

LA GALLERIA

NAZIONALE

Unbuilt: intervista a Fernanda Fragateiro

In the 1920s, architect and engineer Auguste Perret speaks of a “Superb architectural language”, in which “architectural elements are comparable to the words making up a dictionary, as when they are combined they make up infinite models that respond to different emotions and practical needs”. This is also the idea you base your works on, right?

My first use of text occurred in my first installation, in 1990, at the Faculty of Science of Lisbon. It was a citation from the writer Maurice Blanchot that I read in a text by architect Peter Eisenman. I don't remember the text or the citation anymore but I still remember transforming the phrase into an object: each word was converted into a white piece, like an empty shelf suspended on the wall, very much like Donald Judd's works. Not readable as semantic text but as form... Maybe this first use of text was a prediction that influenced and anticipated future works. What I'm really interested in is thinking/working about space. Theory is so much a part of it that I cannot separate textual materials from other materials, as text is memory and also anticipation, and it participates in the construction of reality. The relation between text and architecture is a strong subject matter in my work.



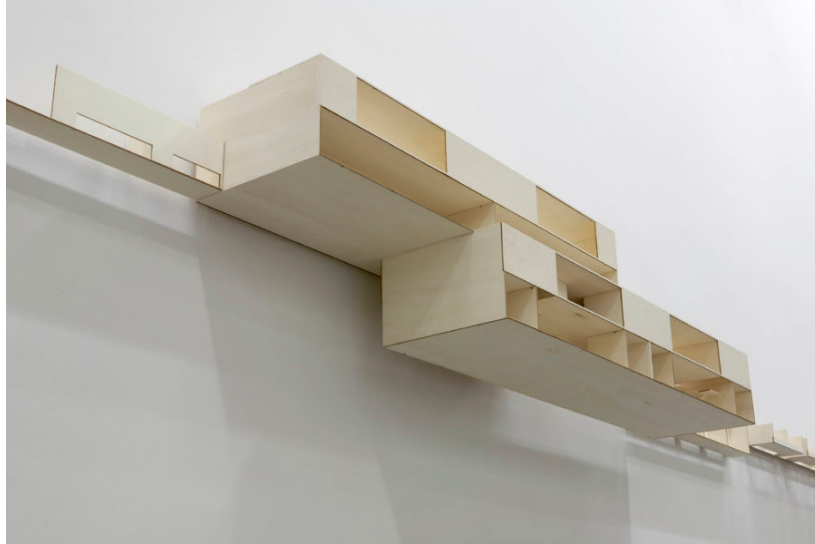
Unbuilt is the title of a work currently on show at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, part of the exhibition named Conversation Piece. According to Robert Venturi, “the aesthetic simplicity that fulfills the mind stems from a hidden complexity, rooted in the nature of the relationships between primary forms”. I think this quote is particularly significant in the context of your works, as they are seemingly very simple, but they are charged with strong sociopolitical meanings.

I work with a wide range of source material and subject matter all linked by a strong minimalist aesthetic of form, color and surface texture. I hope this reveals a work that actually explores and goes beyond the limits of the object and embraces space in which both the object and the object's viewer exist in all their phenomenological manifestations.

Unbuilt directly references models of projects that have not been or never will be realized, elements that establish a dialogue with the space surrounding them that you define “fragments”. While for Carlo Scarpa the fragment becomes an opportunity to “make an enigma out of the answer”, I think in your works the same element seems more a willingness to suggest a hidden time. What is the relationship between your works and time and memory?

During a visit to an architect's studio I watched that maquettes for a cancelled housing project were being dismantled – it seemed as if the maquettes were little homes, all about

to be thrown out with the day's trash. After taking these dismantled cardboard models to my studio they became the basis for the sculptural series entitled "Unbuilt,". Is this a way to repurpose into sculpture materials from a project that was never built, retrieving it from the past and placing it in the present? But, that past never happened. Maybe I'm talking about the past of the future. Is there a memory of what is to come, as established by what "will have been"? Like Scarpa, I think time is an enigma, the same way reality when reflected in a mirror is an enigma.



The greatest contemporary Portuguese architects, such as Fernando Tavora for instance, have utilized the concept of the void as architectural matter: there are no isolated forms but there is always a relationship between the forms occupying a space and the space itself. What is the relationship between your works and the space they inhabit?

I agree with Tavora, that void is construction. I want to build space with my work and void is part of that construction. Sometimes through simple operations of cleaning and emptying the spaces – I continuously pared down all that is excessive, superfluous, decorative, and accessory – other times through more complex operations that allows new spatial experiences, where the body could find countless possibilities of being a body. Verbs such as clean, remove, unblock, eliminate, open up, are part of my discourse. And I considered these to be not just actions preparatory to placing the piece but part of the work itself. I'm also interested in the history/stories of the spaces in which I work and in the memory inscribed on their walls. Void and freedom are my favorite concepts to think about space.

In this sense, do you believe that Unbuilt establishes a better dialogues with Cesare Bazzani's Neoclassical architecture or with the other works on show?

Unbuilt establishes an amazing relation with the space of the Galleria Nazionale. For the first time, for me, this sculpture looks like an endless line of text suspended on the wall. The relation with the architectural space is very strong and this is underlined by the proximity with Donald Judd's wall piece and Rachel Witheread floor piece.

Intervista e foto di Alessia Tobia