

PIER LUIGI NERVI. Architecture for sport

The experimentation, ideas, methods and expertise of the talented Italian engineer and constructor

5 February – 2 October 2016

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#PierLuigiNervi

*A new material and new themes
necessarily lead to new architecture*
(Pier Luigi Nervi)

Rome 4 February 2016. Stadia with innovative structures, diving boards that have become icons, sports centres with lace-like concrete domes, in the long career of **Pier Luigi Nervi** (1891 – 1979) research into sports facilities was a continuous fil rouge. From the first stadium built in Florence in 1929 to the Kuwait Sports Centre from 1968, **22 projects** and their stories make up the exhibition **Pier Luigi Nervi. Architecture for Sport** curated by Micaela Antonucci with Annalisa Trentin and Tomaso Trombetti of the University of Bologna at MAXXI **from 5 February to 2 October 2016**.

“This exhibition traces the constructional and formal genesis of Pier Luigi Nervi’s architecture for sport - from the football stadia to the sports halls and the swimming pools - that in the collective imagination have been and still are remarkable settings for sporting events”, says **Margherita Guccione** *Director of MAXXI Architettura*. “A model of success, one of the most important early expressions of the Made in Italy phenomenon and a fundamental point of reference for contemporary architecture and engineering.”

The exhibition features **over 100 photographs, original drawings and documents** drawn from the rich heritage of the Archivio Pier Luigi Nervi, part of the MAXXI Architettura Archives Centre and presented together with **four models of the stadia from Florence, Rome, Swindon and Kuwait** made by LaMo and LaMoViDA (the Laboratorio Modelli di Architettura and the Laboratorio di Modellazione e Visualizzazione Digitale per l’Architettura) of the University of Bologna.

Organized on a chronological basis, the exhibition brings together the works in **three sections: Experimentation and innovation (1929/49), Concrete Champion (1950/60), From Italy to the world (1961/79)**, paying particular attention to the football stadia.

The presentation opens with a succession of **photographic panels** featuring Nervi’s principal projects for sports facilities, the same panels that were attached to the walls of Nervi’s studio to illustrate his work to public and private clients: the images include two enlargements of postage stamps produced in 1960 on the occasion of the Rome Olympics with the Palazzo and the Palazzetto dello Sport.

The first section of the exhibition **Experimentation and innovation (1929/49)** describes the process that led to the creation of the engineer’s innovative constructional method with the *Giovanni Berta* stadium in Florence (1929-32) representing a starting point for systematic technical and design research that was to project Nervi into the midst of the Italian and international architectural debate.

However, it was the post-war years – those tackled in the section **Concrete Champion (1950/60)** – that conformed Nervi’s success with a series of works in which formal invention goes hand in hand with constructional capability; these included the *Kursaal* bathing facility at Lido di Ostia (1950), a symbol of rebirth in the 1950s with its iconic diving board, and the works constructed for the Rome Olympics of 1960: the *Palazzo dello Sport*, the *Palazzetto dello Sport* and the *Stadio Flaminio*.

Together with the projects on display there is also the *Album 19* photographic album containing a vast collection of contact prints: from Gothic and renaissance churches to typewriters, from opticians studios to aircraft fuselages, images that served Nervi as references and cues for studies.

The final section of the exhibition **From Italy to the world (1961/79)** features above all projects realised abroad, from Europe to the United States, from South America to South Africa, from India to the Middle East, including the *Good Hope Center* at Cape Town, South Africa (1964-80), one of the Studio Nervi's most important international works, both in terms of dimensions and technical characteristics (at the time it was the world's largest concrete dome) and its political and symbolic significance (it was the first multiracial sports facility to be built in the period of apartheid, with no separation between blacks and whites).

At the centre of the hall a projection on a round screen mounted on the ceiling shows three remarkable **"pleated" or "ribbed" domes** constructed by Nervi that over the course of his career became a unique stylistic motif, his "architectural" signature in Italy and around the world: the *Palazzetto dello Sport* in Rome (1956 – 59), the *Palazzo dello Sport* at the EUR (1955 – 59) and the Cultural and Convention Center in Norfolk, Virginia USA (1965 – 71).

The exhibition is also enriched by a section devoted to the **photo files** from the Archivio Nervi. Of the over 4,000 forming part of MAXXI Architettura Archives Centre, **631 relate to projects for sports facilities** and are exhibited in reproduction and available for consultation, along with a selection of originals.

Together with the photographs, the drawings, the documents and the maquettes, the exhibition also features a special model in Plexiglas of the Palazzetto dello Sport made by two students from the ISIA (Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche – Rome) Aurelio Capri and Elettra Renzi, rendering visible the system conceived by Nervi to channel the forces in the building to the ground.

This model represents the central element in a series of guided visits dedicated to Nervi's work that also includes a "tactile" route designed for **blind and partially-sighted people**.

Realised in collaboration with the Centro Regionale Sant'Alessio, this walk includes a tour around the Palazzetto dello Sport introducing the built structure and an exhibition visit with the aid of the model and tactile panels.

On the occasion of the exhibition MAXXI Architettura will presenting the **publication of the inventory of the Pier Luigi Nervi Archive**: the result of a decade of complex archival work and a working tool and point of departure for future research, the Pier Luigi Nervi Inventory is the first of the Centro Archive's Inventories which form part of a specific section within the series of publications *Quaderni del Centro Archivi del MAXXI Architettura*.

The exhibition project **Pier Luigi Nervi. Architecture for Sport** is the fruit of joint research by MAXXI and the University of Bologna initiated in 2014 with a project that involved the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering of Princeton University, the University of Florence, the University of Roma Tor Vergata, the Fondazione CEUR – Centro Europeo Università e Ricerca, the Scuola Superiore di studi sulla Città e il Territorio of the University of Bologna, the Historical Archive of the Municipality of Florence and the CSAC – Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione of Parma. The results of this project have been presented in the touring exhibition *Pier Luigi Nervi. Gli stadi per il calcio* (Bologna, Cesena, Florence, 14 November 2014 – 28 May 2015).

The press kit and images of the exhibition can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/area-riservata/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

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