



Civico Museo Parisi Valle  
"My whale"



Maccagno con Pino e Veddasca – Lago Maggiore (Varese)

## Maurizio Sacripanti: a biography

Maurizio Sacripanti was born in Rome on 8 August 1916 to Giuseppe and Olga Bartolani. His father, an engineer, died when Maurizio was still very young. 'I lost my father as a child,' he remembered in 1997, 'an engineer, and I soon lived alone. At the age of thirteen, I was practically kicked out of The National Boarding School for disobedience, (...) I discovered the inns... I drew, I learned the art of moulding, I got to know templates and ancient shapes... an old art in an old city (...). It was not wasted time, and while I discovered my passion for architecture in Rome, fellow anarchists were leading me to anti-fascism'. He then enrolled at the Art School and later at the Faculty of Architecture. 'In '36, I was in the Faculty... I rarely attended class, with good grades in composition subjects; but I was looking elsewhere, attending the Free School of the nude, working in studios where it was possible to learn, and even speak freely without being denounced'. Among these studios, according to Sacripanti, were those of Marcello Piacentini, Pierluigi Nervi, Mario Ridolfi and Mario De Renzi.

He graduated in Rome on 8 January 1943. 'I was working for a new architecture doing something completely different. September 8th, breaking with the unjust war, the underground struggle, the Liberation at last, political work, the battle for the Constituent Assembly. Architecture was still ruins that covered the dead and unexploded mines killed more people (...)'. In 1947, in collaboration with Ciro Cicconcelli, he worked on projects for the Youth Hostel and for the single-family townhouses built in the QT8 experimental district in Milan: 'It was Bottoni, who, in 1947, introduced me to my first experience as an architect (...) Architecture finally captivated me and urged me into an experience that made me discover social values'. In 1945, De Renzi called him as an extraordinary assistant for his course on Elements of Architecture. This was the beginning of Sacripanti's university career: he started in 1961 as a free professor, then held the chair of Elements of Architecture and Survey of Monuments in Rome (from 1963 to 1969). This was followed by the chair of Architectural Composition and finally that of Stage Design (a position he held in the 1984-85 academic year).

In '49 he opened his first studio: 'Professional life? Still very little, but then I met Mafai'. The cafes and inns 'on credit' where he spent the evenings, the 'nocturnal streets, marked by roof gutters and corners, mitigated by violet tones', where he walked late into the night, became in those years the backdrop of passionate conversations with Mario Mafai, of course, and with some young artists, Piero Dorazio, Achille Perilli, Giulio Turcato and Piero Consagra of the Forma 1 group. Towards the end of 1949 Sacripanti went to Paris, 'In

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Paris I experienced the age of surprises, in the fruitfulness of disorder, of adventure. Neoclassical Paris and Cubist Paris inspired me by revealing the space generated by axes and the space generating vectors to destroy those axes'. On his return to Rome, he took part in the competitions for the new Auditorium at Borghetto Flaminio (1950) and for the San Giovanni di Empoli Hospital (1954; winning design). In 1956 he planned the residential quarter in Santa Lucia (Verona), completed in 1958. In 1960 he moved his studio to Piazza del Popolo 18. In 1961, he took part in the international competition for the Peugeot Skyscraper in Buenos Aires (in his team also the painter Mafai and the physicist Romeo Nigro).

They presented a highly articulated construction, made up of overlapping, suspended blocks, overhanging loggias and vertical gardens; a structure that, through the movement of sunscreens, could be transformed into an enormous ad space. In the following years he designed the Italian Pavilion at the Toulouse International Trade Fair on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Trade (1962), the Incis quarter for employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome (1963) and the 'Cynthia' quarter of houses for steel workers in Bagnoli (1964). In 1965, he took part in the competition of ideas for the new Lyric Theatre in Cagliari. In the interpretation of Sacripanti and his team (Achille Perilli also collaborated on this project) the construction became a 'new theatre', total; a form in progress, a machine capable of modifying space, of transforming itself to remain operative every day of the year, opening up to new activities.

In 1968, Sacripanti won first prize in the national competition for the design of a new museum in Padua, located between the Scrovegni Chapel and the Eremitani church, between Giotto and Mantegna. On the relationship with cultural traditions, Sacripanti writes in the report: 'Proposing a kind of symbiosis between past and future: this is what designing means, here and today. The past: our culture, the texture of every living reference; the future: our multiplicity, the true, unique novelty of the modern era'. Between past and future Sacripanti launches long bridges, supported in the empty space by each other and creating controlled visual perspectives. Works of art, suspended in space, become an integral part of this elaborate, multifaceted structure, airy and transparent.

Unfortunately, however, this too was to be a lost opportunity, another piece of architecture that would exist only on paper. The same fate awaited the contemporary design of the Italian pavilion at the 1970 Osaka World Expo with the theme 'Harmony and Progress of Humanity'. In response, Sacripanti (here in a team with Achille Perilli and Renato Pedio) proposed a pulsating building in motion (because 'a space that moves can be as well a country that moves').

The construction consisted in a double series of seven circular blades, of variable cross section and diameter, hinged at an eccentric barycentre and variously arranged around the two cylindrical staircase shafts. In the following years Sacripanti worked on a project for prefabricated schools in Molfetta (1969; realised). In 1971 he published the article 'Città di



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frontiera’ (in ‘L’Architettura, Cronache e Storia’), a ‘story’ that begins with brief biographical notes and then develops what are ‘my invariants of modern architectural language’, a seven-point programme that, as expressly stated, does not pretend to be sufficient, infallible or conclusive - an indispensable admission for an architecture that is not only form and appearance, but neither just bare necessity.

In 1976 a tragic event turned Sacripanti’s life upside down: the death of his son Paolo. From this moment on he would mention the name of his son in his projects, preceding his own. In 1977, in Santarcangelo di Romagna (at that time called ‘the little Athens of the north’), through mediation of his friend, the poet Tonino Guerra, Sacripanti built the middle school building, ‘a both rough and delicate structure... a finished and unfinished form at the same time’, as Pedio puts it. In 1979, he started to work on the project of the Civico Museo ‘Parisi-Valle’ in Maccagno.

In the same year, Sacripanti was appointed a member of the National Academy of San Luca. In 1983, he was commissioned by the City of Rome to design the Museum of Science in Via Giulia, another architectural vision of great impact that fuelled lively discussions, but was never realised. During his last years at the studio in Piazza del Popolo Sacripanti and his collaborators were completing the executive plans for a construction that already had started (the Maccagno museum), whereas another project, the theatre in Forlì, would never be realised. Death seized him on 25 September 1996 while he was preparing to complete his project for the new Auditorium in Rome.

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### “My whale”

*Maurizio Sacripanti's museum on the Giona river in Maccagno*

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