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Carlo Scarpa's *Monument to the Partisan Woman*

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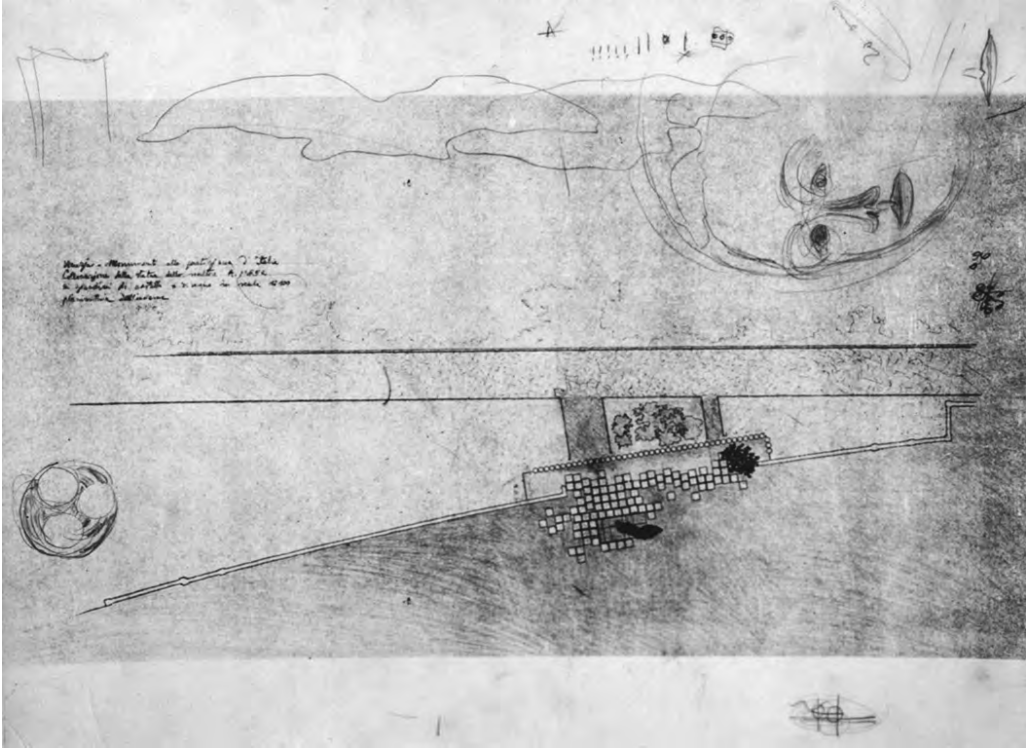
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1. Monument to the Partisan Woman, plan. Drawing by Carlo Scarpa. Courtesy Carlo Scarpa Archive Drawing / Centro Carlo Scarpa, Treviso.

Carlo Scarpa's *Monument to the Partisan Woman*

It is impossible to do conservation work on Carlo Scarpa's creations in Venice without noticing how his architecture and his objects are merely instruments of his thought and how his structures define certain crucial themes of the second half of the twentieth century. Retracing his modes of thought, trying to decipher them, treading in his footsteps upon the stretches of his pathways, compels us, together, to work and to think. The general principles he so rigorously respected come to be understood precisely during the act of conservation, principles he upheld in many contexts and on diverse levels of architecture and detail. Above all, he remained focused on the search for the absolute uniqueness of the work he was creating. In exemplary fashion, the works of the master combined either an interaction among contexts where both old and new architecture claim sovereignty, or else in a continuous interrogation of things and surroundings, a great suppleness of thought, a capacity to make the decision that results in figures, characters, situations, and dreams being born from the materials and from many techniques, both old and new.

The work that Carlo Scarpa performed over almost thirty years in Venice in the area of the Biennale gardens to the east of the Castello district may be read in the same way. These include the first preparation work in 1942 on a hall in the Italy Pavilion intended to contain the works of Arturo Martini, the Book Pavilion project executed in 1950 and inaugurated at the twenty-fifth edition of the Art Biennale, and yet again in his creation of the Sculpture Garden finished in the spring of 1952 before the inauguration of the twenty-sixth Biennale.¹ This same project also saw the inauguration of the wall and the ticket office with the famous almond roof that today, now entirely restored with funds from Mibac 2005, has been put back into its original position. The next project, in 1954, saw the creation of the Venezuela Pavilion, which was finished in 1956 after a series of troubling events. Beginning in 2008, following a complex campaign of surveys and fact-finding investigations carried out with funds from the ministry, the Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon is in the process of preparing the conservation project — in agreement with Venezuela — for the famous Pavilion.



2. *Monument to the Partisan Woman*, pictured during restoration work. Photograph courtesy the Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon, Comune di Venezia.

It is worth remembering that Carlo Scarpa's association with the Biennale extended through the four exhibits from 1962 to 1968, including the drafting of the projects for the Italy Pavilion, and concluded with the 1972 exhibit. The scope of the works of the Venetian master in this same area includes other outstanding projects: the 1955 creation of the monument *Venice, to her Partisan Women*, with the statue by Leoncillo Leoncilli, and the *Monument to the Partisan Woman* on the Riverbank of Gardens. The two monuments have a closely connected destiny: the first, created in 1955, was set up in the Napoleonic gardens, in a flowerbed facing the southwest entrance of the Biennale. It consisted of a reinforced concrete base fitted with a plastic joint functionally designed to support Leoncillo Leoncilli's work in polychrome ceramic. During the night of July 27–28, 1961, it endured a brutal attack that almost completely destroyed it. This is why today there remains only a stump that, in its memory, has been put back into its original position.

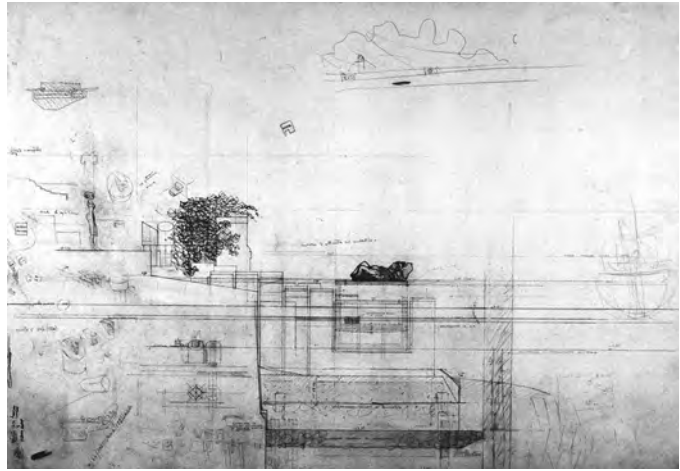
The general indignation of the city of Venice when confronted with this vile vandalism led to establishing the conditions for the creation of a new monument and amplified the debate over its optimal placement. It was Bruno Zevi who suggested right from the beginning a tract of the coastline leading to the Lagoon, that highly symbolic place, for the creation of the new monument. The space picked out by the Communal government for the placing of the monument was the entrance to Via Garibaldi on the Riverbank of the Seven Martyrs. After Giacomo Manzù turned down an offer to create

a sculpture, a contest was announced that, in 1964, proclaimed the artist Augusto Murer the winner. The deadline for the work was fixed for February 15, 1965, and in September 1964 the project for inserting the monument into the delicate Venetian environmental context was conferred to Carlo Scarpa.

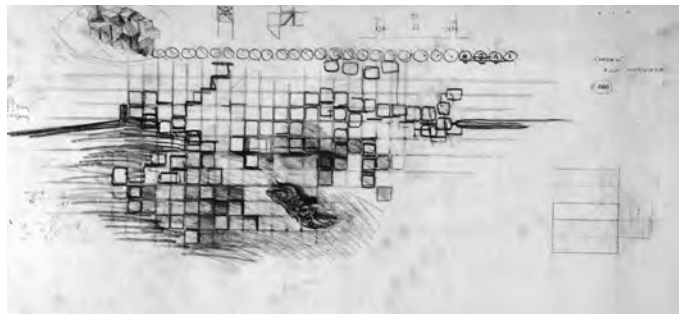
We can almost certainly attribute to Scarpa the choice of site for the statue, which Murer was already imagining on a floating platform, to be towards the south. The placement of the monument at the intersection between Via Garibaldi and the Riverbank of the Seven Martyrs underscored, perhaps with undue emphasis, the role of this new monument dedicated to the Partisan Woman. For his part, Carlo Scarpa was looking for a spot that would be less busy and far from main thoroughfares. He chose the side of the lagoon that is far from the bridges of San Domenico and Sant'Elena; he envisioned the tranquility of an area having as its background the Napoleonic gardens and he used two photomontages to make certain that the route of the riverbank also accommodated the position of the parallelepipeds surrounding the statue. The water and the green of the surrounding space were included in the general composition, but, at the same time, the statue and its base maintained an obvious autonomy. The configuration, which was studied for the monument, evokes yet again an age-old action in Venice: the ramming of the riverbank in order to obtain ground appropriate for construction. Scarpa achieved his ends by implementing a sort of lake dwelling emerging from the water at various heights and tracing a grid in the midst of which Murer's work could be placed, such that due to the tides, the eye captured the whiteness of the Istria stone as if enveloping the bronze statue.² The method of Carlo Scarpa was one of continually learning from the past in order to render it in the present, never repeating or quoting but staying inclusive and attentive, in continuous regeneration, a confrontation between culture itself and the present. In this project, Carlo Scarpa's method is perhaps distilled to its essentials.

The platform that supports the work has been harmed by the rising and falling of the tide, producing a continuous, silent interference by the water of the lagoon. By design, the movement is not perceptible, both because it develops within the time arc of the cycle of the tide and because the entire elevation mechanism is conceived to follow the inclination of the energy of the water rather than express something stagy or obvious. This is the meaning of dialogue with context achieved in Scarpa's handling of an extremely difficult theme: giving life to a monument dedicated to those women of the Resistance who but for this work would have contributed silently to the regaining of liberty by Italy.

3. *Monument to the Partisan Woman*, section. Drawing by Carlo Scarpa. Courtesy Carlo Scarpa Archive Drawing / Centro Carlo Scarpa, Treviso.



4. *Monument to the Partisan Woman*, plan. Drawing by Carlo Scarpa. Courtesy Carlo Scarpa Archive Drawing / Centro Carlo Scarpa, Treviso.

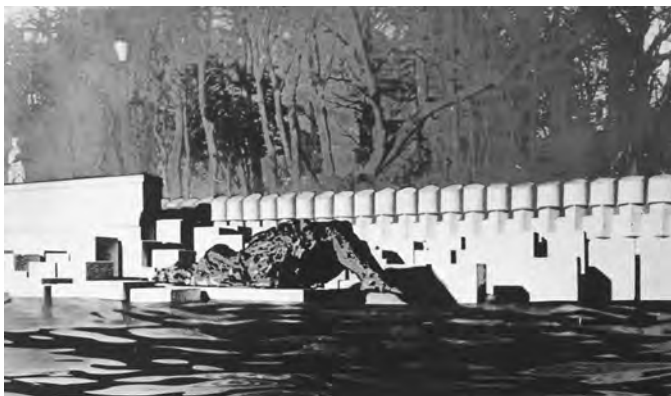


In Scarpa's initial project, a baluster of cylinders in Istria stone was to mark the border between the area for the monument and the relevant green space; in the solution that was created, however, a wall of stone quoins traces the back profile, magnifying the contrast through the rhythmic sequence of the memorial stone extremities of the parallelepipeds.

Over the years, a metal fence was placed along the riverbank by the Commune. Presently, the water authorities are requesting the installation of four groups of catapults with warning lights for navigation. The word is that in a short time, probably due to bad workmanship, the floating platform created in 1965 will no longer be functional and the statue will assume a static position. A *vaporetto* pier was placed not far from it, and at the end of the 1990s the entire area came to be protected from wave motion with a cast gangplank. The latter, today remanded to the use of the shipyard, will in any case be removed after the current restoration.

The program has already been started and anticipates two divisions of work. The first concerns the platform, repair of its functioning, and restoration of the entire foundation of the monument. This has been financed by the Commune of Venice with funds from the Legge Speciale (special law). The second concerns conservation work on the bronze statue of Augusto Murer, financed by the Ministry for the Program for

5. *Monument to the Partisan Woman*. Photomontage of a model of the monument as seen from the lagoon. Courtesy Carlo Scarpa Archive Drawing / Centro Carlo Scarpa, Treviso.



the Management of Landscape and Contemporary Art and Architecture (PARC). This is the very Ministry that has been financing conservation work on Scarpa's structures for the past few years, both directly and with funds and in collaboration with the Veneto region. Such work has included the Manlio Capitulo Hall near the Venetian civil courthouse, the analysis campaign and restoration of the Venezuela Pavilion and the complete refurbishing of the Biennale ticket office. Additionally, along with the Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon and the Commune of Venice, the Ministry has been promoting coordinated conservation activity of Scarpa's architecture in Venice. This has already allowed us to salvage the sculpture garden among other things, and now, the less-known *Monument to the Partisan Woman*. For this singular creation, the objective of our work is to restore the blocks in Istria stone that are mounted on reinforced concrete pillars and built into the water, repair the platform with minimal modification to the raising and ballasting system of the base of the statue, and remove and clean the bronze work and put it back into place. The *Monument to the Partisan Woman* has never been the subject of attentive maintenance but only of minimal, desultory intervention. The particularly aggressive environmental conditions of the lagoon, added to the wave motion, has led to erosion of the concrete, exposure of the iron scaffolding along with expulsive corrosion of the iron coverings, and widespread oxidation. Saline efflorescence is ubiquitous in the cement mixture, as are areas of disintegration; phenomena such as superficial flaking are attacking the stone as well. Dust deposits have fostered the development of microflora (mosses, lichens, and algae) as well as widespread growth of small vegetation. Cohering and loose superficial deposits and ferrous oxide stains from the degradation of metallic elements are present both on the cement plinths and on the stone. A few of the memorial stones show splitting all the way through, with some separations filled in with cement



6. *Monument to the Partisan Woman*, view of stone piers. Photograph courtesy the Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon, Comune di Venezia.

plastering and/or other inappropriate mixtures. The infiltration to the inside of brackish water through surface micro-splits has fostered degradation phenomena that, moreover, affect all of the constituent materials of the monument locally.

The conservation work going on at the present will not lead to definitive elimination of deterioration phenomena. A few causes of adulteration will be removed or reduced, while the parapet walls on the riverbank and the parallelepipeds in cement and stone are not showing any particular structural problems. The foundations have been inspected and can hold firm in good condition in spite of a few discontinuous spots due to how cement was applied and a few microfissures.

The parts that risk becoming detached have been further reinforced by inserting pins in AISI 316 stainless steel, their adhesion enhanced and fixed with epoxy resin. The removal of the superficial rust from the iron bars of the scaffolding was done as well, using successive treatments with converters. In a few limited cases, we are planning to remove the iron bars and create reinforcement by inserting stainless-steel bars. All of the metallic elements have been treated with a protective film. The operating modalities followed for filling the gaps in the cement bases must be considered “experimental” given that this is the second intervention performed on Scarpa’s architecture (the first was the restoration of the roof of the Sculpture Garden in 2005). After analyzing the existing cement mixture, the compound was reproduced. When added precisely at the right moment, the mixture filling the gaps renders the workmanship identical to the original. The inspection of the



7. *Monument to the Partisan Woman*, view of submerged stone exposed during restoration. Photograph courtesy the Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon, Comune di Venezia.

work is entrusted to a monitoring program extended over a period of at least two years. The work on the platform also has to be continually monitored because, although it had been ascertained that it was no longer possible to make the existing piston system functional again, the specific set-up required a system capable of functioning even if there were no adequate supports to maintain it. Thus it became necessary to reintegrate the original mechanism in order to be able to lift the heavy statue once again; but in so doing, we installed adequate supports in order to avoid having the blocks slip from the platform in case of unusual tides.

The manual, controlled removal of the ill-fitting plasterwork was done, followed by the reconstruction of identical plasterwork with flakes and dust from stone, hydraulic slaked lime, and inert substances having various granulate sizes and chromatic characteristics. Several levels of cleaning are planned for the cohering and loose deposits. From simple washings with water at low pressure using sorghum brushes or soft toothbrushes, and cleaning using applications of aqueous solutions of ammonium bicarbonate for the removal of the mainly cohering deposits, up to progressive and controlled mechanical removal of the calcareous incrustations using scalpels and possibly microchisels, all of the surface areas will ultimately be treated with appropriate biocides that will help limit the formation of microflora deposits on the surfaces. Furthermore, the cement surfaces will have to be treated as well with a protective substance capable of slowing down future deterioration processes.

Completely different is the treatment reserved for the big bronze statue, which weighs about 1,200 kilos and whose absolutely unique workmanship is obvious. The alloy used for the fusion, as becomes clear from the X-fluorescence analysis, consists of 85 percent copper and average percentages of around 4 percent each of tin, zinc, and lead.³ The comprehensive macro- and microscopic appraisal of the work, combined with the analyses done on the samples that were taken, have allowed us to delineate a complete picture of the typology and distribution of the forms of adulteration that characterize the metallic surfaces. For forty years the statue has been exposed to sea aerosol laden with chlorinated substances and, alternatively and with less frequent cycles, to complete immersion in the water of the lagoon. It is possible to distinguish two large classifications of deterioration: one consisting substantially of surface deposits of organic and inorganic products brought in from the sea, but whose aggression on the metallic matrix is not very strong; and another consisting of products derived from oxidation phenomena acting on the bronze structure of the work. The effect of the latter is worsened by the resulting contact of damaged areas with aggressive solutions of seawater containing atmospheric agents. The first deterioration typology extends over the entire concave area of the surface and on the lower ring of the work where the water, when at a height of over twenty centimeters, collides with it on an almost daily basis. The stagnation of the brackish water creates calcareous deposits consisting of calcium carbonate in the allotropic form of aragonite, which adds thick deposits of both animal and vegetable marine organisms, such as algae, mussels, and the like, which also affect the internal structure of the work. The forms of deterioration that involve the metallic structure show all the various products of adulteration of copper. The latter are derived from contact of the structure's constituent material with saline solutions and atmospheric oxygen; to a slight or moderate extent, they generate a coating on the metallic surface and pustules. The presence of pustules is worrisome; these are bulges of two to three centimeters that create fissures that appear as cracks on the most raised surface of the statue, namely the right side of the female figure. The transversal shiny sections revealed through optical and electronic microscope show a multiple-strata texture with radial fractures toward the outside. The metallic structure reveals discontinuities due to defects in casting, cracks, pores, or intergranular fissures that are also formed as a consequence of other progressive processes of oxidation. In extreme synthesis, the flows of saline solutions toward the external surfaces are localized in the areas where texture is discontinuous and the migration of metallic ions takes place. The bulges derive



8. *Monument to the Partisan Women*, detail of sculpture in bronze. Photograph courtesy the Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon, Comune di Venezia.

from this, becoming progressively bigger until they break the surface; they also favor the presence of saline substances added to this same surface by the external environment.

The project anticipates that, beyond the removal and transporting of the work to a laboratory, a big tank used as a container will have to be made for the desalination. This will be performed using conductivity controls for chlorides and sulfates. The cleaning is conducted gradually with complex compresses, applied with surfactants and resins with ionic exchange. Mechanical cleaning will be performed only locally and with precision instruments in order to remove the loose or extraneous material. The reinforcing, the sealing, and/or re-adhesion of a few microfractures will be executed with specially formulated mixtures and only after experimental trials and tests. To ensure the upkeep of the patinas, their processes of transformation will have to be taken into consideration, given that our intention is to safeguard in full the surface treatment originally desired by the artist.

For the development of the protective system, a cycle of trials in the laboratory will have to be performed on analogous materials in order to identify products that best respond conditions the statue will confront when it is once more placed in the lagoon environment.

Finally, the project also anticipates the complete cleaning of the green space currently occupied by oleanders, conifers, privets, and other wild bushes, which prevent one from seeing the monument from the riverbank. From Scarpa's drawings, it is possible to grasp how the green space is meant to be a

filter between the Napoleonic garden planted with trees in the back and the formal rigor of the sloping cavea of parallelepipeds in stone. Following this logic, a hedge of around sixty centimeters high and a simple grass carpet devoid of any plantings whatever will be installed so as to encourage meditation before the *Monument to the Partisan Woman* created by Augusto Murer and Carlo Scarpa.

Author Biography

Renata Codello is an architect and director of Office for the Protection of Architectural, Natural, Historic, Artistic, and Ethno-Anthropological Heritages in Venice and Its Lagoon. Codello received her PhD from IAUV University in Venice and is currently professor of the theory and practice of architectural preservation at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. Her books include *Materia signata-haecceitas tra restauro e conservazione* (with Roberto Masiero, 1990); *Il restauro dell'architettura contemporanea: Carlo Scarpa, aula Manlio Capitolò* (2000); *La nuova Accademia di belle arti di Venezia: cinque progetti per il complesso degli Incurabili* (2001); *Progettare un museo: le nuove gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia* (with Tobia Scarpa, 2005). She has supervised and worked on the design for the expansion of the Accademia di Belle Arti and the Gallerie dell'Accademica in Venice.

Endnotes

Translated by Joanna Dezio

¹ The Garden of Sculptures was restored in 2005 with a project financed by the Comune di Venezia and executed by architects Roberto Benvenuti and Ruggero Munarin.

² The Commune of Venice entrusted architect Luciano Gemin and his assistants with the conservation and restoration of the architectural elements of Scarpa's work, while the structural aspects were executed by engineer Enzo Magris. The work was begun in early 2008 and is currently ongoing. Management of the project has been conducted by architect Roberto Benvenuti, with the participation of architect Ruggero Munarin from the Executive Offices of the public works of the Commune of Venice. Conservation work on Augusto Murer's bronze statue is planned and directed by the author, with funds provided by Mibac 2005.

³ Dr. Guido Driussi of Arcadia Research, Venice, performed these analyses.