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*Psychological Research on Museum*

ABSTRACT:

The talk presents the historical events at the origin of the cross-cultural research conducted recently by a group of psychologists at Roma Tre University. GNAM and MAXXI – the two contemporary art museums in Rome where part of the scientific works are held – are described in some of their peculiarities, that is to say urban position, architectural structure, interior design, human resources. It is underlined that a complex network of factors contributes to promote functional visiting itineraries, with regard to purposes of aesthetic fruition as well as of wider educational impact.

I enjoy following up Emma Nardi's speech, as it allows me to recall the far-away origins of a research work, which brought us to this two-day seminar/congress.

I had recently arrived in Rome, at the half of the Nineties', as a teacher of General Psychology in the former Pedagogy degree in Roma Tre, when two pedagogy colleagues – Benedetto Vertecchi and Emma Nardi – asked me to contribute to their specialization course in Museum Didactics, describing the cognitive processes (perception, in particular) implied in the museum fruition. The interest leading our group to develop research in this field, especially on Art museums, was born.

We are now gathering in the headquarters of the Department of Education; showing a great sensitivity and scenic intelligence, Stefano Mastandrea thought of bringing us to the GNAM (National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, collecting works from the XVIII and XIX century) tomorrow afternoon, and then to the MAXXI (National Museum of the XXI century Arts) on Saturday morning.

GNAM and MAXXI are two very different places, though both extremely evocative, even because of the environment characteristics which distinguish them.

In the first case, we face an eclectic building, designed by the architect/engineer Cesare Bazzani (Fig. 1); inaugurated in 1911 for the Universal

Exposition, it is surrounded by the park of Valle Giulia and can count on such good neighbours as the Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia, various cultural institutes and one of the Architecture Departments of Rome.



Fig. 1 – The Façade of the Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna, Rome

In the second case, the building designed by Zaha Hadid in 1998 and inaugurated in 2010 rises up in the former Montello Barracks area, of which it maintains some pavilions, and is aptly integrated beneath the houses of the Flaminio district, which are reflected in the mirror-windowpanes of the protrusive top of the building (Fig. 2).

These two evocative places, in their peculiar exterior façade, seem to anticipate the pleasure of the following fruition; the one with its reach decoration, overlapping the harmonic neoclassic elements; the other with its dry and intriguing dissymmetry. At least so it would appear to well-disposed observers.

And yet, we know how long-standing and inconclusive the problem which is the core of this Congress is, that is how to foster and potentiate one of the main functions of a Museum – the educational one – in young people, who seem widely indifferent, uninterested, or at least superficial in their fruition capability.

Some of the factors that explain this phenomenon have been long indicated. Among them, the fact that past relics, if perceived in «static», «solemn», «enumerative» contexts, do not speak easily to the young; in fact, they do not speak at all, remaining «silent», as Claudio Strinati (former superintendent of the Rome museum pole) underlined many years ago. Alas, this phenomenon still occurs, to the shame of the different

devices conceived and enacted by the specialist didactics during the last decades. Most times, current observations on museums attendance on the side of young people give us an alarming picture of the situation.



Fig. 2 – The MAXXI museum by Zaha Hadid, Rome

The researchers gathered here today will tell us how much this phenomenon has a bearing today, on the basis of recent data, collected systematically during 2012-2013 in different countries in various parts of the world.

Now, in contributing to the opening of the works, I'd like to mention two women who have both worked much to promote and present avant-garde visual artists in the best way: Palma Bucarelli and Zaha Hadid. Both contributed – each according to their own role – to making the above mentioned museums open and vital spaces.

Palma Bucarelli, an art historian, was appointed superintendent of the GNAM in 1941 (in the middle of World War II); and how did she start her mandate? By secretly transferring the works of the gallery to Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola (province of Viterbo, Lazio region), to save them from the dangers of the war.

We remind her for the tenaciousness, the insightfulness and the bravery she showed in over thirty years of activity, in selecting and proposing artists

who were by the time profound innovators, and who, precisely for this reason, run up against the darts and arrows of a certain post-war conservative culture in Italy. So, despite everything, she introduced Picasso in 1953, Mondrian in 1956, Pollock in 1958, Burri in 1959, Manzoni in 1971.

She was equally capable in organizing advertising to campaign which regularly corresponded a great success of public; not to mention the fashion shows hosted in the Gallery (Cantatore, 2010; Petriagnani, 2012).

We come now to the Hadid's merits: she created an architectural structure that holds requisites of both high aesthetic value and great functionality. A structure which mesmerizes for its expressive power, but at the same time give to people venturing in an initial sense of displacement, due to the peculiar development of its internal paths: circular, upward and labyrinth-like. A displacement feeling that, however, gradually turns into an impression of accessing a different dimension from everyday life: the dimension of aesthetic delight. In pre-organizing the access to the aesthetic dimension, the very same experience of wandering without a destination is extremely efficacious (Figg. 3-5): a visiting path that is not economical, but stimulates curiosity and the will to explore (Zaha Hadid Architects, 2009).

Now it is time for Stefano Mastandrea, the coordinator of the cross cultural research, to introduce the topic; personally, I am much grateful to him for embracing, together with his collaborators, the heritage of a twenty-years commitment that brought us to the current accomplishment.



Fig. 3 – The interior of the MAXXI



Fig. 4 – The interior of the MAXXI with the black stair



Fig. 5 – The interior of the MAXXI with a dance performance

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