

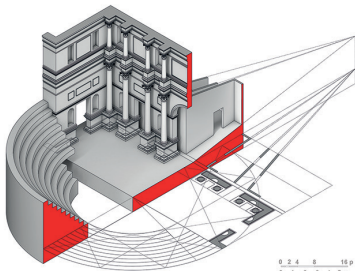
## Reviews

Massimiliano Ciammaichella  
**Scenografia e prospettiva  
 nella Venezia del Cinquecento  
 e Seicento. Premesse e  
 sviluppi del teatro barocco**

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SCENOGRAFIA E PROSPETTIVA NELLA VENEZIA  
 DEL CINQUECENTO E SEICENTO  
 SCENOGRAPHY AND PERSPECTIVE IN SIXTEENTH  
 AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES IN VENICE

Massimiliano Ciammaichella



Premesse e sviluppi del teatro barocco  
 Preconditions and Developments of Baroque Theatre

La scuola di Pitagora editrice

Introduced by a *Preface* by Francesca Fatta, this interesting monographic volume by Massimiliano Ciammaichella investigates the relationship between the invention of scenography in Venice between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the science of perspective, articulating the theme in three chapters: *La città dello spettacolo* ("The City of Spectacle"); *La matematica dell'illusione* ("The Mathematics of Illusion"); *La scena barocca* ("The Baroque Stage"). Preceded by the author's *Introduction*, the three chapters are followed by the *Conclusions* and the *Bibliography and Documentary Sources*, again by Ciammaichella. From the point of view of international impact, the *Introduction* and the *Conclusion* are entirely translated into English, while the three chapters are each followed by an ample summary, also translated into that language.

On the whole, the main theme of this monograph revolves around the connection between the publication of descriptive treatises on the works of scenographers active in Venice between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the contemporary publication of geometrical treatises on perspective representation. According to the author, this connection is due to the fact that in that period Venice was the "undisputed home of Baroque melodrama" [p. 11] and, therefore, in the Venetian city the production of treatises in this field appears very consistent. Moreover, according to the author, another

aspect (which becomes here the main one) links the two sectorial productions where, on the one hand, the treatises on scenography mainly describe the events related both to the scenic events and to the authors of the performances (although the figure of the scenographer was still characterized as having a subordinate role), on the other hand, in the treatises on the science of representation, the explanation of the geometrical foundations of perspective is accompanied by the description of the construction of stage sceneries and of the implementation of mechanisms able to animate them.

An interweaving, therefore, a hybridization of speculative interests (but also practical ones) that in seventeenth-century Venice creatively linked geometry to scenography in the common intent of invalidating the classical model of theater in order to open, as the author well summarizes, to the "magic of the fourth wall, in the illusionistic perspective box of scenography" [p. 11]. For the arguments clearly indicated in the first lines of the *Introduction*, the book therefore appears interesting in outlining the cultural premises and the developments of theatrical design as they are configured and transformed in Venice between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first chapter, *La città dello spettacolo* ("The City of Spectacle"), gives the reader a historic cross-section in which the multiple forms and activities of spectacle which

took place in Venice gradually changed their impact, both regarding the typology of the performances and the architectural configuration of the spaces that hosted the theatrical representations. In this sense, the reading of the three paragraphs which make up the first chapter guides the reader through this progressive evolution of the Venetian stage space which, from the mimic representations in masks without nearly any scenography, generates ephemeral theatrical stagings (conceived as closed and/or open-air spaces) then reaching, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the introduction of the first forms of public theaters with paid entrance. This historical transformation would in the seventeenth century lead Venice to inaugurate a modern type of spectacle, the melodrama, and at the same time, a new model of theater, the so-called “*teatro all’italiana*”. Therefore, two innovative forms of representation that, between spectacle and architectural space, proposed a Venetian model that would be so acclaimed as to be exported abroad with great success.

The second chapter of the book, with the aforementioned and seductive title *La matematica dell’illusione* (“The Mathematics of Illusion”), is composed of two paragraphs dedicated to the examination of the geometrical foundations for the perspective representation of scenography as well as to the description of the techniques used in the mechanical construction of the scenes. This is a chapter nourished by the excellent epochal seasons that saw the codification, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of a new scientific and artistic culture, that is, the *perspectiva artificialis*, conceived by Brunelleschi, Alberti, Piero della Francesca, Leonardo da Vinci and Luca Pacioli, and divulged through treatises on perspective as a

mathematical discipline. On these bases, and as recalled by Anna Sgrosso in her fundamental second volume entitled *Rinascimento e Barocco* (*Renaissance and Baroque*) of the series *La Geometria nell’immagine*, the seventeenth century built the “revenge of the geometers” [Sgrosso 2001, p. 217] with the great conquests of science, in theory and practice, and with the popularization of extreme perspectives, such as anamorphoses. Nourished by these events, the culture of theatrical representation established close connections between scenography and perspective, of which Ciammaichella in this second chapter describes the main steps that led not only to emphasize the depth of the theatrical scene (already conceived as a geometric and spatial configuration of central solid perspective) with the use of oblique planes, but also to transform the fixed scene into an animated stage thanks to the invention of extraordinarily conceived and designed machinery. From the masterly union of science and art, mechanical inventiveness freed the “fourth wall to host a dynamic scenography, in continuous transformation” [p. 67], hosting the events and acts of a new theatrical form, the previously mentioned melodrama. In this sense, the philosophy of the scientific revolution, which was to accompany the social and theoretical transformations of the seventeenth century, would strengthen, even more, the scientific conscience of the sixteenth century, leading the “new science” towards a quantitative image of nature in which Cartesian mechanism culminated in the celebration of the “machine.” As Ciammaichella well states, in this epochal context “the figure of the stage painter evolved into that of the skilled Baroque engineer” [p. 91]. What the author affirms brings to mind the time of bastioned military

architecture, a real war machine capable of associating spatial form to offensive devices (firing weapons). Similarly, theatrical scenery was transformed into stage machinery, housing dynamic mechanical devices capable of changing the perspective image of the represented environments and thus arousing surprise and wonder.

The relationship established between the place of the performance and the action on stage is the subject of critical reflection in the third chapter, entitled *La scena barocca* (“The Baroque Stage”). In this chapter, starting from the description of the transformation of the classical theater into a public theatre with paid entrance, the relationship between a large number of works conceived by architects and stage designers and the new theatrical spaces in Venice, which hosted the performances, is examined. The aim is to show how this relationship was so strong, affirms Ciammaichella, as to be a real symbiosis.

The need to better describe the relationships existing between the fundamentals of the science of perspective representation and the projects of the stage designers working in Venice becomes an opportunity for Massimiliano Ciammaichella to visualize these theatrical spaces through graphic reconstructions of the settings. The three chapters are enhanced by a rich and varied iconographic apparatus constantly accompanying the text. There are more than one hundred images including reproductions of paintings, drawings and engravings (loose or contained in treatises) as well as autograph drawings, including an image that, using a satellite shot of Venice, shows the location of musical theaters at the end of the seventeenth century. More specifically, the drawings by the author (about twenty) constitute a valid aid to

the comprehension of the assumptions, not only for the obvious reason of allowing faster communication by means of visual images, but also for the use of the visualization of plans, elevations and, above all, axonometric or perspective schemes, accompanied by clear graphics in various shades of red and grey. In this sense, Ciammaichella attributes to these autograph drawings the task of representing the hypotheses of spatial reconstruction for the stage set designed by Giorgio Vasari for *La Talanta*, by Sebastiano Serlio for the provisional theater proposed in the *Secondo Libro di Perspectiva*, by Andrea Palladio for the play *Antigone* (whose cross-section is reproduced on the cover of

the monograph), of the scenic space proposed by Ludovico Cardi, known as Cigoli, of the plan of the Teatro San Cassan (in 1670, as well as according to the project by Francesco Bagnolo of 1762), of the plan of the Teatro San Moisè (according to the 1742 drawing by Gabriel Pierre Martin Dumont and the renovation project of 1793 by Carlo Neumann Rizzi). Similarly, to other autograph drawings the author assigns the task of illustrating the identification of the geometric principles underlying the construction of the scenery for the Teatro di Sabbioneta, for the tragic scene proposed by Daniele Barbaro and for the stage with canopies indicated by Giulio Troili.

These reconstructions are based on a thorough and scrupulous critical re-reading of the documentary, iconographic and archival sources consulted by Massimiliano Ciammaichella, as well as the analysis of the spatial relationships between the theaters examined and the spectacles performed in them. Therefore, these graphical analyses appear fully exhaustive and convincing, strengthening and qualifying even further the scientific-cultural contribution of the monographic volume both within the disciplinary community of Drawing and in relation to the more general theme of theatrical representation.

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