

# Stories of Architecture: Cavalieri Square and Largo Rolli in Rome

The reclamation, tutelage and protection of masterpieces of architecture, contemporary or not, can give new life to the sociopolitical and cultural rebirth to the Capital.

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**Commenta**

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In Rome, the abandon of the politics of the city, the "agreed" urbanism, which started from the suburbs that deserves a separate discussion, created the difference and the degradation that we are attending but it was started far before the economic crisis. Even in an environment where the answer to which was the politics of the public space is extremely wanted, which is the sign of public projects and main center of urban quality, integrates my story: requalification of two squares of rare beauty, Largo Rolli and Cavalieri Square, today they are in conditions of complete abandon along to the decree and the negligence of the present time. The requalification of these two squares finished in Rome during 2000 deserves a particular attention for the uniqueness of their two fountains, the Giant and the Yellow Sculpture, that we are trying to protect from indifference and degradation.

I remember that the two squares were born in an atmosphere that Rome was seeing for the first time, as object of many interventions of requalification of the public space, with designers of public administration put side by side with external professionals. After

conventions realized between administration and private authorities, in our case the ANDIL Assolaterizi, came out the executive project. The board of the site stayed Garden Services of Municipality of Rome, while we provided the artistic direction of the two fountains free of charge, occupying entirely of their realization. The authenticity of the idea of these spaces is on psychiatrist Massimo Fagioli, to whom we were addressed with my colleagues Francesco Mirone and Corrado Landi. The author gave us as a gift these specifically created drawings in relation with the places that we were going to requalify and the project developed with every meeting we did during the whole time of realization of these works, in particular of the two sculpture-fountains. Architecture of the squares grow together with these two pieces of art, the Giant and the Yellow Sculpture, and exactly the uncertainty to describe them as fountains or sculptures make me think of the richness of the fountains in the history of our cities, that the whole world is jealous about the fusion of architect-artist work that created the architectonic space with its monument.



Largo Rolli, situated in the first section of Portuense Street, which is not far away from the antique Porta Portese, is an area of connection between Trastevere, Marconi and Testaccio districts. The area is a long rectangle of 4100 smq where the market of Sunday of "Porta Portese" still goes until the current square. We were in charge of transforming the space to a big square which has an urban character and to an area of

heavy transit with a budget of 600.000.000 million old liras (300.000 €) .

The idea of the author was to bring the design of the flooring over the all area, preserving also the roadway in part, because the project was born as an arrangement in grand-scale including the adjacent space. The stylized image is a woman, in granite black, with raised arms and a wide elliptical head in light brick. The drawing of the flooring was removed at the time of the execution by the Garden Services and never realized entirely even if it was designed and subcontracted. The rectangle of the square, realized in red brick is passed through by signs that were not completed. The design remained latent. The space is well delineated from the edge to the rows by Gincko Biloba is alternated with an enclosure and with the street lights designed by Renzo Piano for the Lingotto di Torino, meanwhile the internal side is furnished with robust benches. The fountain, in gold-plated bronze, is an arc of 16 meters long and 8 meters high, with four transparent cups which are placed on a steel beam. And they bring the water into the cavity of two springs which extends from the travertine basin to the base of the artwork.

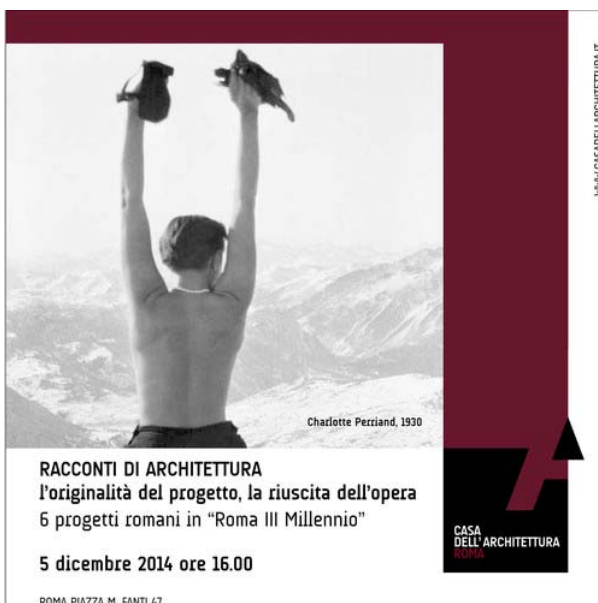
Cavalieri Square is very different, it is a small square of 1800 smq in the Villa Bonelli area, realized with nearly 450.000.000 million old liras. This time we were supposed to realize a neighborhood square and it was about an intervention of requalification of the suburbs, where the people reside and live daily, where the square becomes finally a place of meeting, of encounter. The sculpture, the Giant, is placed at the center of the square where the design of an octagon is the propulsive center of the geometry which extends to the whole space between the buildings. Eight fingers of a big hand touches the whole surrounding leaving an area at the center for the garden. The percentage of the square

and the garden are the same as the streets in order to eliminate every obstruction, enlarging the space of the square and giving a place of quality to the neighborhood life. The path around the fountain is furnished with four "peanut" shaped benches, realized with travertine bases and high, curve sectioned seatbacks with wood staves of Iroko which revealed a perfect relation with the human body.



I think that these squares brought back the centrality of art to the city, which is absolutely rare, not just in the contemporary city but also in Rome and as we well know here it is a different case. Above all, in the area of requalification of the suburbs, of the spaces and their artworks I can't find any other courageous and generous examples like this case. A reaction came out in front of the high level reached at that time and with the disorientation of these days which is both cultural and political: to propose again, in a convention, the originality of the architectural project and the success of the work, but not as it's last defence. Because Rome, an extraordinary city for it's creative wealth that was characterized by centuries of history, was opened to a confrontation with contemporary architecture in a singular way; because

here, more than anywhere else, doing architecture requests a continuous confrontation between story and contemporaneity and it cannot be excluded from a research of originality. The lecturers of the convention, all belonging to a new and careful generation, told the expressive originality of the architectural profession in the realization of the works, "to know how to construct" which is a culture and not a technique. Appeared a very rich, energetic and informed identity of pursuing a profession which is an essential relation that needs a confrontation with the society and, in a sense, it is doing politics: doing art is a cultural choice. Maybe this is truly the actual point of the meeting: to propose again a debate with the city that is abandoned for a while; because the confrontation encourages and realizes a critical point of view which is absolutely necessary in these days.

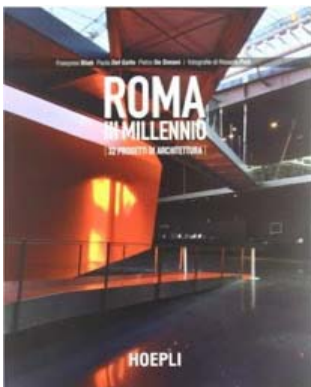


Stories of architecture: originality of the project, the success of the work. Six roman projects from "Roma III Millenio" is the title of the convention hold in the house of architecture in Rome the last 5th December. The appeal and the opening of some initiatives promoted by arch. Flavio Mangione (CTS Casa dell'Architettura) on some topics about the city and art proposed the emotion of the almost literary evenings of Bruno Zevi, where the courage to defend the originality in architecture didn't have fear to reveal, which was our motivation to propose this meeting with Paola del Gallo and Corrado Landi. To describe the originality of an



architectural project and its success through the story of the designers: Jeremy King and Riccardo Roselli (Lateranense Library), Luigi Franciosini (Trojan's Forum), Enrico Da Gai (Biblioteca Herziana), Daniela Gualdi (Largo Rolli and Cavalieri Square), Maria Claudia Clemente-Studio Labics (Città del Sole). Promoted by the scientific technique committee of the House of Architecture, cured by architect Paolo Del Gallo, coordinated by journalist Simona Maggiorelli, managing editor of science and culture of Left, the meeting saw the participation of Paolo Masini, the council member of public works of the Rome Municipality, of Alberto Saibene from the Hoepli publishing house, of architect Flavio Mangione for the introduction and Ugo Tonietti from the University of Florence for the conclusion.

Starting point of the selection of the proposed projects in small dimension with a strong originality is the book of Francaise Bliet, Paolo Del Gallo and Piero De Simoni, "Roma III Millennio" (Ed. Hoepli) because of its particular vision for the transformations that happened in our city in the last years, concentrated exactly on the originality of the architectural project and on the possibilities in which we studied and believed. The proposed projects review the historic city, like Lateranense Library, but also the consolidated areas of the city or the suburbs, like the public spaces of Largo Rolli and Cavalieri Square, contribution of the new like Città del Sole or the high school of Aranova, but also the regeneration of the existing with the Trojan's Forum and the Biblioteca Herziana. We asked to the lecturers to tell and deepen the choices they made that were fundamental for the success of the work, starting from the origin of the idea, as a result of a personal relation with the space, with others, with the context, with history, with construction, until that work of artistic passion realized a work of architecture which, due to its nature, is always in precarious balance between art and function. We were talking about architects, distant voices from today's formal agreements, capable to grasp a request not oftenly expressed to give shape to a necessity or to create it. The answer of the lecturers and of many colleagues in the hall, along with the gratitudes came in the following days, was a precious answer: the meeting was very motivative for its considerations and a unique occasion of confrontation in difficult days like these.



I follow the theme developed in the meeting: to pursue the project of a work with artistic passion, to resist to the standardization of the usefull, to give a shape to the originality of an initial idea is the identity of the profession of architecture. It is to know how to do, which is a personal perception, a culture and not a technique. In front of the original drawings, the answer came out with making plastics and models by hands, even

before the executive drawings. The design work for two sculptures was in two different ways: while the Giant needed a project of an internal figure of a steel structure, following the proportions of the shape and the dynamics of the volumes which were already delineated by the design, the lines of the sign of the Yellow Sculpture were waiting to gain its dimensions, its thickness. So we designed an arc with two hinges with double

wavy beams which holds four cups, inclined to 45° like a simple gesture of a person who holds a bowl in his hands. Then we followed the realization works of the two sculptures-fountains, starting from the metal carpentry made in Naples, to the fusion of the bronze with dropped wax in the artistic foundry of Anselmi&Sons in Rome, and after that the execution of an antique technique for the realization of modern images was an extremely rare and fascinating experience. We discovered the enthusiasm of the artisan, the manufacturer and the executors and the commitment they provide with such particular passion in making these works. The parts of the sculptures arrived in the construction site with special transport and with such ways that only Renaissance companies were adequate and we started the phase of assembling. The climate and the waiting was like those of a delicate operation or an inauguration.

At that point, as we said in the theme of the convention, the work goes in marriage and architecture becomes experienced. So we have to ask ourselves how much does an immaterial image in an inanimated object appears visible, which can be destabilizing of a "normality" who refused the human fantasy. Or to the contrary, if the success of the work can be a success of everybody and become the identity of the citizens. After finishing the works and after years have passed there was a treatment of big interest, curiosity, surprise from the inhabitants but also from the pedestrians and tourists who still go to visit the very centralized Yellow Sculpture. Also the roman architectural culture had experienced immediately a particular relation with these works, it is enough to mention prof. Muratore who recently expressed himself like this: "There is an extraordinary thing in Ettore Rolli street, there is a modern monument signed from a hidden personality, who left us an extraordinary sign, very courageous, the courage of the images that we were speaking earlier: it is one of the modern contemporary works, maybe the most significant one made in the last decades in Rome".

In the ninties, just after the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of a divided city, became possible again to talk about the beauty of the city, of qualification of the suburbs, of the connection between public space and art: they were those years of the years of important international competitions, years of research and of a culture of the city that reached very high levels. But what happened after that? In 2006, with the approval of the ex president of the Municipality ex XV, who believed that the sculpture was too big for the dimensions of the square, the Giant was demolished, with the displeasure of a many citizens. In these years we worked in vain with the administration to confirm the reallocation of the sculpture in different urban places, but beyond economic difficulties, we realized that the fountain-sculpture, merged to the dimensions of that space and of the neighborhood, was losing its uniqueness in elsewhere. For many years also the fountain of Largo Rolli, as the whole square, is without any minimum manutention and it is under the risk of suffering the same destiny of the other one.

In front of this indifference, of this cultural and political loss, we have to ask ourselves how not to fail a fundamental research, not just for the city but for all our lives. And us, architects, as we always work in relation with others, we know that it is necessary to aim those generally denied human needs, instead they are source of a common identity and a recognizable society.

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