

Reviews

Vincenzo Cirillo

Feste settecentesche a Napoli. Disegni e progetti per l'architettura effimera

La scuola di Pitagora Editrice

Napoli 2021

324 pp.

ISBN 978-88-6542-836-8



The use of ephemeral architecture for celebrations and religious events, the first examples of which appear in the 15th century in and around Rome, reached its peak during the Baroque period, spreading to different areas of the Italian peninsula. Artists, set designers and architects invited to create triumphal arches, portals, carousels, and scenography had the opportunity to experiment and study design solutions that they would apply in their artistic and architectural works.

The book by Vincenzo Cirillo, which focuses on the ephemeral Neapolitan architecture of the 18th century, excels in the exploration and deepening the Neapolitan experience by suggesting new approaches to the historical and cultural study of the city of Naples.

The volume presents the results of research conducted by the author starting from 2017 at the University of Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli'. It is divided into chapters and contains an appendix that collects the sources used for the analysis as well as the elaboration of virtual models, transcriptions of printed texts from the era and the reproduction of numerous graphic plates related to them. The latter allows for the appreciation of the compositional and graphic expertise that scenographers and architects dedicated towards the design of ephemeral structures.

In the first chapter, the author introduces the topic of his research. In the subsequent chapters, he develops an

in-depth analysis of the ephemeral structures designed and built to honor the reigning Bourbon family on four festive events celebrated between 1738 and 1791. Thanks to the careful study of the sources, the author proposes some digital models developed through accurate analysis of the geometric and compositional architectural forms.

The first ephemeral apparatus introduced by Cirillo is the one set up during the celebrations for the marriage of Charles of Bourbon to Maria Amelia of Saxony (1738). The work, created by the architect scenographer Ferdinando Sanfelice, and defined as an *invenzione capricciosa* by his contemporaries, takes the form of an urban theatre, a large *Fiera* bordered by an enclosure within which one finds pavilions, kiosks, fountains, and obelisks. As pointed out by the author, the work aimed to arouse feelings of 'astonishment and wonder' in visitors. Ferdinando Sanfelice meticulously took care of every detail and, in particular, the artificial lighting: using crystal chandeliers and mirrors, which allowed the light generated by the torches to create surprising lighting effects. In the virtual reconstructions, the author tries to evoke the emotions felt by the visitors of the time. Cirillo does not limit himself to only proposing renderings of perspective views but also offers a point of view of this ephemeral architecture in the urban context of the city of Naples. Starting from identifying the area occupied by the Fair

in historical cartography, he proposes its probable location. The reconstructed model is inserted into two iconic representations of the Neapolitan city: the pseudo-axonometry of the city seen from the sea in the engraving by Alessandro Baratta (1627) and the perspective view of the Castle area in the painting by Antonio Joli (1757). These representations allow the reader to understand the relationship that these works, although temporary, established with the urban fabric, resuming its axiality and volumetric relationships.

The second ephemeral apparatus described in the volume, also the work of Sanfelice, is the one created for the birth of the eldest daughter of Charles III of Bourbon (1740). It is a large *Torre*, about 53 meters high, surrounded by four fountains and placed in the center of a large hemicycle connected with the facade of the Royal palace. The tower was characterized by its pyramidal shape and was divided into ten levels that offered spectacular observation points over the city. In this chapter, the author investigates the geometric matrices of the project based on the description of the *Relazione sulla festa* and two drawings, a perspective view and an elevation, preserved in the Library of *Storia Patria* and the Cabinet of Drawings and Prints of the Museum of San Martino in Naples. Thanks to the data reported on the *Tavola del prospetto della gran Torre Piramidale*, a digital model is produced, and from this, a fascinating perspective

view from above which, through the dematerialization of the external envelope, allows to highlight the complex system of vertical and horizontal connections of the tower. As in the previous chapter, the author proposes some renderings of perspective views; in this case, the choice of points of view appears less satisfactory. It results in an overly aberrated vision of the Tower in relation to the context. In addition, for this ephemeral apparatus, the author carries out the appreciable operation of insertion in historical representations of the city, in particular in a painting by Gaspar Van Wittel from the early 1700s.

After a brief *excursus* dedicated to the numerous ephemeral apparatuses created for the birth of the first son of Charles III of Bourbon (1747), the following chapter is dedicated to the spectacular *Macchina da fuoco d'artificio* set up near Largo Castello. The author proposes a redesign in double orthogonal projection of plate XV of the *Narrazione delle solenni Reali Feste*, used as a reference for the construction of a digital model and the creation of two graphic elaborations. In the first, the *Macchina da fuoco* is reproduced inside the painting mentioned above by Antonio Joli, while in the second the model is placed in a digital reconstruction of 18th century Naples, during of celebrations and under colorful fireworks. In the last section of the book, the author reviews the structures made in Naples, along the Toledo road, for the

return to Naples from Vienna of the sovereigns Ferdinand IV and Maria Carolina of Austria (1791): from the city gate to the Largo di Palazzo, up to the Royal Palace, in front of which the *Tempio della Fortuna Reduce* was set up. Here, the reconstructions of Cirillo show a different graphic language, interrupting a continuity that had characterized the previous chapters. In this case, the reconstructions take on a new value since they are used for an experimental application, essential but appreciable, of visualization in augmented reality. Cirillo identifies the potential of this technology as a tool for the knowledge and dissemination of the ephemeral apparatuses of Naples, which over the centuries, even if for very short periods, have been an integral part of the urban context of the city.

The volume concludes with a study of the new forms of representation linked to intermittent events, such as video mapping installations and drone light shows. These offer to the author the opportunity to underline the similarities with the ephemeral apparatuses of the 18th century described in the volume and draw the attention of readers to their importance and to the contribution that such experiences, in a new and comprehensive perspective such as the one presented in the volume, can offer as a source of inspiration for digital visualization applications.

Mirco Cannella

Author

Mirco Cannella, Department of Architecture, University of Palermo, mirco.cannella@unipa.it