

The Rebirth of Roman Design

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Meier's Ara Pacis Augustae at Night

Forward

According to Milanese designer James Irvine, “the Italians are masters of the continuing redefinition of taste”. Irvine has the unique perspective of being a long-time resident of Italy, yet having that ability as an outsider to see what the native-born rarely has the chance to express. Italians at their best are capable of the most beautiful of things and spaces. The Roman heritage ran so long and deep that the idea of “city” and the acceptance of aesthetic beauty have never been lost- just dormant every now and again. Developments in the contemporary city of Rome prove this to be true (yet again). This time, in a radical redefinition of itself as a post-industrial city, decades in waiting.

A nascent architectural culture, whose energy at present is second to none in Italy today, and even a burgeoning product design and interactivity emanating from Rome Sapienza University and events such as the “Roma Design Piu”, evince a clear sense of growth and vitality. The historic “eternal city” was built, layer by layer, through time, through inhabitation; a palimpsest clear in the layers that can be seen in contemporary museums such as the Crypta Balbi. That palimpsest, and the idea of Rome as “history” though, has threatened to bury contemporary Rome for decades, to treat the city as a museum, or vitrine.

Poor Florence is at present suffering this fate, a core inhabited by tourists, a fringe that has no identity. Rome suffered like this for a long time, which makes the new developments of the past ten years that much more promising. For the past few decades, no one could get anything new built in Rome – if it was, it was behind or inside walls. Several key developments converged to create this shift, perhaps none as important as the return of Roman son Massimiliano Fuksas to Piazza Trinita di Monti. Fuksas has said, “Italy was something of a disaster for 30 years architecturally because you had only designers, and we lacked an architectural culture. Rome even more than other cities.”

But, Rome, after a few key urban and architectural projects in proximity to the Aurelian Walls (the limit of the ancient city at the height of empire) can now be seen to be changing. Albeit this change is slow. Change in Italy is slow; change in Rome can be glacial. Slowly the dominant idea of the archaeological palimpsest metaphor for Rome is being challenged, and the idea of “layers” replaced by multiple co-existent narratives, additions to a long story. “Layers” cannot get at the contiguousness of how cities really grow and remain vital. Without letting go the past, cities cannot grow at all. Rome seems to be getting this and growth is following.

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Cino Zucchi has said, “so, we accept this idea of “layers”, one where you always operate on a text that’s already existing (or the palimpsest). But MUCH more importantly, is the idea that you add something on, like in a collective artefact, and it changes your point-of-view because you see yourself and your work as a contribution, as something that [has] to interpret something else” (Cino Zucchi, 2006). It is this new Italian thinking about the city which is finally creating a slow, uneven, post-industrial shift not just in Rome, but in Milan as well (see Jayme Cochrane’s paper on this site). Milan though is struggling under its own successful past; a new generation dispersed and under-employed. Too often the A-list international star architect or the older generation is getting the job. Milan’s development is not really affecting young architects that much. In Rome, also the A-list is getting the big commissions. But, in Rome that energy is also coming from hot new young firms, best exemplified by laN+ and Labics – good, young firms who are winning competitions in Italy and abroad and employing young architects in Rome in cool projects. Though to date Rome’s new “signature” large scale projects have tended to be by “big A” international architects (Meier, Piano, Zaha, Koolhaas), Rome is beginning to slowly embrace the notion that the current generation of talented new architects has a story to tell, a piece to contribute, to the city of Rome.

So, there are two strands of this development that is bringing buzz back to Rome. Ask the Milanese- even they are hearing it. These new native Romans want to build in the city and bring the vitality of the urban back. And this is not in conflict with Rome’s important role as repository of many of the world’s treasures. What makes Rome exciting is precisely this sense of layers (contiguous or palimpsest), not the old stones. Rome is best when the Empire period column is carved out of the utilitarian wall of an apartment near Campo, in a non-fetishized way - just a shrug, and a wry sense of the continuousness of its people, not their/the “history” – a subtle, but noble narrative told through its buildings and streets, in everyday and non-heroic ways. This deep contextualism is also where these new Roman firms are coming from, and what they have to contribute, beyond heroic buildings.

After decades of development stagnation in the historic center of Rome, buildings are rising again within and around the Aurelian walls. Some heroic, and some - as Cino Zucchi suggests - a contribution to and interpretation of the past. The layers of the current day and its voices are about to be added to the “collective artefact” of Rome’s millennia of inhabitation. And the change is significant for the city’s burgeoning community of standout young architects – laN+, Labics, Giametti+Giametti and Ricci-Spainsi among them. Many of these young firms are clustering around the revitalizing Testaccio/ Ostiense area and that is in turn bringing a sense of a “design center” back to Rome: a clustering of innovation drivers, knowledge workers in proximity. It is no coincidence that the Roma Design Piu is being held there as well, in the redeveloping industrial zones, not unlike what is happening in Milan’s Zona Tortona area. The return of Massimiliano Fuksas to Rome, has also signalled something important – a force to be reckoned with - an

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architecture office with a significant world-wide portfolio and reputation, working in town, in the center of town. A large office employing and in the old “bottega” manner training dozens of young architects and designers, fostering skills and creativity. Giving opportunity and the chance to work on international large-scale big-budget projects. Young Roman architects coming up may now see a future in their own home-town that they might not have five years ago. And though this all may have been also initially driven by the controversial importation of big-name “A-list” architects like Meier, Renzo Piano and Zaha Hadid, projects even Fuksas was not getting until the recent commission of the new Congressi at EUR, the exercise seems to have had a positive spin-off effect, while their buildings have been generally positive additions to the city. Regardless, an architectural dialogue is occurring and the design world, is -or should be - paying attention.

This has not been without controversy. Rome’s mayor and the projects themselves have received heaps of abuse from certain traditional quarters. But it has never a



Massimiliano Fuksas during our 2006 interview with the maestro

simple task to have progress and change without upsetting people. In the long-run these projects will probably work and be less disruptive to the old city because there is so much more awareness of context and more than just the architectural programme (and message) as was certainly the case in the last significant round of development – in the 1930’s. The post-war rebuilding of the city could have added so much, but while it produced dozens of buildings, most of them are as un-remarkable as Milan’s modern contributions. By and large such buildings are not wearing well because they were cheap and without the excellence of pre-war Italian Rationalism, do nothing to build the streets and squares they sit on. It’s not that banal functionalism isn’t still practiced, it’s that enough people know that we should expect better. Today it is expected that a designer needs to have a “social approach, an anthropological approach, a technical approach, and you need a vision. Without ideas, you have nothing. Without any vision you can’t, in my opinion, do anything”

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(Carlotta de Bevilacqua, 2006). It is with this Italian sense of vision (which is when the Italians are at their best), that Rome is moving forward. Asked why Rome is so great during our interviews with 15 designers this year the answer always came back to these issues. Rome is “one of the best, the most beautiful cities in the world. One of the reasons is because it is one of the cities where you see the layers” (Rossi, 2006). But it is a place where the art of living is particed with passion. It is this combination that the tourist comes hoping to find. And if they are lucky, and stay a while and get away form that damned Trevi Fountain, they are sure to find in Roma. Sit for a few hours and just watch, listen in a great neighbourhood like the area between Campo and Porta Ottavia and if you don’t find it, you’re not looking hard enough. These streets give voice to life, to drama, to civic and neighborhood values. The best that Italy is. You must let such streets live, you kill them by putting them behind glass and making of them a museum, a butterfly on a pin under glass. When Italians remember this, maybe they will insist on it. Tell their city halls that they expect it, care to craft it. Enable it. And we believe that this may indeed be the most important of all values necessary in the emerging Global-Euro-Italy of the 21st century as localness and particularity may see ever greater threat. The local and global can and must co-exist. Even though globalization is removing a sense of the local at an amazing pace, several of our interviews also noted that Cino Zucchi’s “collective artifact” seems to be part of what is developing across Europe and this was confirmed in our interview with Domus editor Stefano Boeri. In recent years Boeri has been speaking of the continent itself as a “city”. A metaphor of scale, and in his thought we sense some hope at the larger and the local scale. “City Europe is a city which is growing on itself. Adding the new, but never cancelling, totally cancelling what [was] there first” (Boeri, 2006). But Italy must accept this new reality, and its new character beyond its borders. The young designers and architects of Italy may need more than anything to need this new perspective. It is a comment we hear often from more established designers. They see it coming. If Italy is to have a new generation of excellent design it must accept this reality and embrace, and it is this which we clearly see in firms such as laN+ and Labics, who out of necessity structured their practices this way.



Rome panorama: the collective artifact

In a city well known for its sensitivity to the past, new ideas and practices are emerging. This is now the third year that the ItaliaDesign Field School from Simon Fraser University’s School of Interactive Arts and Technology has visited Rome.

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Over the span of these trips, a monumental shift has been noticed in Rome. New architecture has begun. Italian, and foreign, architects are receiving commissions to help revitalize the city of Rome. To bring it to post-industrial reality of the present, but as with many such developments around the world, history is not lost in the process of progressing. It is clear and must be stated: Rome is in the midst of a rebirth, an exciting moment in its history. A moment that is connecting the classical, and papal city to a newly eternal city, and perhaps to one that is seeing it emerge as a leader in the world of design.

Introduction

Rome is an architectural marvel. No surprise there. Artefacts of centuries and empires gone by are everywhere in Rome's historic centre, preserved by an arsenal of maintenance crews who ensure that it is still possible to view structures dating back to the Roman Republic on its streets. Yet Rome in recent years - as the rest of the world was getting a post-industrial make-over – began to feel like the air had been sucked out and the whole place made a museum, and those same streets, vital to the energy of a city, began losing their renowned energy. You know, THAT Rome, Fellini's Rome, Trastevere's Rome, Moravia's Rome. How was this possible? In one of the world's great and legendary cities. Rome as museum was not working. Until the Papal Jubilee year and its massive hosing down Rome was becoming an ugly, dirty, neglected city of old stones. Cities can't grow that way. They can't stay relevant. Until this time – around 1998 -when ideas of new construction in Rome emerged, they invariably hit a political wall, whereby suggestions of altering the historic centre were akin to destroying the world's greatest untouchable treasure.

The architectural establishment, particularly in the universities and architecture departments, were complicit in this grand plan to not change a thing. But the political landscape in Rome has been changing. Maybe the cleanup for the Millennia sparked it, maybe seeing it all clean made some think. From that time, slowly, new and contemporary and significant architecture has been starting to emerge throughout the city, including within the historic city centre. Rome, it seems, is becoming once again a place to go to see more than the past, almost inexplicably, after decades of neglect, Rome is becoming a new center for design in Italy. And that is a very promising and welcome development in a country too-long dependant on Milano to do the heavy-lifting in this area of their culture and economy. This paper will detail the impressive list of new architectural projects which look set to change the face of the eternal city yet again, and how they got to be there. And which hopefully might contribute to a new generation of productivity and innovation in Italy's largest city. What were the barriers? First off, it's, well, ROME.

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The city has an imposing presence, one that can intimidate even the most confident and talented designer. Upon being selected to build the Parco della Musica auditorium, even Renzo Piano felt the pressure: "Working in a city like Rome, measuring yourself against the form of the place is the most difficult thing. An identity as powerful as Rome's cannot be ignored" (as cited in Kirk, 2004). The Parco della Musica - one of those key new projects - though resisted initially, has proven to be a watershed development that in retrospect opened the door for further innovation. Beyond its success as a stand-out signature building that attracts world-wide attention in the design community, the building is a greater success because of what it has achieved on the ground – bringing a much-needed high-culture venue for music and recording while simultaneously bringing the ordinary and low-brow together in its even more needed central piazza. The piazza has become a magnet for locals (on weekends in particular) giving Romans the opportunity to do what Romans, and Italians generally, do best – enact the theatre of life framed by built walls, turning stairs into what they were meant for: sitting. The public space provides community space for families, for young people and, a desperate need for Italians in their own cities – a space away from all of the tourists who have filled and taken over their historic squares. Parco della Musica works because it works at many levels. It's a design that works for the community, works for the city, and undeniably brings good things that build place. Other projects were lightning rods of protest – the Ara Pacis museum being most notable – this project brought credibility.



Renzo Piano's Parco della Musica, urban intervention that worked

This was much-needed ammunition to fight the conservatism of the archeo-planning culture who until recently blocked anything of consequence that might be big enough to allow crowds to congregate and create that most civic

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of all virtues: pride. Yet, with a powerful identity also comes a powerful sense of such civic value. In our interview with Roman born architect Massimiliano Fuksas, he explained that “Roma is exciting, because it is a very exciting place to live. It’s much better than other places... but, this is because people here are more involved in culture, and enjoy living in the city” (Fuksas, 2006). The return, the triumphant return, of Fuksas has also brought credibility and weight to contemporary design debates in Rome. With Renzo Piano’s building finally complete- in a culture that sees projects take decades to finish -and Fuksas home the hegemony seems to be shifting. In our three year study of Rome to date, it has become abundantly clear that something is definitely shifting. It will take perhaps another ten years to fully see this change. But this paper will seek to document what even Italian designers may not yet know: the secret’s out, Rome is cool again.

This shift in thinking began during the tenure of Francesco Rutelli as the mayor of Rome in the 1990’s. One of the keystone achievements of his administration was to create a master plan for Rome for doubly important year 2000 - the millennial year 2000 and the Jubilee year of Pope John Paul II papacy. An important Pope who also contributed to the pride of Rome in his own way.



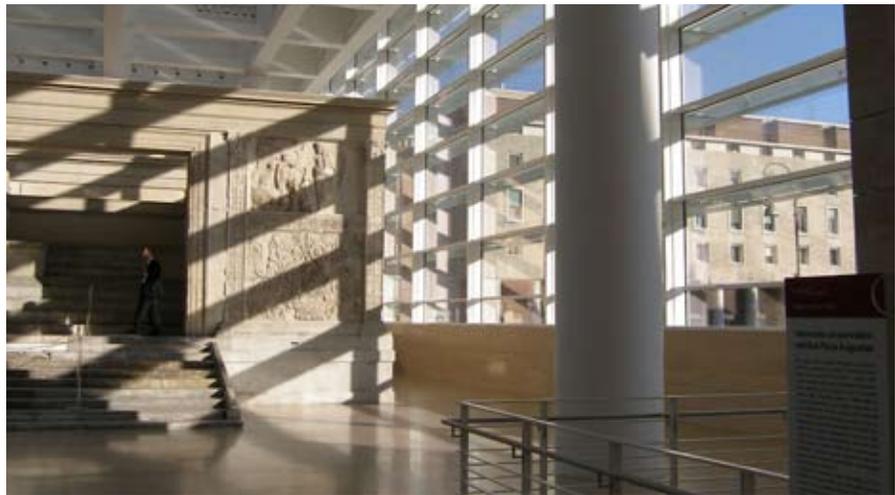
La Notte Bianca 2007, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, projections

The administrative Rome of Government and the Religious Capital of the Catholic World got together and poured huge resources at revitalizing the city. This plan was designed to “redistribute resources and services and designate places of social and historical interest throughout the expanded city, especially along it’s lacerated edges” (Kirk, 2004). Yet importantly it was not just the old city which became a focus. One of the major goals of the plan was to remove the central overuse on the historic core, and allow the city to function more like a network.

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The focus was to try to create a web of inter-connected micro-cities, which could boast a mix of residential and commercial uses for the enormous and sprawling capital, and then to host a series of decentralized public offices, cultural and sports facilities. And what began in the late 1990's has continued under Rutelli has carried under his replacement in 2001, the popular leftist politician Walter Veltroni, who has continued the support of culture of the openings of architectural buildings as gestures of civic movement. "The City of Rome has increased its investment capacity, earmarking over 1.6 billion euro in 2003 for the upgrading of infrastructure, services, and entrepreneurial activities, an amount almost five times higher than in 2001" (WorldMayor.com, 2005). Now, government in Italy is still rife with major inefficiencies and there is much scepticism over the degree to which this de-centering has occurred - the Via Cassia route to Viterbo and the North is as choked as ever. So, though it is harder to see the changes in the periphery, the changes closer to the center are more evident.

Investment, a general hosing down and new projects are more perceptibly changing the face of the historic centre, and the areas closer to the Aurellian wall to reflect a Rome that has become more comfortable with the idea of adding new contemporary layers of history to its rich past. Retelli's master plan has brought about 5 billion Euro in investments, with 60 million cubic metres of new buildings. The plan, and all the new architecture, is designed to take into account the complex needs of Roman society, including social policy, real estate costs, mobility, schools, hospitals, the environment, and many others. We'll see. Cynically or not, the most noticeable of this investment has been a series of signature architectural additions.



Ara Pacis. The altar of Augustus now open to the public again in it's new controversial setting

The largest, most noticeable, and most controversial project this decade in historic Rome is undoubtedly the American Richard Meier's Museo Ara Pacis

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Augustae, a museum to house the Augustan Altar of Peace – one of the most important artefacts of Roman past. But which is the “jewel”? The Altar or the box that contains it? Located firmly within the historic centre on the Campo Martius, wedged by the Tiber River and main thoroughfare Via di Ripetta, the new gleaming white Museo Ara Pacis stands out to all who pass by. The monument itself has long been out of its original context. After its original construction in 9 B.C. nearby, isolated and surrounding by fields on the Campus Martius, Mussolini had the Altar moved next to the Mausoleum of Augustus around 1938, as a tribute both to Augustus, and of course (more importantly) to himself. Meier’s museum replaces the former modernist glass box complex by architect Vittorio Morpungo that was built for Mussolini. The box formed the fourth wall, against the river that surrounded the enormous decaying Mausoleum, whose monumental steps added in the fascist period lead to one of Rome’s more odious dog-“walking” areas today. The other three fronts are the kind of muscular classicism that was the fashion of the day, replete with enormous fasci and other imperial symbols. So, no matter anyone did, this is one loaded and problematic “piazza” (one that is continually promised to be re-developed itself). This was the terrain that Meier, a Jewish-American, was, ahem, stepping into.

Construction, and completion, of the Ara Pacis Museum has been engulfed in a political hailstorm. Repeated demands for archaeological digs of the site significantly delayed construction of the new museum complex. Protests erupted



Museo del Ara Pacis exterior, Richard Meier, the controversial museum and the incursion on the historic city

because part of the project would cover the site of the Port di Ripetta, the 18th century port of the River Tiber, which was lost due to construction of the river walls and the Via di Ripetta in the 1900’s. However, the complex is also extremely contentious because it is being constructed by a foreigner; in September 2005, 35 Italian architects demanded more support for home grown talent, decrying the

invasion of foreign designers who could not understand Italy's unique historical and cultural context (The Guardian, 2006). Further, the new mayor Berlusconi had originally vowed to destroy the new museum – even complete- as part of his electoral campaign, and to create a complex more similar to Morpungo's initial museum, stating that he had an "obligation to stop this horror" (Ceen, 2001).

The new Museo is many things. The Museo Ara Pacis Augustae is a commemoration for lost history. "The site has a plaza as well as a contemporary obelisk to represent the relationship of the Ara Pacis to an original obelisk" that stood on the site (Schlimgen, 2006), when the altar was in its former location. So the Museo seems to be the first attempt at reconciling the histories. This museum is also a turning point for Rome, because it is new and contemporary, and it is the first new architecture to appear within the historic centre of Rome since Mussolini was in power in the 1930's. So reviled were urban the incursions (scars) the Fascists made that there seems to have been a tacit convention to block anything new using the spurious connection to the Duce's excesses. The museum is a large complex, using massive sheets of glass, white walls, and travertine as it's main materials (Schlimgen, 2006). It is, well, white. VERY white. Rome is not white. Augustan Rome and his "city of marble" may have been. Contemporary Rome is mostly shades of reds and browns. Meier's white box, not unlike his career ventures such as the Getty, stands out. But here it screams different. It seems to try to connect the river to the Augustan tomb. But, mostly, as with its predecessor that contained the moved Altar of Peace, it runs alongside the river in a long rectangle that further severs the connections. To its credit the right hand side of the Tridente emanating from Piazza del Popolo down the Via Ripetta feels more an place again, and its wide stairs seem to invite seating. But one seriously wonders whether this buildings will settle well into Rome's way of making its buildings like "lived-in" after the budget for keeping it stuccoed white runs out.

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Even now that the museum is open, controversy still surrounds it. Critics charge that Meier was contextually-oblivious, or needlessly reactionary about Roman history or form-bound when designing the building: in terms of "its relationship to the glories of the city around it, the building is as clueless as its Fascist predecessors... Meier's building is a contemporary expression of what can happen when an architect fetishizes his own style out of a sense of self-aggrandizement" (International Herald-Tribune, 2006). Generally opponents charge that the scale of the building leaves it largely indifferent to the beauty and richness of the surrounding area. No matter how nice the building may be itself. It's a classic case of the modernist designer who still firmly believes both in the International and the Style. The only "idea" or "value" seems to be the building and its curative cause. So, this of course has proven the connection to the Duce's excesses to be somehow more real than it need be. On its on merit it is hard to say if this building is part of the move forward, but taken as part of the program, it is symbolic, in that it challenge the no-build dogma – even with the most reactionary of "subjects".

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Outside the historical centre, but within walking distance, just to the North beyond the Porta el Popolo and the Villa Borghese park, Genovese architect Renzo Piano offers the counterpoint development to Meier's Ara Pacis – widely popular, contextually sensitive, distinctive and contemporary, yet somehow not clashing with its surroundings. Perhaps being sited in the old Olympic Games village helps, and more so, the direct comparison to Pier Luigi Nervi's much-acclaimed, and similarly sculptural Palazzetto dello Sport. Both buildings are about interior enclosed spaces. What makes Piano's project different is the way it seems unaffected by the concrete motor traffic fly-ways and off-ramps that surround the area, and more importantly the public spaces its private enclosed spaces enframe.

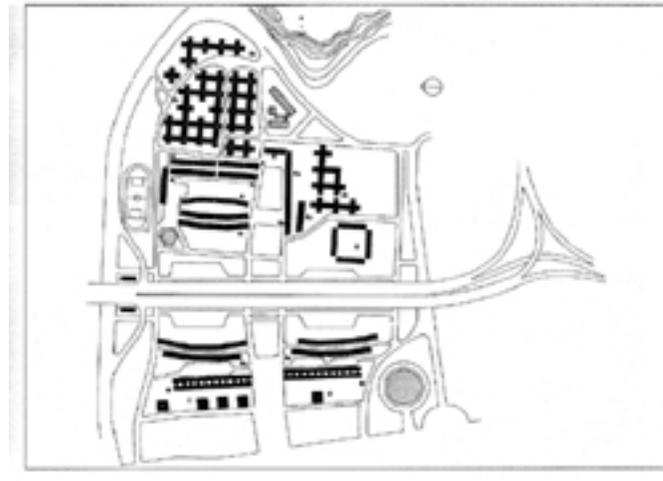


Moretti's 1950 Olympic Housing, now sought after in the developing Flaminio area

Architect Piano has completed one of the largest scale projects in recent Roman history: the Parco Della Musica, or simply "the Auditorium", which is housed in an area leftover from highway construction, near the former Olympics site. Close to Nervi's Palazzetto dello Sport, and Moretti's 1950 Olympic Village, and not far from the city centre, Piano has created a complex that houses 3 distinct indoor theatre houses, plus an outdoor amphitheatre. One of the hallmarks of Renzo Piano's work is that many of his projects around the world look and feel different. For Piano, "coherence is the daily responsibility to make things with the greatest care and to resolve problems that come up along the way. Working like this, each work makes its own way and acquires its specific nature" (Piano, as cited in Kirk, 2006). The Auditorium complex's three performance and recording music theatres resemble large metallic beetles in the skyline, but were originally intended to invoke a metamorphic response to string instruments. Piano has done a remarkable job of making a very large complex fit well within the skyline, to have a gentle impact on all that surrounds it. Once inside, the visitor is able to move along gentle lines inherent in the curved site. This building is designed to show the dynamic, free experience, of the democratic world (Kirk, 2006).

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One of the primary goals behind the project was to reduce the artificial fracture between the Olympic village and the Parioli hill which backs onto the Villa Borghese park. The location, between the districts of Flaminio, the Olympic Village, and the Villa Flori (Schlingen, 2006) has brought about numerous urban improvements and enhanced the connection between these areas, providing a



The ground-plan of the Parco della Musica, surrounded by off-ramps and raised free-ways

much-needed central gathering place. The complex provides discreet underground parking, shops, and outdoor uses, bringing a human connection back to the area, and providing an urban garden for the city. It acts as a source of attraction in the extra-urban context, while still being accessible and useful for local interests (Auditorium Parco Della Musica, 2004).

The form is unique but the sense is of contextualness. Indeed a commitment to the sense of responsibility in adding a contemporary layer actually shifted the buildings layout in mid-design construction. Because there was an ancient Roman villa that happened to obstruct construction, Piano reshaped the complex to work around the ruins. Now, these ruins are incorporated as a free-access museum within are enframed outside by the Parco Della Musica.

As a result, this complex already has historical and age value, even though it is brand new, which contrasts with Meier's Ara Pacis museum (Schlingen, 2006). The three performance halls headline the world's great musicians, and outside the locals enjoy free concerts on sunny Sundays. Without directly comparing –they were different kinds of projects, with different constraints – it is undoubtedly Pianos building which has provided the example of the successful project, from process to use and inhabitation. And it should weather better as well. So is there a project that is a more direct comparison?

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While the Ara Pacis remains embroiled in controversy, the Crypta Balbi museum project exhibits another building in the historic center – this time deep in the continuously inhabited medieval core – and is another stunning example of how attitudes towards architecture and development are changing in Rome. And how different the result can be when contextualism IS the end goal. Indeed, though less-overt, the site is ALSO edged on one of Mussolini’s “disembowelments”, the widened (severed) Via delle Botteghe Oscure.

The Crypta Balbi Museo Nazionale is an historical museum that showcases parts of the massive Porticus Minucia pavilion, dating back to the period of Augustus. The Crypta Balbi is a traversal through time that creates both a visual and a cerebral threshold between modern Rome, and the time of Augustus –AND everything in between. Housed amongst numerous buildings of Fascist decent, on



Interior Crypta Balbi Museum, contemporary scaffolding within multiple layers of inhabitation

the Via delle Botteghe Oscure, the Crypta Balbi showcases the former Theatre of Balbus, built around 14 B.C. Balbus, a Roman officer, had the theatre built upon his return from Africa, to show the power of Rome. Many of the remnants in the area are thought to have been from the arcade of the Porticus Minucia, which was used for several purposes throughout time, from giving grain to the local citizens to a venue for people to gather during lengthy shows in the neighbouring theatre. Long after its original construction and into the middle ages, the site and its remains became re-purposed and used for markets, churches, houses, workshops, lime-kilns (to burn the profuse Roman marble left laying around useless to the Medieval mind) and other multiple other uses until the complex was abandoned and fell to ruins, only to be re-occupied as apartments in more recent centuries.

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This museum is particularly exciting because of the context within which it exists and the void it fills. “Rome is built in layers and you can recognize that every layer has its own identity. It’s not the identity of the Renaissance or the Baroque, it’s a Roman identity” (Clemente, 2006). The Crypta Balbi museum is one of the experiences that can highlight these layers for newcomers. Entering this new complex, you are confronted by a number of new interventions within an old building: new walkways, a glass ceiling joining the two buildings together to preserve the insides, and modern conveniences such as access for the disabled. As you traverse down the stairways, you wind back through time: a vertical palimpsest. At the bottom level, you are in the Crypta, which houses the ancient ruins of the Porticus Minucia and Crypta Balbi. This is one of the more unique aspects of Rome. Over the centuries, buildings that fell into disrepair were simply built on top of, as is the case here. So, the museum provides a rich discourse about that which architect Cino Zucchi discussed above, “the idea that you (your generation *ibid*) add something on, like in a collective artefact, and it changes your point-of-view because you see yourself and your work as a contribution, as something that [has] to interpret something else”. So, though the Crypta Balbi occurs behind walls that other look like those which define the street, its content is a discourse in contemporary shift in value about archaeology and by extension architecture and urbanism – the three are rarely separate issues in Rome.

Walking through the dark, damp Crypta, the guest truly gets a sense of this historic place and its contemporary stitches. In addition to the ambience of the space, the visitor gets a true sense of what the original marble and tufa complex looked like, through a limited restoration of an original wall, before the weather and medieval “clamp miners” altered the former walls.

The displays in the Crypta Balbi aim to trace the entire architectural and cultural history of the space, from the Campus Martius through to modern day. The museum makes extensive use of displays images, videos, and computer models to demonstrate how the area has changed over the centuries (Geary, 2001). This museum will undoubtedly serve as a guide for future projects that have both a modern element and showcase Rome’s rich history. A museum that treats the city as a living entity is clearly a metaphor for the shift in how to think of the city itself.

While the historic centre of Rome is changing, the areas just outside the Aurellian Walls are now also moving with increased pace and are bringing a heightened sense of optimism. Maybe more than any other areas beyond the historic center Ostiense and Testaccio, -former industrial areas, but long inhabited even in the Republican period – evince the greater reform program underway. This area surrounds Monte Testaccio, which essentially is a mammoth pile of broken and discarded Roman pottery shards. Valuable, yet innumerable. I garbage dump for amphora and other storage containers of the Roman period. Deep within the mountain, some of the world’s finest wine cellars exist, keeping product cool year round. Over the last decade as the area has had its warehouses converted, Ostiense

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and Testaccio have become a hotbed of architectural and design activity. This process of gentrification and the usual loft space for urbanites (as well as the hottest discos and clubs in the city), has resulted in the former industrial area becoming a destination for artists and designers, as well as another area in which several significant architectural and cultural institutions have taken root.

Testaccio and Ostiense have a rough edge connection to the rest of the city. They were marginalized because they housed everything the Roman's didn't want in the city: the slaughterhouse, powerhouse, graveyards, and garbage dumps. Yet, as the process of gentrification of this area progressed through the last several decades, peaking after the 1990's reforms, this rough edge has served to attract creative people to an area that the government continually marginalized (Rankin, 2006). According to Tom Rankin, the president of the American Institute for Roman Culture, "creative people continue to design on the fringes, and gravitate to those places that have aura" (2006). And the clustering of cultural and knowledge workers is always a sign of post-industrial development taking root.



Testaccio, working class roots and traditions. AS ROMA heartland: Forza Roma, Sempre!!

Testaccio is the more tacitly-residential part of this neighbourhood, though it boast among other charming facilities an old slaughter-house. In this area, numerous buildings were erected to accommodate workers from the various heavy industries in the area. Currently, many of the buildings are in the process of reform of use as young people move into the area, workers move out and the old cultures

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firmly embedded shift. Yet some of Rome's best authentic eateries exist in this area. Further, restaurants and wine cellars have developed under the back end of Monte Testaccio, which attract tourists and Roman's alike on a daily basis. Because of the marginalized status of this community for so long, they have some very uniquely Roman dishes that were based off the less valuable "parts" of the nearby slaughterhouse. THIS kind of working class Roman cuisine is heavily oriented toward organs and other red meat products served without any desire to hide the origins. Today, many of these dishes are considered to be delicacies, and have become as Rome has changed, unique to Testaccio.

Ostiense is the industrial building part of the neighbourhood. The ancient city of Rome itself zoned such industries here and successive generations went even so far as to ban heavy industry, and other elements that were not salubrious from within a certain distance from the center. Inevitably Ostiense became the center of such activities, though today it is only two metro stops from the Circo Massimo. As a result, Ostiense was host to many heavy-idustry concerns whose job it was to run the city from behind the scenes. For example, the distinctive structure of the area is a eight storey steel lattice that housed the gas power generation station, still partially in use by Italgas. But also in this area were the general markets or "maggazzini" from which wholesale was brought into the city of all sorts, the slaughterhouse, mausoleums and crematoriums. Many of the buildings in this area originate from the industrial revolution and have long served as icons on the horizon for the area. The long abandoned gas cylinder on the Italgas property has been preserved because the large metal structure has for so long identified Ostiense on Rome's skyline. These structures are in many cases being fully or wholly re-developed for commercial purposes of mixed-use at this time, the era of warehouses and urban proximity now long past. Yet, perhaps this is an evident example of just how far Italy's cities fell behind as most major centers had begun this process as early as the 1960's (Vancouver's False Creek and Coal Harbour would be good examples). But one of the other consequences was plentiful, cheap, funky buildings which always attract businesses such as architects and innovation and technology start-ups.

Labics, one of the top young design firms in Rome, opened up their architectural studios in 2002 on Via de Magazzini Generali, mere blocks from Via Ostiense and the numerous contemporary projects in the area. In addition to completing their own headquarters space, Labics completed the Italtel & Libardi Associati Headquarters in 2004. Labics was involved extensively in the project, from schematic and conceptual design, through to construction. The building itself – evidence of a more contemporary design approach - was a former school, which they would transform into the new headquarters for Italtel, a large Italian communications company. A typical newcomer to the area. Because Labics is a relatively young firm, they valued paying "particular attention to the relationships between collectivity and individuality, public and private spaces, and between production and social areas" (Labics, nd).

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This innovative approach allowed them to vertically orient the three systems vertically throughout the space characterized by enhanced spatial qualities and functional independence. The public space is considered a vacuum, that runs for the full height of the building, with a web of intersecting stairs, bridges, and galleries. Within the core of the building is an area called an intestine, which contains meeting rooms, and a vertical connection between work and social space. Further, there is a neutral work area that serves as the main production space. The building is one of Rome's best new pieces of architecture.

Since opening in 2002, Labics has been busy in Rome and around Italy. In 2002, they won the competition to design the offices for Itama, a naval manufacturing company in Rome. Further, they won the competition to design a university education centre in Rozzano, and the world contract to design the Obika chain of bufala-mozzarella bars. From the initial design project in Rome, Obika has now expanded to Milano and London. Their goal is to have a location in all of the world's most prominent cities. Rome's Obika is near the Ara Pacis and in a public achieves many of the spatial goals that the ItalPromo building seeks to achieve. The restaurant is also, it should be noted, an outstanding example of resurgent Italian "slow food" and of positive globalism – a restaurant that features local hand-made Italian food products bought directly from producers fresh, centered around the best buffalo-milk mozzarella produced in Campania, but delivered in a bar set-up that resembles in formal origins a Japanese sushi bar with modern and contemporary styling. Labics was central to creating this forward-looking vision, another project, conceived from what Carlotta de Bevilacqua insists must be contemporary projects: ideas and values. But importantly Labics has forged a project portfolio well-beyond Rome and this clearly has brought contemporary ideas back to the capital of Italy.

In 2003, Labics was commissioned by Calosi & Del Mastio SpA to revitalize the Roman Tiber riverfront near Longotevere in Augusta and to develop the area near Meier's new Ara Pacis Museum. But in the same year in 2003, they presented their views in Brussels about the quality of housing and how to improve the liveability of regions. They also received honourable mention for their proposed ski resort design for Etna Nord.

In 2004, Labics submitted a high school campus design for the city of Schio, completed the offices of Italpromo, and realized the completion and opening of the first Obika restaurant. But they were also very active internationally in design research, entering competitions and presenting at numerous conferences (Labics, nd). In 2005, Labics was highly involved with a numerous of other projects around the world. The Hidri complex in Albania is a mixed use residential and commercial development. But, again, they were also simultaneously working on a design for the new hospital in Castelli Romani in Rome. They also around this time began working on the masterplan for the community of Le Serre in Albania, a wine museum in Rome, competing to redesign refreshment areas for museums in Napoli, competing to renovate the Ecole Franse in Rome, and a housing project in Nepi, Rome.

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If one reviews another Roman firm, laN+ and their portfolio, a similar pattern can be found. laN+ principal architect Luca Galofaro concedes that it is partially sound business, as “Roman projects often get stalled, and often take too long to complete, and this is hard on an office trying to retain a consistent size and good designers” (laN+ 2006), in the fold. In Rome, if one is to succeed in design, one must enter competitions outside the region. But, importantly, both firms are getting significant commissions within and around Rome, a major shift for this generation of architects.



laN+, Rome Falcognana park, rethinking the Roman periphery

Architect Marie Claude Clemente, one of the founding principals at Labics, feels that Rome is now indeed undergoing a dramatic transformation: “Now there are lots of contemporary projects in Rome... Now they have this new unfamiliar challenge, and that is to diffuse the contemporary culture and give everyone the same opportunities” (Clemente, 2006). This last part is particularly intriguing. In the last few years, unlike the Ara Pacis (which was handed to Meier and not open to competition), there have been numerous design competitions in and around Rome, allowing new ideas and firms to flourish and expand their reach.

She further elaborates that “until four years ago, if you wanted to do a contemporary project in Rome, you had to hide it... Just hide it” (Clemente, 2006), meaning that the archaeology mindset had shut down the ability of architects to design to the street. The amount of change occurring in and around Rome right now is unprecedented, since the time of Mussolini. In the new Rome, “everything is transforming” (Clemente, 2006), and Italian design is moving more towards Rome. In a strange reversal of fortunes, Milan’s architects have even expressed envy of the Roman scene.

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Luca Galoforo, principal architect at laN+, has been interviewed by the SFU ItaliaDesign Field School three years in a row, and along with Michele Rossi in Milan, has been involved the longest with our study. Because we have seen these architects year after year, it has been interesting to document their progress over the years from new firms starting out with research and small projects, to entering and winning international competitions.

laN+ is currently working on a number of projects in and around Rome. In 2006, they are recreating a park, Falcognana, located on a steep hill between the residential fabric of Rome and the countryside. The park project will include a community and seniors space, on top of which sporting events may be housed. The park attempts to blend and reduce the threshold between the countryside and the city (laN+, 2006). This project fits well with their vision for architecture's new direction: "What we think the new direction is is public space, and thinking about how the architecture can change the relationship between the people that are in the space and the city" (Galoforo, 2006).

In 2007 laN+ is working on the Scuola Elementare, an Elementary School in Fontana Candida. This description from their website: "As architects, it is our job to try to make those responsible for teaching the more inviting. Depending on the mental efforts that will be required, students should feel as much as possible in a welcoming environment, an environment that represents them and make them feel at ease." (laN+, 2007) The flower inspired school illustrates their direction in



laN+, Scuola Elementare, Fontana Candida, 2007

architecture; they have designed the exteriors and park areas surrounding to be extensions of the interior. The classrooms become the petals and heart central part of the landscape, the school itself becomes an object which is playful, and is easily recognizable, and is intended to have an impact on the imagination of the students within (laN+, 2007). The school is described as a place of transition, the corridors,

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the classrooms, the exteriors and the surrounding park. The school itself a place of experience, the corridors of observation, the classrooms of learning, and the outer space to play, learn and again observe (IaN+, 2007).

But it isn't just young Italian firms that are successfully morphing the landscape in Ostiense. The Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), led by Rem Koolhaas, won the competition to redevelop the sprawling Mercati Generali, a former general market wholesaling and warehouse complex on Via Ostiense that has fallen into disrepair and abandonment progressively since the 1980's, yet nothing was developed there – it just sat empty and abandoned until now. The project looks to take a long time to complete, in classic Roman timespans. The new Mercati Generali is being dubbed the "city of youth", and will feature an 882,000 square foot mix of shops, theatres, restaurants, and sports facilities to provide local services and leisure spaces for the changing social population base of Ostiense and Testaccio (Bennett, 2005), but also looks to draw from around the region, perhaps one way of reducing the heavy influx of bored teenagers and other residents of the suburbs who flood into Rome's core on the weekends in particular (lacking entirely similar sorts of spaces close to home. The Mercati Generali was most notably Rome's original produce market, where food imported from the countryside was brought in, wholesaled and sold. Ostiense was chosen for the market because it moved the noise and pollution away from the city. Further, it was ideal because of



Mercati Generali, Rem Koolhaas and OMA, Ostiense

3 surrounding rail stations, the river, and ancient Roman roads linking it to other parts of the city. Koolhaas won the design competition in the year 2000, with construction expected to begin in 2006 or 2007 (Rankin, 2006). So, this could prove to be a very positive step forward for the city beyond signature buildings in the core, despite the big name attached to the project.

Also in Ostiense is the newest addition to the Capitoline Museum, the Centrale Montemartini. This unique museum is housed in a former industrial power station, which provided energy for Rome until 1968 (Rankin, 2006). Many of Ostiense's workers were employed in this plant, and many of these former

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workers participated in the initiative to preserve the facility as a museum. Some of the Capitoline's overflow collection is now housed here, in juxtaposition with the industrial art of the machinery of the power station (Rankin, 2006). It is another example of new ideas about archaeology, and new valuing of the more recent past as a form of valid archaeology. But the mixing of the two is arresting in its originality and implications. Again, like Crypta Balbi a definitive move forward both architecturally and in how culture is considered in the city. The involvement of the venerable Capitoline in the project brought credibility and signalled an openness to innovation from one of Rome's most important institutions. This openness is further revealed at the Capitoline Hill Museums itself in the outstanding new spaces that one side display the core collections of the She-Wolf of the Capitol, the Marcus Aurelius bronze from Michelangelo's Piazza in front and in the connecting tunnel beneath the square and its innovation display of both information and artefacts.



Interior, Capitoline Museum, Rome, with She-Wolf of the Capitol and the Marcus Aurelius Bronze from Michelangelo's Campidoglio Square outside

Ostiense was also home to the recent Roma DesignPiu exhibition of new product and environmental design, and contemporary ideas. This the latest project of Rome Sapienza University professor and maverick Lorenzo Imbesi. While this show is fairly new, it is growing, with bigger and better ideas expected at each annual event. By locating strategically in Ostiense, it has established that the area is indeed at the center of design activity, and that the future will bring more new and exciting shows and ideas to the area. Imbesi seems to be behind a major initiative to bring significant product design and interactive design to the city, which would be good news indeed.

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Further outside the Aurellian walls to South of the city, beyond Ostiense is the sprawling Fascist era EUR, where Massimiliano Fuksas is currently constructing the Congress Centre for the European Union. The building looks perhaps to be the best yet and the completion can only bring more positive attention. While the Roman Master Plan enabled new architecture and ideas in Rome, the trigger for these ideas was the return of Massimiliano Fuksas to his home town: "Italy was something like a disaster for 30 years... [but now] Roma is a very exciting place to live" (Fuksas, 2006). Fuksas carries a prominence and aura about him that is characteristic of the best in the world. He thinks and acts differently than many of the other Italian designers in the past, possibly because he brings a significant international portfolio back to Rome, after years of having to work abroad in Paris most notably, after years of stagnation back home. Fuksas seems to have saved his best for Rome. The Congress Centre concept is almost surreal to look at.



Massimiliano Fuksas, new EUR Congress Center, with the "cloud: form within, rethinking EUR's severe architecture"

The building itself ceases to be a building; it is a cloud within a box. In designing the centre, Fuksas wanted to create a "building that had no crystallized form at all" (Arcspace.com, 2004). The 320,000 square foot complex will cost 1.6 billion Euros, is 30 metres high, and will be almost completely translucent. The highlight of the space is a 37,000 square foot steel and Teflon cloud suspended above the surface, which contains meeting rooms and an auditorium.

This project exemplifies Signor Fuksas idea that "if you want to do architecture [that is] more than only a building, you have to ... give emotion. Emotion has to be positive, not negative" (Fuksas, 2006).

Fuksas himself is a visionary. Numerous projects around the world test the limits of the traditional and redefine how a space should work. The Eindhoven mall in the Netherlands is but one example. In explaining his concept for a mall that had numerous entry and exit points, and a vast amount of public space, he spoke about how the traditional mall was no longer relevant. It seems that cities have a clear idea of the inner city, a historic centre, and the suburbs. "What, I believe is

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most important right now is to work in this area (between them). To understand what has to be the area between the suburbs and the city" (Fukas, 2006). To better understand the relationship between the city and the suburb, we need to redefine what the connection between the city and the suburb actually is. EUR is such a place, three metro stops away from Ostiense.

Fukas is designing a new contemporary architecture which clearly has gained from having worked close by the best in France, Dominique Perrault, Jean Nouvel etc . But the swooping forms of the new EUR Congress Center - much like his long roofed building at Milan's new Fiera complex at Rho, and his newly proposed Piaggio Museum complex in Pontdera – he insists owe as much at least to a deep appreciation of Rome's Baroque facades and spaces by Borromini, which are deep within his consciousness. "Borromini", he insists "was doing what Frank Gehry and others does now long ago", and better. It was from San Carlo Borromeo that today's forms first derived.

Fukas isn't the only architect building out into the suburbs of the eternal city. While Richard Meier's Ara Pacis was embroiled in controversy, locals generally appreciated his Jubilee Church (Dio Padre Misericordioso) project (however much it looks like a gleaming white modernist UFO dropped into the dingy working-class neighborhood fabric). This is Meier's third church, after completing the Crystal Cathedral's International Center for Possibility Thinking in Garden Grove, California; and the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. Jubilee grew out of a competition in 1996 where Meier, Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava, Peter Eisenman, Tadao Ando, and Gunter Behnisch were invited to participate. This church is one of the key new religious buildings in Rome, with a total of 65 completed or planned.



Meier's white sails offer little contextual connection to the traditional colors of Rome.

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The church itself is 1 million square feet, and also houses a recreation centre. It is made primarily of concrete, stucco, travertine, and glass. 3 concrete shells arch in varying heights that bring to mind white sails. Skylights span the entire length of the church, filling it with natural light. At night, the light emanating from the structure fills the surrounding area with an ethereal presence (ArchNewsNow, 2003). Meier's goal for the church was to leave an isolated residential district back into the fabric of Rome (ArchNewsNow). Meier claims that he made strong attempts to integrate elements of locality into this project. Chief among them was the white cement used for the curved shells, which is the material invented for Pier Nervi's Olympic Stadium in Rome (ArchNewsNow, 2003). We wouldn't go so far as to call this contextual design, nor should it be surprising to anyone that his building should be white. But in any case, an impressive building that pleased its client by all accounts, and the under-served Eastern side of Rome got an injection of sorts. Another project that will impact Rome's Eastern edge is the new TAV high-speed rail station that is currently being completed at Roma-Tiburtina. But of much greater importance is the enhanced connection that the TAV brings to Northern Europe.

To keep pace with the rest of Europe, Rome has been progressively updating their transportation and infrastructure to allow the city to grow moderately, and take advantage of the European Union and the new economy it brings. TAV (Treno ad Alta Velocita) S.p.A. is the branch of the Italian government responsible for running the country's high speed rail network, which began operations in 1991. The company is currently in the midst of a 15 year project to increase capacity and reduce travel times on the country's most important train lines: North-South, Milan to Naples (via Florence and Rome), and East-West, the Turin-Milan-Venice direction. The project will create 888km of high speed rail lines (TAV, 2006). For the entire system, the goal is to reduce the travel times from 8 hours 30 minutes down to 5 hours, a 60% reduction (TAV). More specifically, these lines will reduce the travel times between Rome and Naples to 1 hour, from 1.5 hours. The travel time from Rome to Milan will now be just over 2 hours, as compared to nearly 4 hours previously. This will involve the addition of new tracks, tunnels, and bridges, as well as numerous upgrades to existing infrastructure. The investment for the Turin-Milan-Rome-Naples line is expected to be 30 billion euro (approximately \$45 billion Canadian). The goal is to have trains running at 300km/h for most of the length of the lines. The project is expected to be completed by 2009. These railway improvements, along with increased capacity on the ring roads around Rome, will allow Rome to be more competitive in the European and global economies.

Elsewhere in Rome, just to the West of Renzo Piano's Auditorium acclaimed British architect Zaha Hadid is constructing MaXXI (the Museum of the 21st Century), Rome's first museum of contemporary art. The building again occupies a formerly abandoned, and now redeveloped site, just blocks for the Tiber. Impressively, Hadid, and the MaXXI won the Pritzker Prize in 2004, the world's most prestigious architecture award. Using her "Deconstructivist" style, MaXXI breaks away from local style forms, and material to keep a global focus, both on the art displayed

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Zaha Hadid's soon to be opened MAXXI, Museum of the 21st Century and its context in the historic Flaminio district

in the museum, and the outside of the building (Kirk, 2004). The former military barracks is being revitalized by Hadid's complex, which has forced a reinvention of function and form "no less dramatic than Paranesi's Carceri engravings envisioned", the flow of data in the electronic age, and a simultaneity of brain functions (Kirk, 2004). Hadid's original proposal for the complex offered what they called a "quasi-urban field, a 'world' to dive into rather than a building as a signature object" (Danda, 2006). The centre is planned to be a porous, immersive space which allows external and internal circulation to follow the overall drift of the geometry. The building almost certainly will put Rome on the map for contemporary design in the same manner that her widely acclaimed Fire Station project did for Vitra in the 1990's. Hadid proposes to create a flexible museum space, that reduces reliance on a wall, in all its forms: windows, fixed walls, moveable walls, screens etc. In this museum, dimension and geometry are constantly changing, adapting to the curatorial needs of the moment, creating a versatile exhibition space. The museum, by project completion, will house various collections, offices, apartments for fellows, a library, and an outdoor demonstration space (Danda, 2006). The project is stretching on in classic Roman style, still unfinished but edging closer.



The MAXXI from above, architectural model of the intense complexity of the Zaha Hadid form, a sure magnet for the design culture traveller

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Now is an exciting time in Rome. A wealth of projects large and small are changing the landscape throughout the city as we know it, and leading a charge that Rome is indeed a new centre for design. For those who are most immersed in the Roman environment, those who live there, Rome has become a new exhibition of ideas and practices that will show it is a world leader in design.

The projects outlined in this paper, and numerous others, are the leading edge of monumental change in the eternal city; a changed eternal city that embraces change while carefully considering how to maintain and value existing history. This Rome is one that recognizes that today's action is tomorrow's history, and that the contemporary and the current deserve a chance to be a part of the story of Rome, from the empire to now.

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