

## Twentieth-century Tuscan Architecture

10 July to 3 October 2003

**Curator:** Ezio Godoli (Fondazione Giovanni Michelucci)

**Press tour:** Wednesday, 9 July 2003, 10.30 am

**Opening:** Wednesday, 9 July 2003, 7.00 pm

### Exhibition venue

Wiener Städtische Allgemeine Versicherung AG

Ringturm Exhibition Centre

A-1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30

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### Opening times

Monday to Friday: 9.00 am to 6.00 pm (closed 15 August)

Thursday 9.00 am to 7.30 pm; admission free

### Enquiries

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**Photographic material is available upon request and can also be found at:**  
<http://www.wienerstaedtsche.at>

**The theme of this exhibition, being held from 10 July to 3 October 2003 within the framework of the Architecture in the Ringturm series, is the varied but little-known modern architecture of Tuscany. It will feature the region's most important 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings.**

This exhibition in the Ringturm of Tuscan architecture is the outcome, presented in visual form, of a five-year research project financed by the *Regione Toscana (Dipartimento delle politiche formative e dei beni culturali)* and undertaken by the *Fondazione Michelucci*. In addition to the actual selecting of the most interesting buildings, the research project involved the documentation of the most important examples of the region's 20th-century architecture. As a consequence, some 500 Tuscan buildings were catalogued by the *Fondazione Michelucci*. A large proportion of these can be seen in the exhibition, now being remounted in the Ringturm Exhibition Centre following its initial showing in the railway station in Florence.

The selection criteria for the architecture chosen included aesthetic considerations, the place occupied by a building in the public consciousness, new approaches to social housing and the important historical roles played by individual structures. Attention was also paid to the influence on buildings from the growing importance of leisure time and the relationship between man and the environment.

**The exhibition:** The exhibition has been structured along historical and chronological lines. From the golden age of *Liberty* style (the Italian counterpart of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil) in the first decade of the 20th century, Tuscan architecture began to evolve towards a fascist-style Rationalism the onset of which occurred relatively early compared to its development elsewhere in Europe. Architectural history is inseparable from political and social developments, and the march of Mussolini's "Blackshirts" on Rome in 1923. Indeed, subsequent fall of the government found its expression in the architectural developments of the day (*Rationalism*), albeit slightly later in the provinces than in the capital.

**Italian Rationalism:** In light of this early reorientation and a duration of nearly three decades (up to the Allied landings in 1944), the inter-war period assumes particular significance. As the regime decayed, so too did the prevailing architecture, ultimately degenerating into pure formalism. The unmistakable Italian *Rationalist* style spread throughout the whole of the country, and Tuscany, where it resulted in local party buildings ("casa del popolo"), flying schools, sports stadia, workers' housing developments, children's homes, transport structures and so on, was no exception. Examples include Giovanni Michelucci's Florence railway station (1932–1934), P-L Nervi and G. Alessandro's "Artemio Franchi" municipal stadium (Florence, 1929–1932) and Angiolo Mazzoni's heating station and signal box also at the railway station in Florence (1932–1934).

A continuation of the architectonic values of the *Modern Classicism* or so-called *Functionalism* of the inter-war years can be seen in the period immediately following the Second World War. At the same time, however, a new phase of reorientation was being instigated by a younger generation of architects. The Italian *Neorealismo* movement, which achieved recognition above all for its outstanding achievements in the world of film (one of these being “La Strada”), also had its equivalent in architecture. The Tuscan exponents of this trend, which also acquired international importance, are represented by Giovanni Michelucci (who also realised a number of important buildings in Rome), Edoardo Detti (whose projects included the San Giovanni Battista church in Firenzuola with Carlo Scarpa, built between 1956 and 1965), Leonardo Ricci (who later worked in America and elsewhere) and Leonardo Savioli.

A significant number of buildings in the exhibition are notable for their sensitive conversion or extension work (second half of the 20th century). Although executed in a contemporary architectonic language, in terms of style it falls very much within the tradition of “continual building”, which is reflected in a number of outstanding examples of integration with historical centres. Buildings such as Giovanni Michelucci’s Cassa di risparmio Pistoia e Pescia in Pistoia (a savings bank) and the chamber of commerce building by Carlo Aymonino in Carrara are architectonic achievements of the very highest quality – from both a regional and international point of view.

**Late 1950s:** The late 1950s saw the dawning of the golden age of architectural *Brutalism*. Concrete, in an untreated and unclad state, became the preferred material of architects. This was an international trend that originated not least in response to the work of Le Corbusier. Examples are Edoardo Detti’s apartment building in Marina di Carrara, Ricci and Savioli’s social housing block in Florence and Edoardo Detti’s Palazzo degli Uffici Giudiziari (Court administration building) in Massa.

The church was an important patron of modern architecture during the 1950s and 1960s. The “Chiesa dell’autostrada del sole” in Campi Bisenzio (1961–1964), situated on one of the region’s busiest traffic routes, was an architectonic milestone and provides a venue for reflection and contemplation. This structure combines regional elements with modern building techniques. It is an internationally celebrated masterpiece of church architecture and is probably Giovanni Michelucci’s best-known work.

The *avant-garde* movement of the 1960s and 1970s was highly politicised and Florence, which has always been seen as the historical centre of the left-wing avant-garde, was one of the main breeding grounds of the Italian student movement and the class of ‘68. Architectonically, this political orientation found its best expression in the “case popolari” that sprang up all over the place – those in Sorgane, for example, which were built between 1963 and 1980. This social housing project, featuring an exceptionally high quality of living accommodation, was built by the Ricci/Savioli team.

**Contemporary architecture:** The 1970s saw the era of the great masters start to fade somewhat. While Florence's importance as an economic centre declined in favour of Milan, its cultural importance has continued to grow steadily. One of the ways in which this was expressed was in a relatively small number of new buildings that nevertheless displayed a very high level of architectonic commitment. One highly acclaimed example is the Museo della Contrada di ValdiMonte, built between 1974 and 1997 by Giovanni Michelucci and Bruno Zevi. Contemporary architecture in Tuscany, such as the block of 48 apartments in Pontedera (Massimo and Lovo Carmassi, completed 1998) is currently undergoing a revival based on attempts – far removed from the by now well-trodden path of “star architecture” – to focus on local regional elements (e.g. red brick) as a means of developing an independent formal language and individual solutions.

The exhibition features original plans and models as well as photographs and numerous publications from the time of building of the many architectural examples.

**Catalogue** (in Italian): *Architetture del Novecento. La Toscana*. Ezio Godoli (editor), Edizioni Polistampa, Florenz 2001. Price: euro 41.50 with interactive CD-ROM (tables of names, buildings, biographies etc.).

*Press info and photographs relating to ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM can be found at <http://www.wienerstaedtische.at> in the »Arts & Culture« section.*