

MAXXI Architettura between Museum and Archive. Protection, Research and Valorization of Architects' Archives in the 21st Century

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Within its premises, the MAXXI (National Museum of 21st Century Arts) of Rome houses the first Italian museum of architecture. Conceived since its genesis as a place of synthesis capable of activating a reciprocal and uninterrupted dynamic between research, documentation, conservation, production and exhibition, MAXXI started its activities in 2010 reflecting on the archive/museum model experimented in various international institutions.

The binomial archive/museum – a binomial that always alludes to coordinated and to a certain extent overlapping functions (conserving, consulting, exhibiting, promoting, disseminating) – has characterized the cultural project of the Museum of architecture since its inception, defining its physiognomy and identity.

With regard to architecture, the relationship between archive and museum is in many ways central. This is be-

cause architecture, absent in physical terms from the museum, in architecture exhibitions, as has been noted by many authors [1], is instead evoked, narrated, described or variously interpreted by drawings, models, photographs and every other form of representation, description, conceptualization, often starting precisely from archival documents.

The mission of MAXXI Architettura is twofold because it is, at the same time, a historical museum and a contemporary museum. A historical museum because it addresses the twentieth century, with the task of representing Italian architecture of the 20th century, turning its attention to the works, personalities and stories that have traversed the last century. A contemporary museum because it looks to the present, to the most interesting and innovative experiences, to the emerging

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Fig. 1. MAXXI Architettura, Repository for the collections (MAXXI_Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo. Collezione MAXXI Architettura).



themes of architecture in its wider relationships with the modern world.

The Museum does not have permanent displays: it presents exhibitions that reveal to the public its cultural program, developed on the basis of its acquired collections and activities of research and in-depth monographic or thematic studies. The strong idea is to encourage a continuous osmosis between exhibits and collections, between exhibitions and archival research in order to develop critical thinking and foster the knowledge of architecture as a complex and multidisciplinary activity.

Returning to the relationship between archive and museum, it is worth remembering that the MAXXI Architettura collection is essentially made up of projects divided into personal fonds (that is, the professional archives of architects) or thematic fonds (which include projects centered on a single theme or produced on a specific occasion).

The definition of the methods of acquisition for enhancing the patrimony of MAXXI Architettura has represented a largely innovative experience for the Museum. The very structure of this patrimony fully reflects the history of the Museum, which is characterized precisely by the intrinsic relationship between collection, research and exhibition activities. Being a single entity that promotes research and at the same time exhibits architecture has determined the absolutely original character of the collection and of the position that MAXXI Architettura holds in the international panorama.

The permanent collection refers to two distinct areas, with specific characteristics: the *20th Century Collection*, which testifies to the culture and activity of architects and engineers of the 20th century, and the *21st Century Collection*, which documents current production and research, also in logical and chronological symmetry with MAXXI Arte, with a close look at the entire system of cultural institutions.

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that, given the role that photography plays in the understanding of architecture and landscape, the *Photography Collection* also forms part of MAXXI Architettura.

The collections are managed by the MAXXI Architecture Archives Center, which can be considered both a physical place for access to the documentation and the consultation of projects and, at the same time, a conceptual place for specialized research.

In the Museum's intentions, and following the tradition of archival science, the archive is conceived as a compen-

Fig. 2. MAXXI Architettura, Repository for the collections (MAXXI_Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo. Collezione MAXXI Architettura).



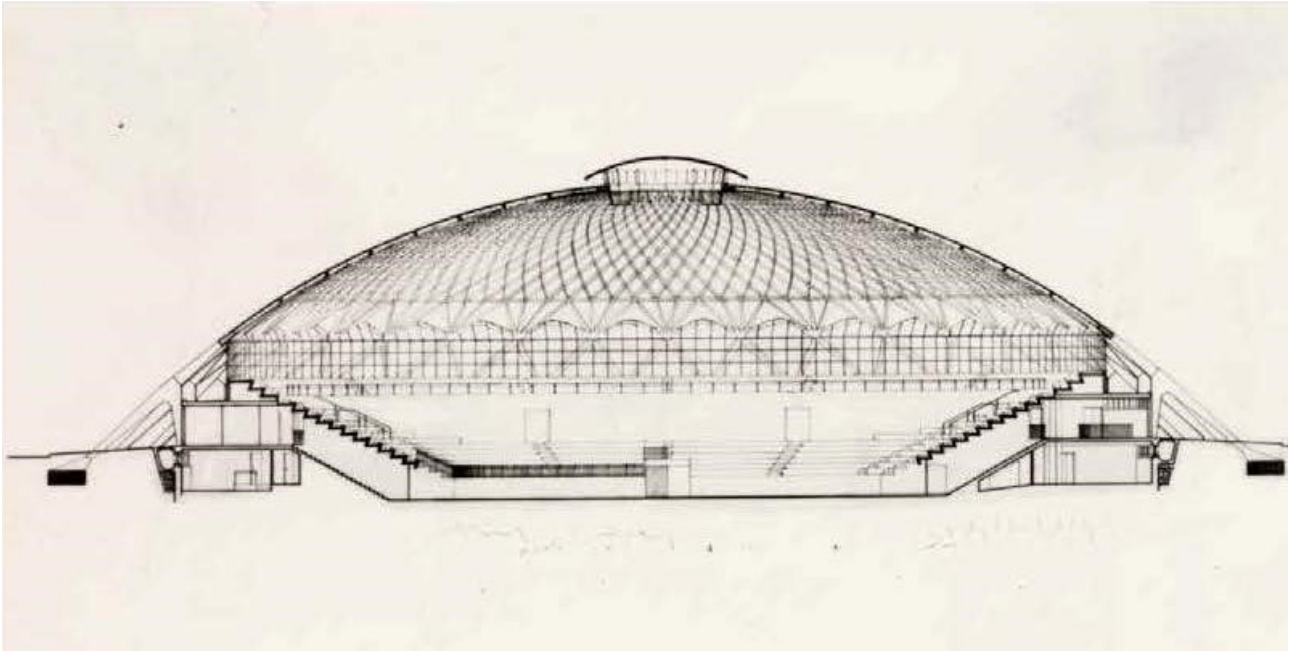


Fig. 4. Archivio Pierluigi Nervi, Palazzetto dello sport, section. Rome 1960 (MAXXI_Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo. Collezione MAXXI Architettura).

dium and contains all the material that revolves around projects, not only those pieces, those products, to which a sort of "artisticness" is recognized and that are therefore more effective for museum fruition. The archive is, therefore, also conceived as a repository, and constitutes the memory of the entire process revolving around architecture, from the initial idea to the realization.

For this reason, the MAXXI Architecture Archives Center is a research center open to scholars and, at the same time, to a wider public. The possibility of constructing one's own critical path through archival documents sets aside the idea of a museum presenting a single vision, the epic narrative of a History (with a capital "H"). The fortunate relationship between archive, research and exhibitions expresses and gives form to the great potential for the transmission of knowledge.

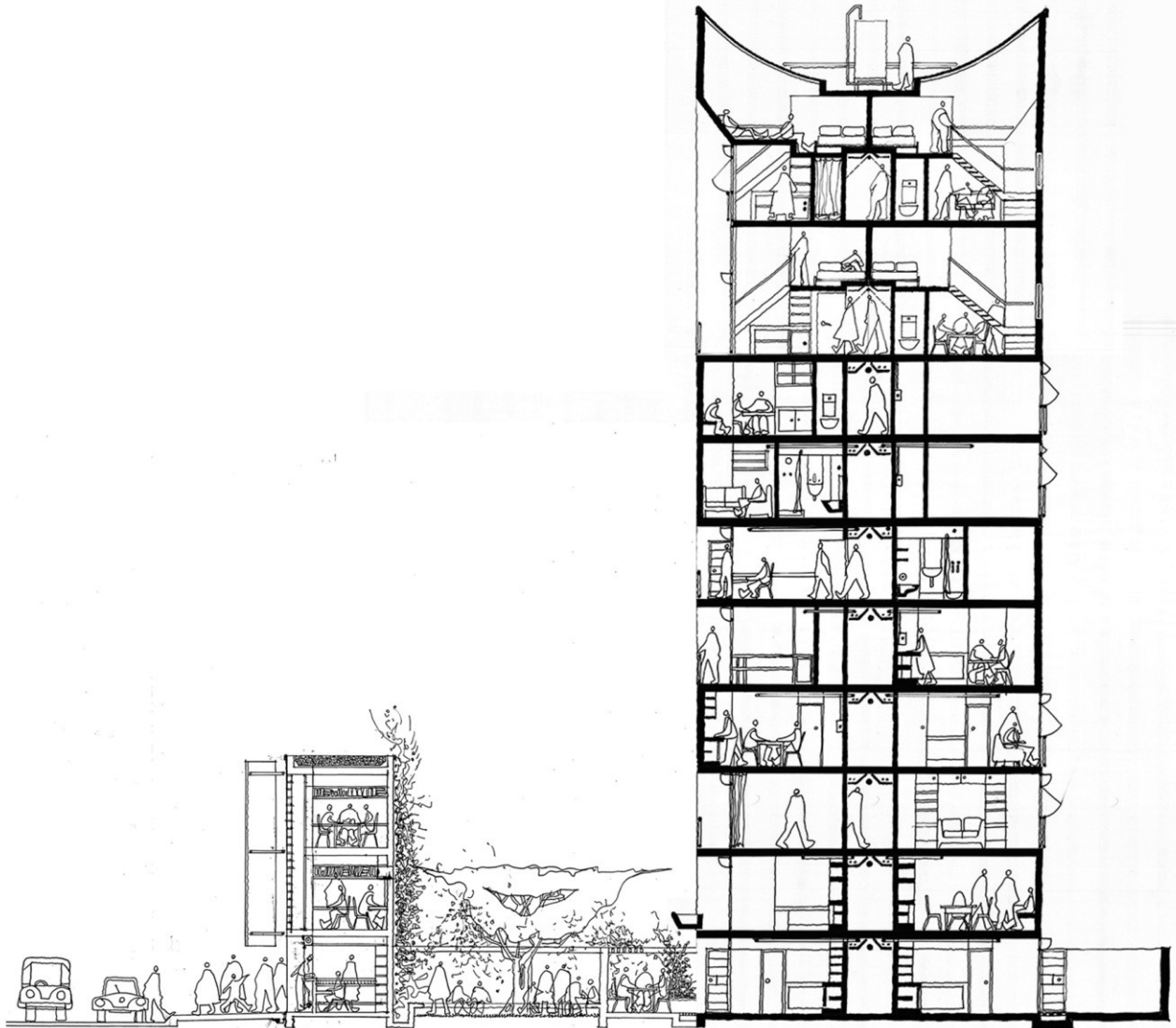
At exhibitions, it is seen how archival materials enable direct or indirect relationships within the same archive or between different archives, activating the most var-

ied paths of research. A cultural approach that seems to refer to that idea of freedom suggested by the architectural conception of the building, designed by Zaha Hadid (1950-2016).

It should also be emphasized that the archives/museum binomial well explains the decision to place the *Sala Studio* [2] of the Archives Center in the heart of the exhibition spaces, thus making it the spatial manifestation of the centrality of the archives in the Museum's architecture collections and programming.

The Archives Center makes it possible to approach architectural records and exhibition documentation in a continuous succession of references and updates, also thanks to the use of wide-ranging digital tools. Its activity is not limited to the aspects strictly related to its documentary nature, but invests all aspects of data protection, conservation, restoration, management and processing, thanks to the standards adopted and the tools specifically developed in recent years. The path of document digitali-

Fig. 5. Jo Noero, Rivers of Steel, Maboneng, cross-section, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2018 (MAXXI_Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo. Collezione MAXXI Architettura).



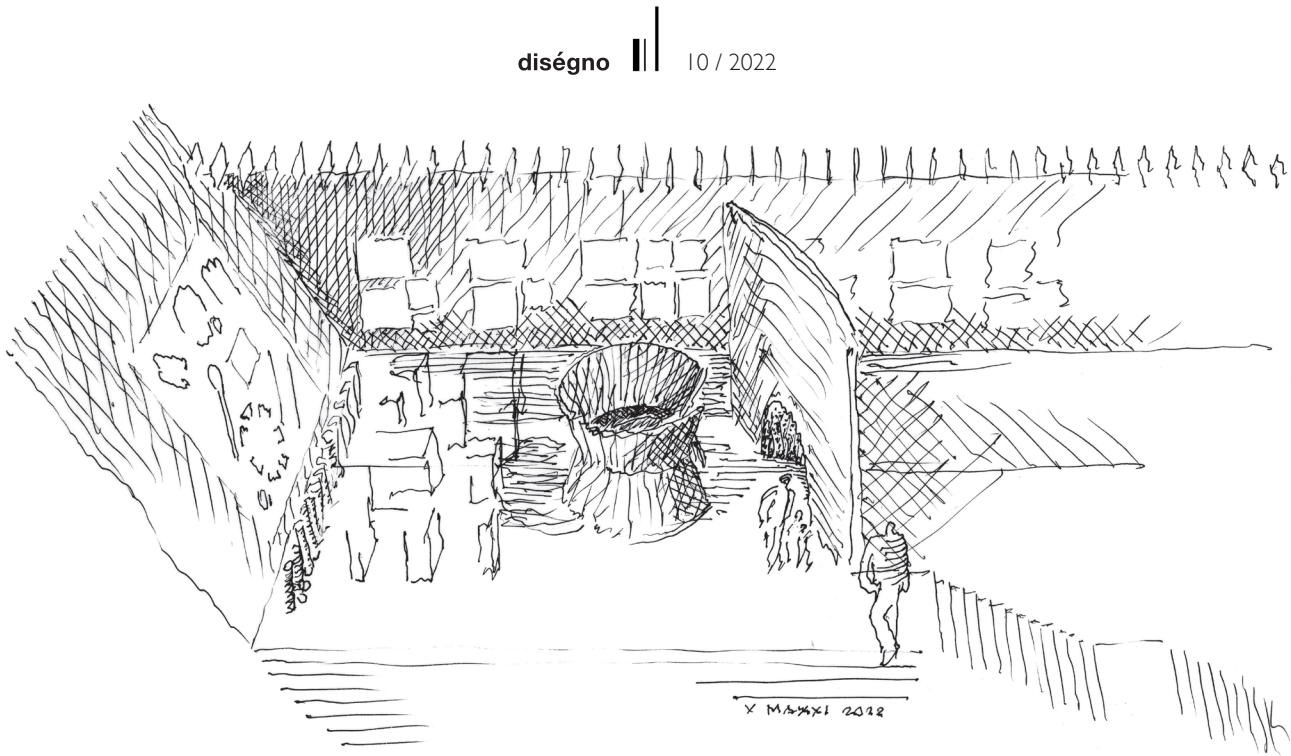


Fig. 6. Mario Botta, exhibition *Sacred and Profane*, MAXXI, sketch of the exhibition project, 2022 (MAXXI_Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo. Collezione MAXXI Architettura).

zation that has been undertaken responds to the need for protection and conservation of the papers because it primarily allows digital copies to be consulted while safeguarding the originals. Digitalization also responds very well to the need to expand the possibilities of accessing and navigating the structure of the archives, through consultation and research in situ or online.

The MAXXI Architecture Archive Center is also an exhibition space, a place for reflections and debates, a venue for seminars and in-depth studies on specific themes of a purely archival or a more wide-ranging architectural nature. In any case, the intention was to maintain the identity of a place that, deliberately, does not have a grandiose dimension, as do the other spaces of the museum, despite the deep conviction of the importance, in a museum, of the dimension of spectacularity. The idea of a space that is a device for accessing the complexity of documents and their relationships evokes the words of Giuliana Bruno, who, referring to the concept of museum-archive

or museum-atlas, reminds us that we are beginning to imagine an internal organization of the Museum that is very different from the linear and static one to which we are accustomed, and the concept of the archive, which might seem outdated, allows us instead to organize and redefine historical documents in a freer and more mobile manner [3]. This brings us to the concept of "dynamic museum," associated by Bruno herself with the moving images of cinema, because the museum coincides with an archive of images and, more specifically, an archive of moving images, if we think about the way the exhibition space is used, the relationship of gaze and movement between the visitor, the arrangement of the works and the container itself when this is as particular as that created by Zaha Hadid with the MAXXI.

The Archives Center [4] conserves entire or partial fonds that attest to the professional activity of some of the greatest representatives of the Italian architecture and engineering scene of the last century, from Carlo Scarpa

to Aldo Rossi, from Pier Luigi Nervi to Sergio Musmeci, just to name a few [5]. Conserved alongside these fonds are smaller ones, with drawings, models, sketches and documents related to a project or a single theme, which do not possess the organicity of an entire archive or a substantial part of it, but nevertheless attest to important moments or milestones in the history of architecture starting from the 20th century.

The 21st Century Collections mainly conserve the products of activities (exhibitions, commissions, workshops) arising from the museum's own cultural projects or re-

lated to prestigious examples of contemporary architecture: these are thematic fonds, within which projects related to a specific subject, such as materials from design competitions, are collected. The latter also include material related to the construction of the MAXXI building itself. This section of the archive contains various materials in digital format that reflect the mode of production of today's architectural thinking. The issue of digital production is a major challenge today: confronting this aspect is absolutely necessary in order to structure collections and archives of the future and to conserve them effectively.

Notes

[1] See Polano, S. (1998). Archivi e (musei) di architettura: e l'Italia non li merita?. In *Casabella*, n. 655, p. 7; Calabi, D., et al. (2004). *Musei d'arte e di architettura*, a cura di F. Varosio. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

[2] In the *Sala Studio* one may access, for reasons of study or research, the museum's entire holdings, offered for consultation in original or digital format.

[3] See Guccione, M. (2009). *Intervista a Giuliana Bruno*. Roma: MAXXI.

[4] The Archives Center conserves, manages and curates the collections and archives of MAXXI Architettura, which comprise approximately 90 fonds to date. The architecture collections are entirely published on the online database with over 200,000 catalog records, accompanied by over 30,000 images: <<http://inventari.fondazionemaxxi.it>> (accessed 24 May 2022). Building on its own methodology for inventorying and cata-

logging architectural fonds, the Archives Center has developed a service also addressed to external, public and private archives. Since 2012, it has been curating and managing the project of archival intervention on the entire documentary complex of the ENI patrimony, for the purpose of achieving a full knowledge of the extensive historical archive and allowing easy access to it by scholars as well as the general public.

[5] The acquisition of personal archives has been an important starting point for the Architecture Collection, with the understanding that the content of architects' private archives represents something fundamental, but at the same time partial. The presentation of an individual architect's cultural production is important but not exclusive. One need only think of their intertwining with the public and private archives of central and local patrons, the photographic and moving image, the testimonies of material culture, and products related to architecture in the literary and artistic sphere, etc.

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