriano Raise

continuing from the first page tion of a number of prestigious names, including Gae Aulenti, who drew up the General Town Plan, Nino Cerruti, our own designer, in charge of the Colour Plan; Carlo Ravizza and Manuel Cargaleiro who, fifty years after its construction, are now completing the decoration of the Rivetti Swimming Pool. "Old boys" who are all approximately eighty years old, immensely bright and in touch with today's cultural trends. On another occasion, in the last issue of *Afterville*, while discussing Biella's design identity, I named others who are also to be regarded as our fathers, but who, alas, are now no more: illustrious ancestors including Futurist architect Nicola Mosso and Rationalist architect Giuseppe Pagano, commemorated in this magazine. The most recent developments of the BAU project, however, regard the young and the very young, both as professionals and users. One example is that of Diversi Associati, the twenty-something visual designers who have created the distinctive elements of our new city graphics. But there is more. Partly as a mark of homage to "youth subcultures", we are erecting a Monument to the Vespa - the legendary scooter which, as only few know, was born in Biella - in cooperation with the Mutoid Waste Company and iconic mod brand Fred Perry (which owns manufacturing facilities on our territory). For our teenagers we have built a Skate Park which is one of the largest in Europe. And for our children, we have transformed piazza del Monte in a galactic "theme square", drawing from that investigation into the relations between design culture and science-fiction imagery which is also behind the *Afterville* editorial project. In a nutshell, *Bugella pivella* is the inspiring principle of a project combining futurism with futurity, for Biella to be truly *bella*.

# Modes and Mods A Vespa way of life

Elisa Facchin



Lyle Rowell, Mutoid Waste Company, Sketch of the Monument to the Vespa at Biella, 2008



The heat is rising / The past is calling

The Who, *Quadrophenia*, 1973



The Turin Mod band Statuto, 1991, Photo by Fabio Nosotti



For a Mod (from *modernist* or *modern* jazz fan in fifties Britain) it is all a matter of details. Sober, sharp and stylish, he captures the best of contemporary fashion and adds a personal touch, in a continuous, almost obsessive, search for the perfect look with a "difference". Against standardisation "rage and style". Starting with clothes. The first *mods* drew inspiration from the American Ivy League look and the stylism of certain cutting-edge French, Italian and English labels (such as Fred Perry, today based in Biella): loafers or brogues for shoes, slim-fit flat-front trousers - just long enough to cover the socks - button-down shirts, polo shirts, pencil-thin ties, "trendy, three-button, single-breasted" (as quoted in the *Alba* catalogue, 1957) short suit jackets, protected by parkas. Details were then added and adjusted to taste, from the cuffs to the jacket splits, to the bottom of the trousers. Everything, though, had to be slim-cut, fitted, almost squeezed. A waist like a wasp. And a wasp, or a Vespa, as a way of life. Indeed, the Mods personalised their Italian scooters - trendy but also relatively cheap and long-lasting - with the same obsessive care as they did their looks. Perhaps as a counterpoint to the powerful bikes ridden by their Rockers rivals, they took it as far as it would go, adding countless wing mirrors and decorative lights, chrome decorations and various fixtures and fittings, to make each Vespa a unique custom-made vehicle, apart from the standardisation of mass production. The Mods as "metropolitan artisans", *ante-litteram* tuners, artists of assembly. And, indeed, when a decision is made, in Biella, to erect a monument as a testimony to the little-known fact that it was there, in the post-war years, that the Piaggio plant which made the Vespa prototype was based, there really was no doubt - at least for us lovers of applied art, public or private - that it had to be somebody who had dedicated his entire life and art to the assembly of mechanical components. And a choice was made to entrust the task to Lyle Rowell of the Mutoid Waste Company, who designed a mechanical hand, sticking out of the ground and holding one of the first Vespa models, tuned by famous Turin-based "curious artisans" Michele Guaschino and German Impache. As a highlight, to celebrate the erection of the Monument, in September 2008, there will also be a concert by Italian mod band Statuto. Nothing is by chance: it's all a matter of details, even in design culture.

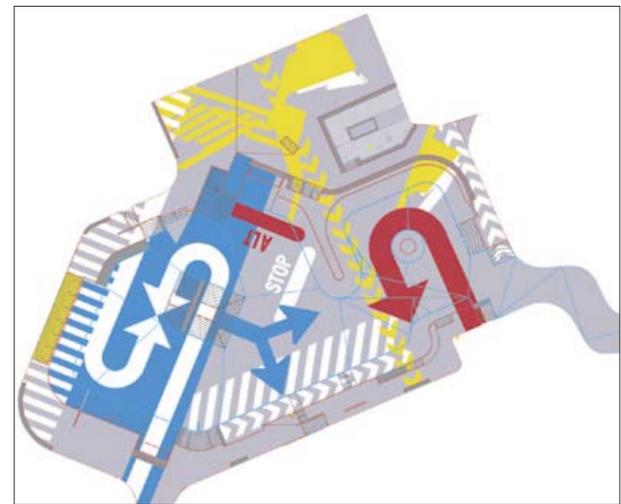
# Skate space

Antonio Pusceddu

"Skate and destroy" sang The Faction, a hardcore punk rock band that was born in the heart of the Californian skate scene in the early eighties. While it was legitimate to be young and angry then, it was also possible for skaters not to be always, somehow *anti*. Perhaps today it's more *alternative* to be indisciplined while seeking dialogue with institutions too. It works like that in Biella, where the inauguration of the biggest public open-air Skate Park in Piedmont is the first result of this type of youth politics. In fact, this project is the result of a participatory design model that has involved, in their roles as future beneficiaries: skateboarders, roller-skaters and bmxers, besides the Parks and Gardens Council Department. Their precise suggestions, based on their own dreams and needs, have been fundamental to invest the available resources as best as possible. The result is a 2000

square metres space-age Skate Park: divided into unified *quarter pipes*, enclosing a *street* area made up of *bank to bank*, *wall rides*, laid out at 360° lines on either side. Entirely built in concrete, with a quartz finish, the curves have been hand-finished with steel coping and rails to allow all kinds of *tricks*. The unique nature of this Skate Park, which is already excellent from the technical point of view, will be confirmed by an innovative decorative project. With the aim of constructively channelling typically artistic youth impulses, from graffiti to tag writing to Street Art, it is proposed to have the Skate Park decorated by the youth who will use it, under the supervision of graphic designers experienced in the area. The first proposal has come from Meat Collettivo Grafico: with a horizontal system of signs made up of arrows, stripes, and coloured hyper-tracks, bringing typical urban signs into the Park.

Meat Collettivo Grafico, *Architectures for the Skate Park worked out as part of the BAU Biella Arredo Urbano project*, 2008



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### AfterVille number 3

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Edith Garcia  
Valeria Garuzzo  
David Gilhooly  
Padre Giuseppe Goi d.O.  
Arthur Gonzalez  
Guarino Guarini + Filippo Juvarrà + Margaret Keelan  
Maurice Lesna  
Arrigo Lora Totino  
Federico Maggia + Paolo Maione  
Joe Mariscal  
Meat Collettivo Grafico  
Alberto Mingotti  
Leonardo Mosso  
Nicola Mosso + Tony Natsoulas  
Ciccio Nero  
Luigi Ontani  
Giuseppe Pagano + Paolo Portoghesi  
Antonio Pusceddu  
Ugo Quarello  
Carlo Ravizza  
Chris Redfern  
Lisa Reinertson  
Sandro Maria Rosso + Lyle Rowell  
Paolo Schmidlin  
Ettore Sottsass + Sottsass Associati  
Bernardo Vittone +



Clayton Bailey, *Fire Breathing Demon Gargoyle*, 1998, gres porcelain, glass, copper, electric light 46x38x25 cm

## BAUUU

tabula gratulatoria

The BAU Biella Arredo Urbano (Biella Street Furniture) project was officially launched by the City Council's resolution no. 570, on 5 December 2006. This appointed Enzo Biffi Gentili as the consultant for the planning of Biella's street furniture. The Street Furniture Office (UAU Ufficio Arredo Urbano) was subsequently set up by the Town Planning, Street Furniture, Parks and Gardens Council Department, (which now includes Culture), chaired by Doriano Raise. UAU is included as one of the responsibilities of the Local Area, Environment and Sports Programme Sec-

tor, whose present organization chart is as follows: Graziano Patergnani: Head Manager; Raffaella Penna: Technical Officer; Antonio Pusceddu: Technical Instructor; Cristina Rizzi: Technical Instructor; and Alberto Rainero: external collaborator for rendering. The Urban Colour Plan has been drawn up by Alberto Cecca, Technical Officer. As Doriano Raise was also appointed to chair the Culture Council Department in 2008, Patrizia Bellardone, the Head Manager of the Culture and Education Sector is also collaborating with the Street Furniture Office. Rinaldo Chiola, the Councilor for Technological Innovation, Demographic Services, Education, Sport, and Youth Policies; and Alberto Zola, Councilor for Cooperation for Development, Participation, Transport, University and Tourism; are also contributing to help in these aspects of the BAU project. This apparently bureaucratic list of functions is really by way of giving thanks. Further particular thanks are due to the representatives of the Riserva Naturale Speciale del Sacro Monte di Oropa, including Doriano Raise, its Chairman, and Oliviero Girardi, its Director. Besides thanks are due to the Piedmont Region for its important cultural support by making available precious art works from the Oropa Chapels and Sanctuary for the exhibition *The Grand Ceramics Theater. BAU+MIAAO*; as well as for its material support. The Oropa complex is in the area of Biella City Council, and is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage of Humanity Site. So we must carry on caring for, enhancing and publicising this Heritage of ours, as we've begun to do.

