



January interview - Paolo Portoghesi

Architect, critic, essayist, academic and historian, Paolo Portoghesi is considered as the father of Post Modernism and one of the greatest 20th-century architect. He is the author of several works famous all over the world. Among the others:

Teatro Kursaal Santalucia, Bari (1991); Casa Baldi, Roma (1959); Teatro di Cagliari (1965); Casa Papanice, Roma (1966); Chiesa della Sacra Famiglia, Salerno (1969); Agenzia di Servizi Culturali della Regione Abruzzo e biblioteca civica, Avezzano (1970); Centro Servizi Culturali della Regione Abruzzo e biblioteca civica, Vasto (1970); Grand Hotel, Khartoum, Sudan (1972); Palazzo reale, Amman, Giordania (1973); Moschea di Roma (1974); Accademia di Belle Arti, L'Aquila (1978-82); Residenza a Tegel per l'IBA 84, Berlino, Germania (1984-88); Sala Convegni, Terme Tettuccio, Montecatini Terme (1987); Piazza Elimo, Poggioreale (Italia) (1988); Piazza Leon Battista Alberti, Rimini (1990); Cappella di Don Giuseppe Rizzo, Alcamo (1995); Chiesa di Santa Maria della Pace, Terni (1997); Biblioteca Civica, Abano Terme (1999); Grande Moschea, Strasburgo, Francia (2000); Teatro Politeama, Catanzaro (2002); Giardini di Montpellier (Lattes), Francia; Parlamento del Centro America, Esquipulas, Guatemala; Ristorante Primavera, Mosca, Russia; Piazza del Municipio, Pirmasens, Germania; Quartier generale del Royalties Institute, St. Peter's College, Oxford, Regno Unito; Complesso residenziale, Pechino, Cina (2003); Piazza pubblica, Shanghai, Cina (2006).

- 1) Since you were a boy Borromini has been for you a great example to study and admire. For this reason, still a student, you published some essays. How much did Baroque architecture influence your education and design works?**

When I was a boy Borromini wasn't considered so important in the history of architecture. His full revaluation was a great achievement for the history of modern art. The reason why I chose him as master, even if he lived three centuries before me, is his ability to invent new things enhanced by the teachings of tradition and considering tradition in the broadest sense of the word, as an inheritance of those gone before us.

In this way, he could use Michelangelo's inheritance, Domenico Fontana and Carlo Maderno's examples, who were his blood relatives, and also some gothic teachings and the researches of those architects who built *Villa dell'Imperatore Adriano* in Tivoli in the second century. I was thrilled by his way of enhancing by far and contradictory experiences and I found a similar attitude in a modern musician that I admire, Gustav Mahler. He interpreted tradition as "not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire". For Borromini innovation meant innovating starting from

the ones who innovated at their own time, not building on a “tabula rasa”. In this way his architecture managed to relate architecture to nature, without abandoning the classic spirit.

- 2) **Quoting two books of yours, "Nature and architecture" and "Geoarchitecture. A responsible architecture", you work for a passionate and coherent defense of the need to look at nature as a source of reflection and planning inspiration. What is Humanist architecture and do you think that the next generation of architects will defend this equilibrium and respect for the surrounding environment?**

The relation with nature is a key point for the whole modern culture, not only for modern architecture. The technology progress and the myth of the endlessly growth that a lot of people madly pursue in a planet with limited resources are putting at risk (through the climate change) the environmental equilibrium which is connected to the human habitability on earth.

A humanist architecture which pursues the aim to reduce consumptions and wastefulness is a real necessity if we want to save the civilization and preserve the beauty of earth that bases on diversities and variety of cultures. For this reason, architecture has to dialogue with the places and it doesn't have to lose the identity that links it to local and national cultures.

I'm sure that the new generation will abandon the myths of endlessly growth and of uncontrolled development of technology that makes us slaves of our own mechanical creations.

Einstein wrote "I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots". The same nature through its threatening rebellion will persuade the next generation to avoid the risk of "dehumanization".

- 3) **May I ask you a personal question about *Casa Papanice*, commissioned by my grandfather, the real estate developer Pasquale Papanice. It is one of your most significant works in the building housing, now headquarters of the Embassy of the Hashemite Reign of Giordania and still today studied by a lot of students. I'd like to ask you for a memory about this artwork, emblem of Post Modernism.**

Casa Papanice was realized with my friend Vittorio Gigliotti. It was a protest action against the greyness of the modern buildings created as a chain meant to close and neutralize the space of the streets. Thanks to its majolica upholstery, the building dialogued with the skylights and the trees green which were preserved at their place. It was meant to be a hymn to Spring and for this reason, the vertical areas motif of different colors translated the first parts of "Primavera" by Vivaldi with the same method of visual translation of a musical text used in Bauhaus by Gropius. For me, Post Modernism had to be the end of Prohibition, the freedom of expression for everyone without forgetting their own identity. Unfortunately, things went differently.

- 4) You are a great academic of Islamic culture. You are a Catholic Christian and several times you've repeated how important is to respect the other's creed and to bring back religion to the center of human interest; about the present political scene, how do you answer to those who still don't know if it's more important to build bridges or walls in Europe?**

The tradition of building bridges is part of the spirit of Rome that was built in a place where its river was impossible to cross, first on a ford and then on two bridges.

Europe – giving Italy the role to welcome refugees without assuring them a destination – has created an intolerable situation, abandoning the principle of hospitality. We all have to hope that a new Europe will rise from the crisis, no more fortress of a normalizing bureaucracy that tries to cancel the differences among regions and worries about the claims dimension, but a federative organism, a Europe of homelands that considers differences as a richness to preserve and protect, not to eliminate. The religious freedom is a great achievement and presumes the will of knowledge and understanding among men with different identities. I think that religion is a strength, a union and spiritual affirmation element, useful to save the civilization in a moment so delicate.

But it has to say no to contrast and conflict, it has to become an instrument of discussion and dialogue. This is possible and I'm glad to prove that I've done something in this direction.

I've built two mosques, In Rome and then in Strasbourg, and both of them have become exchange centers among different religions. In Strasbourg, the mosque was inaugurated by four representatives of the culture of the Book and the Chief Rabbi spoke first on behalf of the Catholic and Protestant bishops, present at the ritual. It's been a great example of a peaceful alliance that is waiting to be completed in the world, particularly in Palestine.

- 5) I'd like to thank you for your willingness to inaugurate the column of January "Interview of the month 2019". What kind of advice would you give to the next generation of architects and to all those young students who study your works looking for inspiration?**

The young students who are putting their efforts into Architecture have to consider their choice as a moral choice that makes them fight for the culture of dialogue and peace, avoiding the deprivation of the architecture's educational mission, limiting it to the satisfaction of needs and pleasures.

This means a critical acceptance to technological progress that can promote the positive social aspects and fight against the trend to develop autonomously without human control, supporting consumption and wastefulness, intensifying the economic disparities and poverty, putting a machine instead of a man in way that men can be relieved by the efforts and sacrifices of work, but also by the work as development of personality and free creation.

Interviewer **Edmondo Papanice** – *President of Halp*

Translation edited **Luana Convertino**

www.halp.eu