

Antonio Muñoz

Italian architect
1884-1960

He was born in Rome on March 14, 1884 by Augusto and Angela Zeri. The paternal family, of Castilian origin, had definitively settled in Rome in the eighteenth century when Juliano Muñoz, senior officer in service at the Spanish embassy, had married a Roman woman.

He enrolled in 1902 at the University of Rome, obtaining his degree in letters in 1906; He then attended the art course in Adolfo Venturi's refinement course. During the university years he went to Paris to attend some courses at the Académie des beaux-arts; in the same period it was in the Middle East, Austria and Russia. He published his first studies since 1903 in the magazine *L'Art*

In 1909 he obtained free teaching in the history of art at the University of Naples; At the same time, at the expense of the family, contrary to his transfer, he went on to participate, by competition, of the staff of the Superintendence at the monuments of Rome. Appointed inspector in 1921, he was called in 1929, it seems to be by direct interest of the governor of Rome, Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi, to the direction of the X division of the Capitoline Governorate where he stayed until 1944: during those decisive decades in which the layout of the city Muñoz was the person responsible for deciding on the opportunity and the modalities of numerous and important interventions, for which he acted according to often unequivocal and symptomatic criteria of a certain lack of methodological references. His tireless activity can be traced back to the classification adopted by Alberto Maria Racheli (1995), which identified four major categories of interventions: work on churches and buildings, undertaken since 1909, 'restorations' aimed at restoring to the monuments the alleged facies, the urbanist and architectural amateur activity; the latter implemented mostly by "building upgrades resulting from urban planning", and most of the time, therefore, located within very precious and delicate urban contexts.

Primary objects of interest during the first years of activity (1909-14) were the work of restoration of some Roman churches, including S. Eligio degli Orefici, the Ss. Quattro Coronati and S. Prassede.

The intervention on the church of S. Eligio, in which some of the foundations had caused damage of some importance in the dome and the humidity had damaged the decorative parties, implemented in 1909 and aimed first of all on the static consolidation and the compensation of the damage, then a general clean-up of the interiors and the façade, had more connotation than extraordinary maintenance than a real restoration. The work of the church of the Ss. Quattro Coronati (1913), in which Muñoz restored both the polymorphism of the bell tower, removed the clock in the 17th century, and the cloister made unreadable by the superficial, that context was an innovative element, like a modern tub in which the fountain was placed with lion heads. Much more 'heavy' intervention (1914) in the early Christian church of S. Prassede where, in the absence of

iconographic or documentary indications useful to redefine the design of the lost pavement, Muñoz carried out a mimetic reconstruction - that is to say, without making in no way recognizable the additions - relying on the analogue comparison, "reiterating general lines of architectural design relating to the predominant originality of the monument": a style-style exercise rather than a restoration, similar to what had been done in the previous century by Virginio Vespignani in S. Maria in Trastevere.

In 1914 he completed the restoration of the church of S. Salvatore in Lauro in via dei Coronari. In the same year, he was appointed a member of the commission established to study the new decoration of the pillars of the Vatican Basilica. In 1915 he went to Marsica to test the damage caused by the earthquake of January 17 and undertake the necessary resettlement works. He published the results of his reconnaissance in the monuments of Lazio and Abruzzi damaged by the earthquake and, a few years later, in Celana Monuments before and after the 1915 earthquake. In 1919 he completed the first phase of restoration works of the church of S. Sabina to the Aventine, begun in 1914.

Throughout the centuries, the ancient basilica had been altered by substantial modifications. The most invasive intervention was, according to Muñoz himself, performed by Domenico Fontana under the pontificate of Sisto V, when it was proceeded to demolition of the Eugenio II cantorum, the removal of the marbles placed on the walls of the apse and the closure of much of the façade and central nave sloping. In a recent time (1906) a canopy was erected in the presbytery area and an altar in cosmatic style. Muñoz's intent was to replenish the stylistic unity of the original structure, bringing it back to the presumed pre-Baroque appearances. The restoration of the holes and the reconstruction of the cantorum scholarship were made, however, on the basis of rather weak indications. As for the first, once removed the tampons hidden beneath the plaster layer and redefined the compartments, it was necessary to rebuild the closed lattices, originally made in scagliola and spatula slab plates, with a concrete cake and powder of granite formed according to a pattern freely drawn from some fragments found during the works. In the presbytery, demolishing the canopy and the altar of the nineteenth century, the planimetric redefinition of the cantorum schola, of which smaller, smaller, finds belonging to the cimasa had been found, was made on the basis of the few traces found in the pavement, "but in general the restitution in plan is based on analogies with other known types "; in the uphill, the integrations were easily distinguished from the original parts by means of decorations, drawn as graffiti in sketch form on the surface.

The work in S. Sabina was subject to severe criticism, who performed " the church-museum, the didactic model of a Christian basilica »proposed by Muñoz, for the truth, without too much teasing the consents received from many parts. In 1936, the church was subjected to a further and more systematic series of interventions by which Muñoz made, among other things, conceal the wooden trellises of the central nave's cover from a coffered ceiling, perhaps more philosophically suited to a early Christian basilica , and again marble the walls of the apse; having also found new fragments of the cantorum school pavement that caused some uncertainty as to the reliability of the reconstruction carried out a few years earlier, Muñoz decided to remove what was achieved then, "raising a wider enclosure than the first version with the ambones of the 'Epistles and the Gospel proposed in simplified forms, with totally missing feedback data'.

In the years of the First World War, Muñoz also worked on the consolidation of Domus Aurea's vault. Outside of Rome, overseen in Anagni to accommodate the palace of Boniface VIII, the communal palace and the cathedral; to Casamari at the restoration of the abbey and to Tivoli of the villa d'Este; in Viterbo, in addition to the work undertaken in the cathedral, he had handed over to the medieval church of S. Maria Nuova in 1912 in order to eliminate the 'deformations' suffered in the previous two centuries.

The restoration was carried out by intervening heavily on the plant, as described by Muñoz himself in volume *The restoration of the church of S. Maria Nuova in Viterbo and St. Francis of Vetralla*, in which he himself raises some doubts about the opportunity of the plaster removal, admitting that at least in medieval times these were present in much of the churches not only of Viterbese.

Muñoz was an attentive scholar of that historical period: between 1918 and 1919 he published two of his best-known studies, *Elogio of Borromini and Baroque Rome*, which were met in a discordant manner by critics.

From 1921 to 1925, appointed director in charge of the Monuments of Rome, undertook the works of isolation of the so-called Fortuna Virile temple at the Forum Boaria, transformed over the centuries in the church of S. Maria Egiziaca and embedded in an articulated assembly comprising some houses.

The major issue behind the collapse of the superfamily was the reintegration of the side of the temple adjacent to the demolished area, which had been deprived of architectural parties. Muñoz again resorted to the analogue method and reconstructed on the best preserved part of the temple, using brick masonry covered with rustic plaster for the integrations operated both on the tuff side and on the barrels of the columns in which the new parts were made further recognizable by the lack of grooves.

Between 1923 and 1926, he worked on several works in St. George in Velabro and between 1927 and 1929 in S. Balbina, also conducted with the intention of returning to the buildings the stylistic unit compromised following the interventions of transformation.

Similarly to what had happened in St. Sabina, both windows were restored in the churches and reconstructed the perforated panels closed. In S. Balbina, the operation was the result of "absolute invention". It was Muñoz himself to explain that "without having traced any of the old transitions, he had applied some inspired to those of S. Sabina but with glass slabs".

Between 1923 and 1927 he went abroad frequently to hold conferences; in 1927 he was invited to be part of the commission responsible for drawing up the guidelines for the drafting of Rome's governing law of 1931, of which were members of Cesare Bazzani, Armando Brasini, Gustavo Giovannoni, Roberto Paribeni, Marcello Piacentini, of the Buffalo and Alberto Calza Bini, the fascist union of architects and engineers, Paolo Salatino and Cesare Palazzo as representatives of the Capitoline Town Hall (as Muñoz himself) and the Ministry of Public Works.

After leaving the direction of superintendence in the hands of Gianfranco Vené (May-December 1928) and then Alberto Terenzio (January 1929-July 1950), in 1930 was placed at the head of the Antiques and Beauty office the arts of the X division of the Capitoline Governorate, becoming the "arm of Mussolini's Roma and true deus ex machina of the great archaeological-monumental transformation of modern Rome": among his interventions there were isolation of the Capitoline Hill, which was executed between 1926 and 1943, saw the destruction of precious sequences of the construction fabric of the historic city near its slopes, from Montanara Square to Tor de'Specchi Street to the Consolation Street; the arrangement of the Holes, the basilica of Massenzio and the temple of Venus and Rome; the reorganization of the area of the Olitorio forum and the church of S. Nicola in Carcere; the opening of the Way of the Sea and of the Way of the Empire.

The opportunity to realize a road link between Via del Corso and the Colosseum had been hypothesized on several occasions both in the Napoleonic era and after the proclamation of Rome's capital. In 1911, the afternoon of the inauguration of Victoriano, the proposal went to be essentially different. It took the body, that is, the possibility of carrying out the bombings no longer for the sole purpose of tracing the road, thus limiting the entity, but of "liberating" the Holes, not realizing a road, but "a great monumental road". The work began in 1931, resulting in a landscape of ruins in which the modes of perception of the monuments had radically changed, irrevocably compromising the "emotional impact of discovery, off-scale, sudden change of orientation ...". The Colosseum, thus placed in the new space context, saw its connotation of a strongly altered emerging element: "the remains of the ancient Empire were redesigned from a new, non-existent point of view: that of the road". At the same time as the opening of the Emperor's Way, Muñoz was concerned with starting the structural consolidation of the Massenzio basilica, which had been affected by the demolition of Velia. Compensate for the injuries, providing for the restoration of the tapered arches, operating a 'volumetric completion', after which the apse of the basilica, or its rear, would be perceived as a "monumental front".

Between 1933 and 1935, the nearby temple of Venus and Rome underwent an important restoration work, which included raising the columns and carrying out the usual reintegration.

On this occasion, Muñoz recourse, with interesting results, to the arboreal reconstruction, which was already the subject of previous studies and experiments by Giacomo Boni and Raffaele De Vico: the staircase access to the hall was made with box steps. laurel shrubs redefined the perimeter walls of the cell, while the extensive surfaces of the supporting walls were concealed with essences of the Mediterranean scrub.

The dialectical relationship between ancient and contemporary was the subject of the report *Les monuments antiques dans l'ambiance de la ville moderne: the exemple de Rome*, presented by Muñoz at the International Conference of Athens in 1931, dedicated to the main issues related to conservation and restoration of the architectural monuments, where he had been a member of the Italian delegation.

In 1944, the Governorate, Muñoz, dismissed by the superintendence and assigned to the seat of Aquila abolished in 1944, claiming health problems; from 1945 to 1949 he reorganized the Archives of the National Photographic Cabinet.

In 1930 he was the first director of the Museum of Rome, inaugurated by himself in the building of the former Pantanella pasta factory in Piazza Bocca della Verità, the structure was transferred in 1952 to the present-day Palazzo Braschi.

He was a romanist, a scholar of Roman 'facts and figures', and he himself the author of sonnets. He was also a painter, such as Maria Luisa Viné, who became his wife: he exhibited his works in the framework of the Roman Quadriennale in editions from 1931 to 1943 and 1952.

During the 1950s, he continued his collaboration with L'Urbe magazine, founded by him in 1936. From 1947-48 to 1954 he held the course of art history and architecture styles at the faculty of architecture.

He died in Rome on February 22, 1960.

When he died, he left his photographic archive to his nephew Federico Zeri, a historian and art critic. The material is part of the heritage of the Zeri Photo Gallery, currently managed by the Foundation with headquarters in Bologna.

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