



## Urbanistica n. 126

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*Fausto Curti* Out of place. Large projects lacking context

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Received books

**The reconquest  
of the waterfront**  
Emanuela Brignone  
Cattaneo\*

Strategic restoration has been undertaken for a new area of museums in the Eastern part of Genoa linking four cultural 'containers' in the Parks of Nervi: Villa Grimaldi (with the Frugone collection, opened in 1993), the Luxoro Museum (to be restored), the Wolfsonian Museum (opening in 2005) and the Gallery of Modern Art (GAM) opened in November 2004. The combination between art and nature is evident here in all its facets. To enhance the fundamental bond between 'nature-territory' and construction, an historical country residence has been preserved, typical of the great Genoese families' *modus vivendi*, dating back to 1590 with connected chapel, greenhouses and stables. From the outside the painted walls, their architecture and sculptures stand out over the 19th century parks' green background. The whole complex will soon be restored including the spectacular sea promenade and the historical swimming sites.

The GAM was designed to be respectful of the configuration of the surroundings, limited by the mountains and the sea, without any additions. Essential but practically invisible actions, albeit somewhat forced, were taken, so as to allow a 17th century building to meet the current conservation and exhibition needs while respecting the spirit of a past era, thanks to advanced technology. To meet these conditions interventions of various degrees were necessary. Capillary dampness was eliminated in the base of the structural and external walls with a dielectric barrier based on a compensatory

procedure of induction charge. The lack of a wall cavity led to the creation of a new ventilation space and of complex plant networks dug deep in the ground and fed by two external stations below grade. Responding to today's needs for housing works of art, in each room a 'pulsating body' was introduced with specialized mechanical systems to create a microclimate. This required the making of a 'second skin' inside the rooms, and eliminates the problem of vibration for large paintings. Counter-walls were anchored to the 17th century walls through a series of spindles mounted on tapered roller bearings, product of the Goppion museum laboratory's state-of-the-art technology and re-search. Such space metamorphosis has allowed for flexibility, thus making the container change with time both in terms of scientific arrangement of the works exhibited (some rooms can easily become temporary), and in terms of a lighting system providing the museum with spotlights in addition to the current low-consumption indirect light. Direct upward light artificially recreates the natural conditions of a diffused light sky, thus lending the museum and the paintings a particular brightness without flattening the works' texture. The link between art and nature is highlighted by the tinted windows filtering the sunlight. Surrounding nature appears to be framed thus creating *tableaux vivants*. The sense of lightness of the interiors is accompanied by the series of colors which, through the museum itinerary, are transformed, inspired by the colors inside the residence or by the restored facades, enhancing them as in an abstract painting. The scientific arrangement has in turn focused on landscape-related topics. In

a city such as Genoa where green areas surrounded by buildings are so scarce, and instead the sea in which the city is reflected is so vast, the unique value of 'sea/green areas/art and culture', thanks to the GAM's revival, becomes the first hint of the ideal city's fragmented and imaginary recovery.

\* Restoration, recovery and conservation project, and museum display of the GAM by an interim group of professionals: Luigi Amann, Emanuela Brignone Cattaneo, Chantal Cattaneo, Enrico Pinna (group leader), Gian Luca Papini, Italo Rota. Villa Serra: 8,400 cbm; Implementation cost euro 5,487,880; Grants: Ministry of Architectural Heritage, Municipality of Genoa (BOC), CARIGE Bank, Mitchel Wolfson foundation.