

INsights INTERVIEW

P38. BODIES, OBJECTS, SPACES AND IMAGES

by Maddalena Padovani

STEFANO BOERI, PRESIDENT OF **TRIENNALE DI MILANO**, NARRATES HIS **PROJECTS FOR THE FUTURE** OF THE INSTITUTION: THE NEW **PERMANENT MUSEUM** OF DESIGN, THE CREATION OF A **NETWORK** OF CULTURAL PLAYERS IN THE CITY, THE **RETURN** TO THE ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPTION OF THE PALAZZO DELL'ARTE

"I always remember the photograph of a lady sitting in the American pavilion at the International Triennale of 1951. She is very elegant, with a timeless style, but she also lets you imagine an unconventional leaning, a taste for

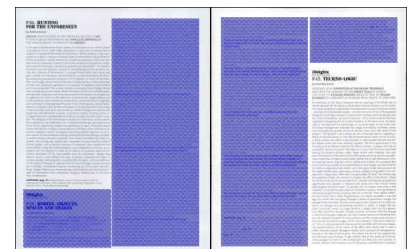
taking risks. The Milan Triennale, in my view, is precisely that: a lady with her share of years behind her, but with a very contemporary spirit, she expresses grace and elegance, and at the same time a certain irreverence." Stefano Boeri is an internationally renowned architect, but first of all his is a Milanese architect, a direct descendent of that generation of designers that wrote the history of Italian design in Milan (his mother is the famous designer Cini Boeri), for whom the Triennale has always been a cultural reference point. His plans for this important institution, where he was appointed president in February 2018, cannot help but start with a personal narrative. "I associate the Triennale with many memories, connected with my mother, the Compasso d'Oro, various moments of childhood. One of my very first experiences 'in the field' dates back to 1993, the period when the Triennale was doing nothing, living through the dark days of the Tangentopoli scandal. With Cino Zucchi and Giampiero Bosoni we organized 'Three Views of Milan': three days of discussions about the city and its future. It was a very important moment. After that experience I was called in by Piero Derossi to work on the curating of the 19th Triennale, in 1996; later, I continued to work with the institution as a curator, first during the presidency of Alfredo De Marzio and then during that of Augusto Morello. Finally, in 2002, I organized the large exhibition 'Uncertain States of Europe' that linked back to one previously held in Bordeaux, together with Rem Koolhaas. From that moment on, for various reasons, my involvement with the Triennale decreased, at least in operative terms."

What viewpoint do you intend to bring with you in this position?

I believe that first of all the Triennale should go back to being a major institution of international culture, as it was in the past. This means not only encouraging collaboration with other important institutions abroad, but also producing major cultural events that have an international profile. For this reason I am trying to create a dialogue between the Triennale and other major Milanese and national institutions, like Teatro alla Scala, the Piccolo Teatro, the Pinacoteca di Brera. I am convinced that the Palazzo dell'Arte, the home of the Triennale, is a unique building. The work done so far to conserve and enhance it has all been of high quality. But today we can afford to take another step, to recover the extraordinary flexibility this building designed by Giovanni Muzio had in the beginning. Not only due to its multidisciplinary character, but also and above all in terms of spaces. At the moment of its opening, in 1933, it included a theater, various exhibition rooms, a ballroom, spaces for encounters; the relationship with the park was very strong and important. I believe that the distinctive characteristic of this institution is precisely the architecture, and this is where I intend to begin.

Would you tell us about the young curators you have called in for the new developments? Who are they and why were they chosen?

As I was saying, the Palazzo dell'Arte is a very powerful work of architecture, almost monumental, conceptually different from other famous museums like the Beaubourg, which are made as an architectural representation of flexibility. It embodies great spatial intelligence inside, which permits it to be very flexible. I believe that inside this massive body, which nevertheless has an agile core, we should not identify specific disciplinary areas, but imagine 'tensions' between different areas of research. These are represented by four curators who are not limited to one discipline in a specific way. I thought about Joseph Grima because in recent years he has demonstrated great sensitivity to all the creative processes that have to do with objects. Thanks to his experience in the theater, Umberto Angelini seemed like the right person to continue to represent the arts that have to do with the body in the Triennale. Lorenza Baroncelli focuses on space, thanks to many years of experience in the field of architecture and urban regeneration. Then I thought



about a fourth curator who would allow me to address the theme of images, seen in terms of new media but also television, cinema, photography and visual arts, beyond the confines of contemporary art. From this standpoint, Myriam Ben Salah seems like one of the most interesting figures at the moment. My reasoning focused on objects, bodies, spaces and images, instead of the traditional disciplines. And I must say that what has already emerged from the first meeting of the group is very interesting.

What are your projects and ideas for the Museum of Design?

The idea on which Joseph Grima is working is that of a permanent design museum, which would display the collection of the Triennale in a stable manner. The objects we have are truly extraordinary and it seems only right, beyond the choice of a specific theme, for them to be able to tell their story. In the world there are museums that have collections that are three, four, five times more important than that of the Triennale; but we have the largest and most complete collection of Italian design, and it should rightfully be enhanced. Think about the figure of Gio Ponti, for example. A protagonist who

made design, arriving from interior architecture, and came to grips with the decorative arts, fashion, set design. This helps us to understand that there are crossover values and stories in our DNA, that deserve to be explored in all their individuality. And the Triennale, precisely due to its original purpose of representing all the forms of art, is undoubtedly the right place to narrate the many meanings of Italian design.

Today everyone says that design is something else and much more than just objects for the home. Yet you are emphasizing this inimitably Italian vision...

I believe strongly in this, because I think it expresses the material dimension of creativity. I think useful objects exert symbolic power on our imaginary, unique and indispensable. Above all in a world that constantly stimulates us with immaterial flows and rapidly passing images. But the design museum will be the work of Joseph Grima: he will be the one who reveals his ideas on the matter.

The next edition of the International Triennale, curated by Paola Antonelli and entitled "Broken Nature," will completely shift the focus: from furniture design to critical design. What are the objectives?

We are talking about an event that happens every three years, of true international scope, whose objective is to conduct research and experimentation. "Broken Nature" proposes a theme that is really crucial for our future: what can we do to restore to nature what we have taken away? This is also a fundamental question for architecture and design, which will have to find a direction to make the relationship between nature and artifice into a hybrid once again. We should give credit to president De Albertis, my predecessor, for having revived the international exhibition. This is a parallel path with respect to the research on the future we have to conduct in our everyday activities. It is a very interesting dual opportunity, which not all institutions are lucky enough to have.

Do you believe the Triennale has unfulfilled potential from the viewpoint of urban planning?

Definitely. The Triennale exists in relation to the small, beautiful Parco Sempione, located in the center of the city, faced by various important public institutions connected with art and culture. They include the Sforza Castle, Teatro dal Verme, the Piccolo Teatro, the Arena Civica, the customs houses of Arco della Pace, and if we widen the radius we reach Teatro Litta, the Last Supper, Fondazione Feltrinelli... I would like all these realities, in their individual, independent ways, to work together to construct shared moments and events. For example, it would be possible to organize programming where with a single ticket, for one day only, people could visit an exhibition, see a theater piece, hear a concert and see dance performances, and then take part in a cultural debate, and so on. This too is a unique possibility for Milan.

From BookCity to PianoCity, all the way to Milano Arch Week: there are various initiatives you have backed that connect Milan to design and creativity, building on the success of the FuoriSalone. How do you interpret this phenomenon that sets Milan apart on an international level?

In 2012 I wrote a little book titled "Fare di più con meno" (Doing more with less) in which - in a moment of great crisis in which resources were reduced to a minimum in Milan - I wrote about how our city could be a great factory of diffused culture. I asserted that the job of institutions was to produce culture, but also to make room for what was already being produced and simply required visibility, not financing. BookCity and PianoCity came about precisely like that: as a call to action in relation to the energies Milan possessed, which simply had to be put on stage.

The perception around the city is that Milan is going through a period of great innovation. Do you think that is effectively the case?

Absolutely, and I find confirmation when I travel. In South America and the

United States, in China and India. We are ones who have to convince ourselves that we are not living a temporary performance, but a stable, long-term situation. From there we can look forward, without running the risk of becoming arrogant and pretentious.

CAPTIONS: pag. 38 Clockwise: the audience of *Milano Arch Week 2018* in the garden of the Milan Triennale; view of the *Palazzo dell'Arte*; the *Bagni Misteriosi* of *Giorgio de Chirico, 1973*, in the garden of the Triennale; portrait of *Stefano Boeri*, president of the Triennale since February 2018. Photo *Gianluca Di Iola*. **pag. 39** Above, a model posing in the *US Pavilion* designed by the studio *BBPR* for the *10th Milan Triennale* in 1951. Photo *Farabola*.

pag. 40 Images of several projects to represent the *22nd International Exhibition of the Milan Triennale "Broken Nature: Design Takes on Human Survival"* curated by *Paola Antonelli* (from 1 March to 1 September 2019). Below, "*Bruises: The Data We Don't See*" by *Giorgia Lupi*. Lower left, "*The*

Iuventa" by *Forensic Oceanography and Forensic Architecture* (photo courtesy: the artists); "*Current Power in Syria*" by *Sigil* (photo *Yaseen al-Bushy*); "*Reindeer in Lapland*" by *Kristina Parsons*. **pag. 41** The four curators appointed by *Stefano Boeri*. Clockwise from top: *Lorenza Baroncelli* for architecture, urban regeneration and the city, also in charge of artistic coordination; *Umberto Angelini* for the section on theater, dance, performance and music; *Myriam Ben Salah* for new media, visual arts, photography, cinema, television; *Joseph Grima* for design, fashion and crafts. The appointments followed that of *Carlo Morfini*, general director of *Fondazione La Triennale di Milano*. Other projects on view at the upcoming *International Triennale "Broken Nature."* From left: "*Italian Limes*" by *Studio Folder* (photo *Delfino Sisto Legnani*); "*Seated Design*" by *Lucy Jones* (photo *Zhi-Wei*); "*Krebs Cycle of Creativity*" by *Neri Oxman* (courtesy of *The Mediated Matter Group*). Above, "*Trinitite*" by *Gabriel Ruiz-Larrea* (photo *Enformable Nuclear News*; courtesy of the author).