

The background of the entire page is a detailed, sepia-toned aerial map of Rome, Italy. The map shows the city's layout, including the Tiber River, the Colosseum, and various ancient ruins and modern buildings. The map is divided into a grid of small squares, giving it a textured, mosaic-like appearance.

# Public Art Summit

## Strategies for Urban Public Art

New York 17-18 February 2005

Rome's Public Art  
what's new  
prospective strategies



# Public Art Summit

## Strategies for Urban Public Art

New York 17-18 February 2005

Rome's Public Art  
what's new prospective strategies

COMUNE DI ROMA  
Sindaco Walter Veltroni

ASSESSORATO ALLE POLITICHE CULTURALI  
Assessore Gianni Borgna  
Relazioni internazionali Rosella Bennati

SOVRAINTENDENZA BENI CULTURALI  
Sovrintendente Eugenio La Rocca  
Direzione tecnica Maurizio Anastasi

# Public Art Summit “Strategies for Urban Public Art”

New York, 17-18 February, 2005

## Rome’s Public Art: what’s new, prospective and strategies

Maurizio Anastasi\*

### 1. Premise

Facing issues that interact with the socio cultural aspects deeply rooted in the cities history is speaking of Public Art in Italy and Rome.

The city cannot be dissociated by its evident historic roots or by the cultural heritage on which the cities art is based upon.

Indeed the role of architecture and urban planning, at the core of the territories development in the aftermath of the war, cannot be underestimated.

Urban art together with the street art and it’s artists is a western overseas heritage, nevertheless it has now days become part of us and our daily life, changing the citizens approach to art.

Paintings and sculptures overwhelm museums and invade the streets where people accept and identify art as an enrichment of their souls and the environment.

Indeed Rome and its history have disseminated Public Art in the world, the commonplaces of the city show a citizens day to day approach to art.

### 2. Historic Public Art

The roman citizen does not notice the art that surrounds him, unless pointed out. Historic Public Art present in the central streets of Rome such as classic obelisks, horse shape statues and fountains witness the bond between the artistic development and the urban development of the city which spreads innovation. Two excellent examples are the “Barcaccia” of Bernini and the “Quattro Fontane” of Borromini<sup>1</sup>.



---

\* Maurizio Anastasi, architect, head of Cultural Section of the Technic Office of Rome.

<sup>1</sup> Bernini and Borromini are the most important artists of the Barocco period in Rome. They were often antagonists, their works deeply influenced Rome’s architecture.

Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), sculptor and architect; among his most famous work pieces are: Apollo and Dafne kept in the Borghese gallery, the Quattro Fiumi fountain located in Piazza Navona, the canopy in Saint Peters and the round porch before the church of Sant’Andrea al Quirinale.

Francesco Borromini (1599-1667), architect. Among his most famous works are: the church of Sant’Agnese in Agone and that of San Carlino near the Quattro Fontane, the dome of Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza.



Perhaps the Barocco art of Rome allows art to become more customary, thanks to it's ability of blending in with the city.

History inspires the excellence of the senses between divine and terrestrial or the joy and pain that only art can infuse, which is witnessed daily by Rome's historic role.



The column of Traiano which has been erected since 2000 years is a message that highlights unforgettable events and the celebration of power<sup>2</sup>.

This column symbolises urban decoration and part of Public Art.

### 3. Rome's modernisation

After years of slumber the relation between Rome and a revised culture of modern architecture is developing.

The new General Planning outlines expansion and completion schemes, consequently the cities assets of the next decade can be foreseen thanks to architectural interventions.

<sup>2</sup> The column erected in the roman Foro was built to celebrate the actions occurred during the war in 105 AC of the emperor Traiano (98-118 AC). Today this column is at the core of a future programme for the urban renewal through the recovery of the Napoleonic hemicycle.



The residential and productive development is essential but, according to a prescriptive and normative scheme strictly bonded to the protection of the environmental and the artistic and archaeological heritage of Rome also the cultural programming role is extremely significant. The *Auditorium* of Renzo Piano, the *Ara Pacis* of Richard Meyer, the future *Congress centre* of Massimiliano Fuksas, the location of the *Mercati Generali* based on the model of Rem Koolhaas, the *glass cover* in the Capitolini museums of Carlo Aymonino, the projected of Tommaso Valle of the new *Exposition centre*, the *museum of contemporary art* of Odile Decq and the *Gallery of contemporary art* of Zaha Hadid are only some of the present and future plans which have and will give a new shape to the city, re-educating the citizens to a modern architecture that for far too long has been absent.



Clockwise: Auditorium of Renzo Piano, Ara Pacis of Richard Meyer, Gallery of contemporary art of Zaha Hadid, Contemporary art museum of Odile Decq, Fair centre of Tommaso Valle, Congress centre by Massimiliano Fuksas.  
At the centre: glass cover of the roman garden in the Capitolini museums of Carlo Aymonino.

All the forms of contemporary art find fertile grounds, thanks to architecture, slowly sneaking in the city with products that create new active scenarios.

Permanent and fleeting architectonic actions together with every single event have expressed the continuous change of a culture that is the worlds urban cultural heritage.

The city, a place for experience.

Art sneaks in the centre and in the outskirts of the city proposing a different interpretation of the urban space and communication. Indeed in the suburban settlements, art is the only element for development and urban reconstruction.

Art can substitute history in the outskirts fostering a high quality level that often lacks in modern urban settlements, in this case art entails the role of the enlargement of the city undertaken in the past by historic monuments, architecture and archaeological sites.

Let us think at Sisto's V project or the streets axes which built the city based on one of the first modern urban plans of Rome or even more, the famous trident statue located near churches, fountains or buildings that spreads all over the city regardless the standard rules and regulations of Rome's structure<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. A new approach

The lack of contemporary art, due to the importance of history, did not prevent an artistic evolution that thanks to the worlds globalization expresses itself in the most varied forms. The *on the road* experience and the results of *land art* (meaningful expressions linked to the cities architectonic and urban structures) have created culture influencing the most various art proposals such as events that belong to the city and its functions. Public Art has slowly become an essential part of the city, not only for its cultural growth, and renewed creative impulses but also for the restoring of urban sites based on forgotten quality models from the modern city. Nevertheless these same models are, in the European culture, a sound historic heritage, which is the way art combines with daily life, merging with contradictory elements, such as the place and performance of music like theatres and the streets of the cities where the music is performed, the art of cinema and images and video art in the squares of the cities, museums paintings and sculptures and the colours and shapes of the streets.

When dealing with art, time has no importance, indeed it is absorbed becoming integral part of personal heritage, yet keeping the impetus at the base of every artistic expression.

Every active architectonic plan reconstructs urban sites filling the gaps and those unaccomplished city action plans which all lead to renewal. Despite phases of crises and stagnation which have reorganised needs and expectations of European economy, always more evident in Rome as in other western capitals, a new approach arises based on a recovery of neglected qualities and not on quantitative expansionistic myths. The quality of new and consolidated urban sites, urban decor and the characteristics linked to *lighting design* all become part of a new heritage that will increase the quality level of the city together with art as a predominant tool that forges the city.

#### 5. Recent experiences

##### a. What's new



The event of Christ occurred in Rome in 1969 shocks the city breaking the rules of the its classic culture with an enormous environmental impact, namely the walls of Aureliano, that obtain a stronger impetus now a days than when they where separating the central park Villa Borghese<sup>4</sup> with the joining residential area Pinciano Ludovisi.

<sup>3</sup> Sisto V, Pope from 1585 until 1590, at the head of the greatest urban change after the roman empires transformations. Thanks to his urban plan, the so called *piano sistino* , an amplified version of Pope Giulio II della Rovere's renewal plans, important axes have deeply changed the city of Rome.

<sup>4</sup> The Mura Aureliane around the city of Rome contained a larger area than the previous town walls. They were build during the empire of Aureliano (270-275AC) with the aim of defending the city from invasions. 19KM of walls were erected incorporating many monuments.

A genius's piece of art that changes the concept of a consolidated urban site. Just like magic, from nothing an object is conceived like a new concept of space in the city, further more the enrichment of an urban site that leads to the rediscovering of forgotten hierarchies.

Dimensional and typological hierarchies entail relations that only art can fit in the right perception.

Since then no glamorous episodes have occurred, indeed events have been proposed yet, not being able to evolve and spread in the city.

Public Art seems to represent an imported element that lacks in traditional factors or active actions of public spaces, and not an acquired artistic substrate.

Casualty does not allow events from becoming an assembly of expressions and tensions that need to be interwoven in the construction of the city, a city that unfortunately is not able to boost a potentiality that could enhance the urban environment and its daily modality.

Art breeds independently without allowing anybody to interrupt the ideology of the essence of art itself.

Arts ideologies shoulder political and economic development of a country together with the spread of scientific discoveries, social development and technological change slowly becoming part of peoples cultural heritage. Sound artistic events successfully occurred creating a city – Rome – with a centre, a suburb, a history, monuments and archaeology.

Short and long term events interchanged, modifying the living conditions of the city that hosts modern art. Rome, New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Barcelona are a fertile ground for contemporary art experience.

Enormous contributions of recent decades in Rome are due to *computer art* and *video art*, whose graphic and technological experiments combine with a historic synthesis of art, ranging from surrealism to abstractism to classic art.

In 1996 Peter Greenway astonished thousand of people, in a famous square of Rome (Piazza del Popolo), by modifying standard architectonic concepts, initiating a new era of architecture, sort of illusionism vehicle that supports barocco and neoclassic construction.

"I have an ambitious project for Piazza del Popolo. The obelisk located in the centre of the square was erected to symbolise an enormous meridian. At the end of the '500 Sisto V planned the erection of many of these architectonic clocks in the cities most important cross-roads. Once again I would like to propose this project creating a scenery characterised by artificial lighting that symbolises the day and the night cycle and that of the sun and the moon, with at its centre the obelisk. This project would create, after the sun set, a mechanic planetarium in the square, that would indicate the passage of the sun and the moon during the day. According to a ten minute cycle, the artificial light would "move" from sunset to midnight, continuously repeating itself with an interval of one minute between every cycle. This light pattern would be quick enough to be observed yet without disturbing or obstructing the traffic and the citizens daily life. The rich red colour light would spring at east at a low level between the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo and the panoramic terrace of the Pincio, it would follow the suns cycle in a higher position as the hour of the day go by, later changing into orange, yellow and off-white having finally reached the apex between Santa Maria in Monte and Santa Maria dei Miracoli over Via del Corso.



After reaching the lightest shades of light the sun will slowly set changing into orange, pink, red and purple of the north western side of the square. The so called third 24 hour cycle, will screen a blue and white light on Porta del Popolo symbolising the moon and the stars. Small lights located on Santa Maria in Monte Santo, Santa Maria dei Miracoli, on the lodge and descending path of the Pincio, on the two fountains located on the sides of the square and over Porta del Popolo will – if possible - create shooting stars and comets. The show will end with the following lighted writing "Felici fausto ingressui" which I translate as "A happy and auspicious gateway". I would like the appropriate lighting system to underline the importance of Porta del Popolo as the entrance to Rome, highlighting the three streets that begin from this magnificent square. A door, a meridian, a geometric symbol: Entrance, Time, Mathematics."



Since then, urban innovations of *video art* have spread in the cities architecture delighting the citizens with a magical atmosphere that brings birth to streets, quares and buildings, fostering the message of art. Urban reality and fairy tales blend.

The so called *White Night* of Rome and Paris, occurred in September 2003-2004, mobilized thousand of people that all together invaded the city creating a multifaceted model of Public Art.



White Night 2004: piazza del Campidoglio, Ennio Morricone's concert.

The interior and external design of buildings have blended in a unique element, a phenomenon represented by the citizen and the city as part of Public Art.

The new scenery of the city and its role of being art, has as its main protagonists light, video art, music, theatre, architecture, sculpture, paintings, archeology and people.

The festivities during the Barocco and the roman *Ludi* seem to be part of such a distant past<sup>5</sup>.

In 1997, one of the first Italian computer art promoter Ida Gerosa, set the building of the Civiltà del Lavoro on fire. This act represented an urban symbol which could have been seen from the motorway that encompasses Rome so to transform an object of the roman countryside into a sound land art element.

Livia Cannella, video art artist, was able to create a perspective background of the Galleria Borghese, by excellently combining the container and the contained, or better the sculpture with the architecture.

For the first time in the work of this artist, elements such as trees, of great importance in the urban sceneries of Rome, become the shield of a vision that inverts natural with artificial visions preventing people from distinguishing reality from fiction.

For example Villa Adriana's.

Cyprus trees recall the magnificence of the sphinx's and blend images with culture<sup>6</sup>.

Famous historic villas of Rome have been the background for extraordinary artistic experiments (*land art*).



<sup>5</sup> Roman Ludi were important public events that occurring for several days in the streets of the city. These were celebrating public events such as war victories and special rehearsals like emperors birthdays.

<sup>6</sup> Villa Adriana, located at the doorsteps of Rome, is a marvellous residence of the emperor Adriano (117-138BC). Its construction begun in 118BC, as big as a province city entailing a great number of monuments. Most art works contained in today's Italian museums derive from this residence.



A Swedish *pop art* artist named Claes Oldenburg creates, in the scenery of Villa Ada-Savoia, one of his most interesting contemporary piece of art in the city, namely the table and the chair. While it is admired the enormous proportions of the table and the chair induce us to think that we are Lilliput citizens and Gulliver is about to arrive. The table represents a protection in this immense world; leading us in an immense abstraction where Rome seems to be so far.



Since many years in Villa Glori, in Rome, a prestigious collection of sculptures blends in with domestic nature in view of the long lasting event that reverses consolidated criteria in museums.

Nature is the background of a great number of art pieces constructing a “natural museum” that recalls Renaissance and the rich roman imperial villa gardens.

Famous artists accompany young ones who have the opportunity to confront art, trends and patterns.

Contemporary art together with Public Art are today an integral part of the continuous growth in urban architecture.

Perhaps the development of the most diverse concepts do not match with a shuttering impact that is a characteristic of contemporary art; perhaps the shuttering concepts change the aspect of the city with a new or imposed meaning; or maybe all is diluted in the quantity of art.

Perhaps Public Art’s energy is so diluted the citizens daily lives that they hardly notice them due to custom.



This is indeed only a doubt. Art in the streets has been boosted by Haring and his spray colors performed in New York's underground.

This is the era of graffiti, an art that descends from a culture of expression, an inexhaustible heritage regardless of art trends and artists role. Its an art directed to people.

This art differs from what the bourgeois call vandalism, and the city has now learned to identify it. Rome needs to grasp the potential of arts message and protect its linguistic form.

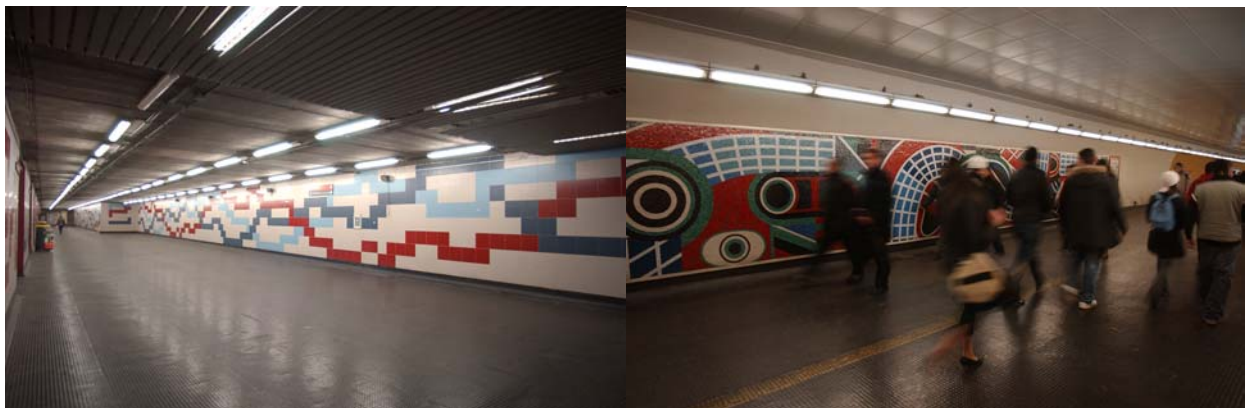


The experience and the teachings of the graffiti artists as Public Art have become a present issue in European infrastructural system speeches.

The work of famous artists and architects interacts in the Italian new underground construction sites.

Public places of daily transit such as airports, train stations and undergrounds host artistic works that renew the functions of these common places.

The outstanding aspect of this contemporary art is the way it enters in daily life.



#### *b. Strategies and prospective*

On behalf of public administrations the social value of silence on art, shouldered by cultural and urban policy seems to have been extinguished.

Recovery and revaluation policies based on sustainable technological strategies have lead to continuous action on the city bringing together foreign and Italian artists.



Despite the absence of an art policy, Rome enjoys high quality level urban action plans, especially of sculptures, which reshape streets and squares creating architectonic sceneries that were long forgotten by citizens.

Recent initiatives on the cities “all hour opening” strengthens the relations among art workshops, enriching the value of art according to urban development.

Renascence and the art policy of the Barocco period are excellent examples to understand the direction and the estimated result of the cities new architectonic transformation.

The implementation of Piazza Navona, Piazza del Popolo, Piazza del Quirinale and Spanish Steps are a direct product of art; indeed modern architecture is well aware of the importance of its production and its magnificence which all becomes a bare necessity for the complex structure of human environment.

More space for art.

The city becomes a big project, a dynamic structure in evolution where culture and production are the peaks of a shared strategic objective.

Despite the necessity of reorganizing social needs, economic resources are available; indeed the endeavors of Public Administrations in Rome show the importance of private partnership.

Private funds are always more present in the management and development of events and actions in the urban reconstruction sector.

The relation between municipality and university research structures on issues such as light design, multimedia technologies is profitable and harbinger for innovation and experiments.

Rome welcomes art and modernization that respects its historic tradition.

A detailed evaluation of Rome’s history allows a choice from a wide range of contemporary art proposals enshrining values that in the past contributed to the cities unique monuments.

In art as in architecture.

The projects independence and quality are prerequisites for the cities cultural growth actions and urban revaluation; namely our challenge.



Igor Mitoraj: Dea Roma

A beautiful city's piece of art. Dea Roma is the sculpture of a head of a deity located on the Risorgimento bridge; it recalls the classic ideals entailed in the Costantino of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in the Capitolini Museums. The goddess cries from only one eye symbolizing the hope and acceptance of a the city entering the third millennium. Build in roman stones.



Mario Ceroli at the Olympic village, on the background the Palazzetto dello Sport of Pierluigi Nervi.

Homage to sport, a cosmological vision that recalls Leonardo da Vinci's genius. It becomes an urban point of reference that enriches the citizen. Constructed in painted wood.



Mario Merz at the Foro di Cesare: the temporary construction, changes the night view adding a different planets touch. The artist works cover the themes already proved by numeric scansion recalling the series of the mathematician Fibonacci.

Arnaldo Pomodoro, contemporary sculptor created this work piece for Rome. Located near the Palazzo dello Sport in the so called Eur area. From south entering the city, this obelisk symbolizes an object emerging from the water targeting the sky. This sculpture is in bronze, a dear material to the author, it is the biggest and most recent work of the last ten years in Rome. His evident classic style with roman columns and obelisks at the centre of squares and historic crossroads together with Barocco style and Borromini's spiral, are all elements present in this monument symbolizing a continuation from the past to today. The cover witnesses our civilizations history. The opening ceremony in 2004 gave a new identity to the place boosting the environmental value.



The photographs (Barcaccia, Quattro Fontane, Foro di Traiano, Villa Ada, Villa Glori, underground graffiti, Igor Mitoraj) have been done by Gabriele Agostini.



Route's Public Art  
strategies  
prospectively  
new  
what's