

Royal Netherlands Embassy in Rome

DARC - Direzione generale per l'architettura e l'arte contemporanea, Ministry of Culture, Italy

HOLLAND-ITALY

10 Works of Architecture

An exhibition on Dutch and Italian contemporary architecture

Introduction

On the occasion of the reopening of the Dutch Embassy in May 2007, in Via Michele Mercati, which will be partly renovated, partly completely rebuilt by the Dutch architectural office CEPEZED, the Dutch Embassy in Rome wants to celebrate this with several cultural events, which will have links with the building, the state of the architecture and the art works which will be permanently on display in and on top of the Embassy. It also wants to celebrate the fact that Holland will be back in the heart of Rome, after one and a half year of absence. With the new building and its program this institution confirms its mandate: to promote Dutch culture in Italy and to act as a link between Dutch and Italian cultures, while looking at the future.

In order to address the specificity of the occasion, as far as architecture is concerned, has been imagined an exhibition about the activity of some Dutch offices of the youngest generation. They will be compared with an equal panel of Italian, emergent groups, whose work, for different reasons, is related to the Dutch scene, also to indicate the ultimate European condition in which more and more the youngest designers grow up and use to operate today.

Context of the exhibition and themes

The field in which the "match" takes place is borrowed from the actual condition of Dutch architecture.

In the last decade Dutch architecture has been one of the most successful and influential, recognized on a planetary level and extremely appreciated. *Pragmatism* – a masterly mixture of freshness, efficiency and "realism" – was the most important character that contributed to its affirmation. Nonetheless, while big monographs of the most renowned offices were piled up in the bookshops all over the world, in the Netherlands the suspect about the effectiveness of that formula became to grow. The ghosts of the contemporary, global "society of the spectacle", as much as the post-ideological situation of the Netherlands during the 1990s, progressively appeared as the real conditions that this architecture had, in fact, embodied, especially in the last times.

Ten years after the exhibition *Nine+One*, launched in 1997 from the platform of NAI, and seven after the book *SuperDutch*, published by Thames&Hudson in 2000 – the two events that marked the climax in the celebration of the 1990s Dutch architecture – the necessity of a different attitude towards the practice and, more generally, towards the role of architecture, seems already present in the agenda of some of the youngest offices: to go beyond the seductive, *immediate*, astonishingly up-to-date images, and to reformulate an architectural thought grounded on a renovated consciousness of its goals, become, for them, important and shared aspects of architecture. More sensible to the contexts where they are asked to operate, sometimes even inspired by a new "sustainability" towards the design and construction techniques, the offices start to look at their activity in a more problematic and articulated way, evaluating and keeping together all its implications, in a sense "coming back" to architecture and investigating its possibilities and its limits.

The hypothesis that the exhibition wants to verify and let emerge, is that these offices, while working in the specific field of architecture in a very concrete way, are offering the embryo of a new *theoretical* approach to the discipline, where 'theory' should be intended in its wider sense: to have a clear, structured *strategy* for architecture (and not just a seductive tactic),

and to propose a *vision* (the literal sense of the word 'theory') that can emancipate architecture from being a mere transfiguration - or, worse, a caricature - of the forces of "reality".

In this way the implicit encounter of the exhibition – its subtext – can be displayed as *pragmatism vs. theory*: the first being the traditional, conceptual core of Dutch architectural approach but also the inevitable "context" of young practices in Italy; the second being a new-old device – besides present in the DNA of Italian architecture – that is emerging from the Dutch context to re-think the discipline in the direction of a renovated consciousness of its role, far beyond the boundaries of the Netherlands and Italy.

Structure of the exhibition and symposium

As said, the exhibition will confront five Dutch offices of the youngest generation with five Italian ones. The selection of the groups – although limited – aims to present a variety of different interpretations of the exhibition's themes.

The offices will be asked to exhibit only *one* project - that should have a specific architectural objective – in order to illustrate their theoretical approach to architecture. The selection of the works will therefore address five categories - *House, Pavilion, Context, Infrastructure, City* - that will reflect a wide range of proposals, embracing different scales of architectural actions, from singular housing to urban projects.

Thanks to the cooperation between the Dutch Embassy and the Direzione generale per l'architettura e l'arte contemporanea (DARC) of the Italian Ministry of Culture, the exhibition will take place in the space of the MAXXI, the Center for Contemporary Art, in Rome. The period will be of six weeks, from the 17th May to the end of June.

The structure of the exhibition will be "light" enough to make it, potentially, traveling. Since in the MAXXI the available space is the central, rectangular room of almost 80 square meters, the exhibition will be constituted by 10 big "windows" (5 on each side) each of them presenting one projects - and therefore one group - in just one board. A series of models will be also part of the exhibition, acting as a concrete, three-dimensional counterpart of the ten boards. A catalogue will be produced where each group will have a consistent amount of pages to explain extensively the project and reproduce all the necessary drawings and images. A specific role will be assigned to the architects' texts. The catalogue will include an introduction by the curator and the biographies of the invited offices. The catalogue will be conceived in English language. Italian and Dutch translations of the texts will be included in a separate part of the layout.

Thanks to the contribution of NAI the exhibition will be accompanied by a symposium with the participating architects that will take place in the MAXXI the day after the exhibition opening. Dutch and Italian critics will be involved in order to give specific contributions to the debate raised by the exhibition and moderate the presentations of the projects. The symposium will end with an open discussion.

The exhibition will take advantage of the cooperation with NAI also in order to let it travel to the Netherlands and find the most appropriate venue (possibly be at the NAI itself or another institution having a similar standing).

curator: Gabriele Mastrigli
organization: iMage

Dutch offices:

Atelier Kempe Thill (Rotterdam), Crimson (Rotterdam), NL Architects (Amsterdam), Onix Architects (Groningen), Powerhouse Company (Rotterdam-Copenhagen)

Italian offices:

Baukuh (Genoa), Dogma (Rotterdam), gruppo A12 (Milan-Genoa), IaN+ (Rome), Beniamino Servino (Caserta)

Works:

(House)

It is one of the most common but still crucial issues in architecture. The exhibition will explore the theme of the singular house, especially in relationship with the modern experience, seen through two radically different contexts in the Netherlands and in Italy.

Works: Villa 1, Bennekom, Netherlands (Powerhouse Company)
Two-family house, Pozzovetere, Italy (Beniamino Servino)

(Pavilion)

The Pavilion is not only one of the most common starting design experience for young practices. It is the zero-degree of public architecture. Its hybrid nature, beyond permanence and temporariness, makes it one of the most interesting architectural typologies in order to explore how architecture is qualified to address the public domain.

Works: Light Building, Rotterdam, Netherlands (Atelier Kempe Thill) [or Acrylic Dome]
Temporary pavillion, Kröller Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands (gruppo A12)

(Context)

It is one of the "new" themes that are emerging in the Dutch debate in the very last years. Both the projects - one by a Dutch group the other by an Italian one - are located in the Netherlands and address this issue.

Works: 'Platfarmhouse', Haren, Netherlands (Onix)
Master plan Bakemabuurt-Geuzenveld, Amsterdam, Netherlands (Baukuh)

(Infrastructure)

It is one of the most interesting architectural issues in the reflection of young Dutch and Italian designers. The exhibition will present compare two cases (one in the Netherlands the other in Italy) in which infrastructure becomes the object of a specific architectural action.

Works: A8 Viaduct, Zaandam, Netherlands (NL Architects)
Parking building Nuovo Salario, Rome, Italy (IaN+)

(City)

The city is the definitive goal of architecture since it is imagined as the representation and the physical space for living of a community. The exhibition will present two different positions that are emerging within the Dutch debate in the very last years.

Works: WIMBY!, Rotterdam-Hoogvliet, Netherlands (Crimson)
New Administrative City, Republic of South Korea (Dogma)

Opening Symposium moderators: Michele Bonino, Roemer van Toorn