

PIER LUIGI NERVI
Architecture as Challenge
Turin, Industrial Patrons, and the
Worlds of Architecture and
Engineering in Italy

29 April – 17 July 2011
Torino Esposizioni Salone C
Via Petrarca 39/B – Torino

As part of the events of *Esperienza Italia 150°* - the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of national unity - the exhibition **Pier Luigi Nervi, Architettura come sfida** (Pier Luigi Nervi, Architecture as Challenge) will open to the public on Friday, 29 April 2011, at Turin's *Palazzo delle Esposizioni*. This itinerant exhibition is a joint project of the Pier Luigi Nervi Research and Knowledge Management Project, headquartered in Brussels, the *Centre International pour la Ville, l'Architecture et le Paysage* (CIVA), also in Brussels, the MAXXI/Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo in Rome, and the Centro Studi e Archivi della Comunicazione (CSAC) of the University of Parma.

Under the direction of an international committee of specialists chaired by architectural historian **Carlo Olmo**, the project is the fruit of collaboration between the *Politecnico di Torino* and Rome's *Tor Vergata* and *Sapienza* Universities. The exhibition has also benefited greatly from the research project entitled *Pier Luigi Nervi, Arte e Scienza del Costruire* (*Pier Luigi Nervi -The Art and Science of Building*), with contributions from the *Compagnia di San Paolo* and the cooperation of the *Urban Center Metropolitano di Torino*.

The series of exhibitions, scheduled to be presented in Italy and abroad, is divided into various phases and is characterised by a central nucleus of 12 works selected from among Nervi's most famous projects worldwide, plus thematic sections created 'to measure' for each individual venue, introducing new materials, studies and testimonials of particular relevance for each site.

The first exhibition, inaugurated in Brussels in June 2010, has since travelled to Venice (September-November 2010) and Rome (at the Maxxi, December 2010-March 2011). The stop in Rome showcased Nervi's projects for the 1960 Olympic Games. After its appearance in Turin, the exhibition will begin an international tour that will take it to

China and the United States.

Nervi was one of the twentieth century's greatest creators of architectural structures, creator of some of the most beautiful works of contemporary architecture, the result of an extraordinary union of art and science in building. Nikolaus Pevsner defined him as 'the most brilliant artist in reinforced concrete of our time'.

He has been characterised as having the daring of an engineer, the imagination of an architect, and the practicality of a businessman. Over his long career, his work encompassed at least six fundamental activities: *design, drawing, computation, modelling, writing and teaching*.

While each of these activities was autonomous, all were intertwined in ways that were sometimes profound, making it possible to reconstruct the developments in a career that, from its very beginning, extended far beyond the common canons of civil engineering as usually applied to architecture.

The exhibit presents the original designs that were the basis for works that were exceptional, both in terms of scope and quality. They can be found on

all five continents and were commissioned by a most diverse group of clients, from UNESCO to Pope Paul VI. Their study makes it possible to retrace a history that would have been difficult to tell in any other way, in which revolutionary construction techniques are frequently connected to Italian and international political history.

This travelling exhibition is the perfect vehicle to explore the complex world of culture and relationships in which Nervi moved, in addition to providing keys to understanding the formal inventiveness of his works.

The exhibition's stop in Turin will be staged in the city's splendid venue '*Torino Esposizioni*', 'Nervi inside Nervi', as it were, for the first time. *Torino Esposizioni*, built shortly after WWII to host the '*Saloni dell'Automobile*' (an automotive show that was a veritable showcase for Turin's industry) marked the beginning of an intense, lasting relationship between Nervi and the city of Turin, one that would reach its pinnacle with the commission for the '*Palazzo del Lavoro*' as part of the grand centennial celebrations of *Italia '61*, the most ambitious urban renewal project in a city then in the midst of an economic boom.

The exhibition's nucleus revolves around the illustration, through original drawings, scale models and photographs, of a selection of 12 of Nervi's most celebrated works in Italy and abroad. First, the air hangars in Orbetello and Orvieto of the 1930s. Next, St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco. Then it's onto the Papal Audience Hall in Rome, followed by the end-60's embassy in Brasilia. It also includes a look at the projects for the Olympic Games in Rome at the end of the 1950s, and those of *Torino Esposizioni* and the *Palazzo di Lavoro*.

Among exhibition highlights are a series of photographs of twelve of Nervi's iconographic works - all still standing today - taken by the great Italian master of architectural photography, **Mario Carrieri**.

The scale models of the twelve works on display, created using today's rapid prototyping technologies, were produced by the NerViLab of the Department of Structural and Geotechnical Engineering at the Sapienza University of Rome and the Department of Structural Engineering of the *Politecnico di Torino*, contributing to an understanding of the depth of Nervi's thinking, while showcasing its best possible outcome: the spatial expressiveness of structural compositions which speak the language of

geometry.

The section of the exhibition expressly created for Turin begins with an examination of Nervi's relationship with the important Italian industrial entities that commissioned projects, which in those early years following the war, were centered in Turin. Fiat is here, of course. But so are *Burgo*, *Italcementi*, *Pirelli*, *Lancia* and *L'Oréal*. In addition to in-depth looks at *Torino Esposizioni* and the *Palazzo del Lavoro*, still admired today, other less well-known projects are also presented, such as Fiat plants from Mirafiori to Venaria, and the tram maintenance hangar in Via Manin, which also contributed to Turin's modern skyline, as well as other unbuilt projects for large structures in the city, such as the *Porta Nuova* train station.

The exhibition also explores **Nervi's relationship with Italian architects** during the design phase of many of the buildings on display: Gio Ponti for the *Pirelli* skyscraper in Milan and the Lerici Italian Institute for Culture in Stockholm, with whom Nervi had a long-lasting relationship that was played out in the pages of *Domus* magazine; Luigi Moretti for the Montreal Stock Exchange Tower; Marcello Piacentini and Annibale Vitellozzi for the Rome sports complex;

Ettore Sottsass for *Torino Esposizioni*; and Ernesto Nathan Rogers and Pietro Maria Bardi, who contributed to Nervi's critical success in magazines such as *Quadrante* and *Casabella*.

Finally, particular attention is paid to **Nervi's relationship to the world of engineering in Milan and Turin**. Thanks to a rich and long-lasting relationship with eminent figures within the polytechnic institutes, such as Arturo Danusso in Milan and Guido Oberti in Turin, Nervi discovered the possibilities offered by experimental research (in particular on reduced scale models) for building and testing his own extraordinary formal and constructive inventions. His contacts with Gustavo Colonnelli shed light on a cross-section of the “golden age” of Italian architecture and engineering in the twentieth century.

The displays are enriched with video testimonials, interviews and contemporary film footage rediscovered in the archives of *Raiteche* and *Istituto Luce*.

The exhibition is accompanied by two catalogues, published by *Silvana Editoriale*, which complement each other. The first is more generally about the themes that delineate Nervi's career, while the other

is more specific to the Turin exhibition.

The exhibition itinerary also continues beyond the *Torino Esposizioni* venue. In order to make it easier to experience Nervi's works sprinkled around the city, Turin's Urban Center Metro is offering a series of Nervi tours aboard a bus that circulated at the time of *Italia '61* and has been restored for the occasion.

In conjunction with the exhibition, on 2 May 2011 Turin's *Accademia delle Scienze* will host an international seminar on the work of Pier Luigi Nervi. Special attention will be given, on the one hand, to the relationship between science and art in construction, and on the other, to problems linked to the culturally-correct conservation and adaptive reuse of Turin's exceptional patrimony of twentieth-century structural architecture, especially, but not only, that of Nervi.

These two important events will bring to the centre of the city's cultural debates an issue relevant to other situations as well: What destiny for an extraordinary heritage of history-making works of contemporary architecture that are known and admired throughout the world, but whose prospects for reuse were and

are still today very problematic?

The international tour of the exhibition has been made possible thanks to support from the *Permasteelisa* Group, *Italcementi* and *Ance*. The Turin exhibition is sponsored by *Regione Piemonte*, *Città di Torino*, *Comitato Italia 150*, *Camera di Commercio di Torino*, *Cassa di Risparmio di Torino*, *Politecnico di Torino*, *Collegio costruttori edili di Torino*, *Maire Tecnimont*, *Recchi Ingegneria e Partecipazioni S.p.A.*, the *Burgo* Group and the *Gruppo torinese trasporti*.

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