

## Lina Bo [Bardi] in Italy

### New research brings back Bo-Pagani's forgotten designs for the staging of two events in the city of Milan during World War II

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#### Resumo

This paper shows that the years Lina Bo Bardi spent in Italy deserve further examination. In fact, bibliographical and archival research, which should be carried out in Italy and also at Lina Bo and P.M. Bardi Institute, can still reveal previously unknown materials. Following this line of research, a careful analysis of the magazine *Lo Stile nella casa e nell'arredamento* has revealed two forgotten designs of temporary structures for political events in Milan by the architects Bo and Pagani from 1942.

*Keywords:* modern architecture, Lina Bo Bardi, Italian architecture.

A hundred years after the birth of Lina Bo Bardi (Rome 1914 - São Paulo 1992), the Italian-Brazilian architect who designed the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) and the SESC Pompéia – icons of contemporary public architecture in São Paulo –, there is still much to be discovered about her biography and her manifold activities (from architecture to design, from city planning to theatrical scenery, from designing jewellery and costumes to museology, from university teaching to publishing). There are numerous issues related to her work that deserve further research, and one of them is undoubtedly the “Italian period”. It comprises the time from her birth until her departure for South America with Pietro Maria Bardi in 1946. This part of Lina Bo’s biography, which includes her education and professional debut in Rome and Milan, was only partially studied for a long time. This was probably due to the difficulty of reconstructing it so long after the events, and its incomplete documentation in the Lina Bo and P.M. Bardi Institute’s archive. Another reason is that the research needs to be done in Italy, working on archives and bibliographic sources which are

sometimes not easily accessible as they date back to World War II.

#### The current state of the studies into the Italian period of Lina Bo

When considering the state of the studies into Lina’s Italian period, it should be remembered that in the monograph *Lina Bo Bardi*<sup>1</sup> of 1993 there is a text entitled “Literary Curriculum”, which written by Lina herself about the first thirty two years of her life in Italy and her arrival in Brazil. The information contained in this passage was repeated word for word in various other contributions, probably because it was written in the author’s own handwriting and therefore considered reliable, or perhaps because of the difficulties already mentioned related to the study of the Italian period. As a result, this content remained crystallized for a long time. It was not immediately verified scientifically, or recognized as the “fictionalized”, personal and incomplete account that it was. As is well known, this story was partially discredited by the architect Carlo Pagani<sup>2</sup> - Lina’s

<sup>1</sup> FERRAZ, M.C. (Ed.). Lina Bo Bardi. São Paulo: Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> A historical and critical study of Carlo Pagani architect, which would make his profile complete, has not been yet realized. The essential personal data, coming from the Milan Architectural Foundation, says as it follows: «He was born in Milan on 28th April 1913; graduated in Rome (the date is not specified), and in 1939 he took the state exam in Venice. He was a member of the Milan Architectural Association since 21st November 1940, and was removed from it after his death on 28th October 1999».



**Figure 1** - Lina Bo, Milan, "Baia del Re" quarter, 1946. Source: mufoco.org, Federico Patellani Archives.

<sup>3</sup> OLIVEIRA, O. DE. Lina Bo Bardi. *Obra construída*. 2G revista internacional de arquitetura, n.23-24, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> TENTORI, F. Ricordo della Signora Lina. In: GALLO, A. (Ed.). *Lina Bo Bardi architetto*. Venezia: Marsilio, 2004. p.150-164.

<sup>5</sup> ANELLI, R. Ponderações sobre os relatos da trajetória de Lina Bo Bardi na Itália. Pós. Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Arquitetura e Urbanismo da FAUUSP, v.17, n.27, p.86-101, jun. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> LIMA, Z. R. M. DE A. *Lina Bo Bardi*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013.

friend, lover and colleague in her Milan years. In 1994, following the exhibition *Lina Bo Bardi* at the Milan Triennale and the catalogue published on that occasion, he wrote a long unpublished text entitled *Considerazioni sul curriculum letterario (Reflections on the "literary curriculum")*, which along with several attachments redefines the activity Lina carried out in the capital of Lombardy. It portrays her contribution as smaller and less significant in many cases and also states that she almost always worked with Pagani.

First Olívia de Oliveira<sup>3</sup>, and later Francesco Tentori<sup>4</sup>, made precise critical remarks on the subject, but it was definitely Renato Anelli with his *Ponderações sobre os relatos da trajetória de Lina Bo Bardi na Itália*<sup>5</sup> who made a decisive contribution to the matter, and opened the way to an investigation of this period of Bo Bardi's biography. The work of Zeuler Lima<sup>6</sup> also made a fundamental contribution,

especially the following chapters: *A Girl in Pants, On Becoming an Architect, Paper Architecture, Basta!*, as did Gabriella Cianciolo Cosentino's recent essay<sup>7</sup>.

On the occasion of 100 years since Bo Bardi's birth, several initiatives focused on this line of investigation have recently been organized: the cycle of events *Lina Bo Bardi 1914-1992, Una architetta romana in Brasile*<sup>8</sup> and the exhibition *Lina Bo Bardi in Italia. "Quello che volevo, era avere Storia"* at MAXXI in Rome<sup>9</sup>. The latter has proved that the "literary curriculum" is fundamental when it comes to doing research aimed at reconstructing Lina Bo's Italian period, and this must necessarily be combined with bibliographical and archival research. This research must include the magazines that Lina worked for from 1940-1946, which are useful and objective tools that can partially bring back the professional experience she gained in Italy, in particular Milan, during and immediately after World War II.

<sup>7</sup> CIANCIOLO COSENTINO, G. Early Yeas and Wartime: Lina Bo Bardi's Illustrations and Journalism in Italy (1940-46). In: LEPIK, A.; BADER, V.S. (Ed.). Lina Bo Bardi 100. Brazil's Alternative Path to Modernism. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2014. p. 51-64.

<sup>8</sup> Lina Bo Bardi 1914-1992. Una architetta romana in Brasile, a cycle of events to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lina Bo Bardi's birth, planned by A. Criconia and F. R. Castelli (Conversations, 25th November 2014, Casa dell'Architettura, Rome; International Research Convention, 4-5 th December 2014, the Faculty of Architecture, Sapienza University of Rome).

<sup>9</sup> Lina Bo Bardi in Italia. "Quello che volevo, era avere Storia" exhibition curated by Margherita Guccione, scientific advice by Sarah Catalano and Ernesta Caviola, MAXXI - Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo, Rome, 19/12/2014 - 03/05/2015.

<sup>10</sup> CATALANO, S. Lina Bo Bardi in Italia. In: GUCCIONE, M. (Ed.). Lina Bo Bardi in Italia. "Quello che volevo, era avere Storia". Roma: Quaderni del Centro Archivi del MAXXI Architettura, 2015. p.11-22.

<sup>11</sup> CATALANO, S. "Casa sul mare di Sicilia", progetto d'esordio di Lina Bo Bardi e Carlo Pagani. Per Salvare Palermo. Giornale della Fondazione Salvare Palermo onlus, n.22, p.18-20, set.-dez. 2008.

<sup>12</sup> RAVA, C.E. Addobbi delle città o l'architettura delle cerimonie. Lo Stile nella casa e nell'arredamento, n.19-20, p.79-81, jul.-ago. 1942.

<sup>13</sup> RAVA, C.E. et al. (Ed.). Architettura delle cerimonie. Milano: Ed. I. P. I., 1942.

This digression about the "literary curriculum" and the contributions of the critics on the Italian period aims to clarify the knowledge that has been acquired and revealed on this subject so far<sup>10</sup>. It is firmly believed that further research can still uncover important details about the story of Lina Bo in Italy, which will be useful for a broader understanding of her life and work, and how it developed later in Brazil.

### 1939-1946 - Lina Bo's professional debut in Italy

It is well known that "Achillina" Bo graduated in Architecture at the University in Rome on 25th November 1939, and after passing her professional qualification examination in Venice, she moved to Milan, where she opened a practice with Carlo Pagani in Via Del Gesù, 12. Because of the war, the architectural profession had to contend with many problems, and at the beginning of her professional career Lina combined design and publishing. The construction of new buildings was suspended to make way for reconstruction, but work on stage sets and interiors could still be done.

Lina Bo wrote articles for several newspapers at that time. She published papers about design in Gio Ponti's *Domus* and *Lo Stile* nella casa e nell'arredamento, and educational and popular articles for *Grazia*. Un'amica al vostro fianco, while her work for *Bellezza* and *L'Illustrazione Italiana* was exquisitely graphic. Papers written for *Domus* - during the period in which Bo and Pagani were deputy editors - and for *A* dealt with the theory of architecture and civil responsibility.

Many of these diverse papers were the work of both Lina Bo and Carlo Pagani, and more research will be required in order to determine who contributed what. In fact, it is very difficult to establish whether an idea, a graphic design or a text is the result of a combined effort, or whether sometimes the contribution of one of them outweighs that of the other in the various phases. These considerations should be supported by carefully chosen archive materials.

But there is no doubt that many of these papers dealt briefly with issues and solutions that Lina Bo Bardi would later study in detail in Brazil, for instance

the "wide eyes in the walls" of the fence that frame the landscape, in the 1940 design "Casa sul mare di Sicilia" for *Domus*<sup>11</sup>, which are forerunners of the holes in the facade of the SESC in São Paulo. Other examples include the precursor of the "Girafinha" chair in an article written for *Grazia*, some chairs produced in 1948 by the "Art and Architecture Studio Palma" which appeared earlier in the drawings published in *Lo Stile*, etc.. We could cite many more examples of both design and theory of architecture that Lina later developed in her adopted country.

The period when Bo Bardi collaborated with magazines has been intelligently defined by Zeuler Lima as "Paper Architecture". However, those magazines, in particular *Lo Stile*, along with a large number of "imaginary designs" by Lina and Carlo contain some works carried out by Bo and Pagani's practice, which are testimony to the architectural profession in a more "typical and usual" sense, where ideas become built structures. They consist of private architecture - especially interiors - and temporary architecture - stage settings -, which are "traces" of young Bo and Pagani's participation in the culture and architecture of those years. Their contribution was not only theoretical, behind the scenes in the magazines, and some of their designs were actually built.

### Two stage set designs carried out for the city of Milan during World War II

A careful examination of the magazine *Lo Stile nella casa e nell'arredamento* reveals two stage set designs carried out for the city of Milan during World War II by Lina Bo (among others), and selected by Carlo Enrico Rava, architect of the "Gruppo 7" and member of "R.A.M.I.", who used them to illustrate his article *Addobbi delle città o l'architettura delle cerimonie*<sup>12</sup> written in 1942.

The aim of the article was to promote a renaissance of the "art of stage sets for events", or rather "scenery for ceremonies". The author recalled the significant Italian tradition, both civil and religious, from the period between the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and Neoclassicism, whose origins go back as far as Imperial Rome. Rava pointed out that after Neoclassicism this art had undergone a period of crisis, which he hoped could be overcome. His first initiative was the publication of the book *Architettura delle Cerimonie*<sup>13</sup> ("The



**Figure 2** - Bo, Castiglioni, Pagani, setting of the “War poster exhibition” in Milan, drawing. Source: article RAVA, C.E. Addobbi delle città o l’architettura delle cerimonie. *Lo Stile nella casa e nell’arredamento*, n. 19-20, p.79-81, jul-ago 1942.

<sup>14</sup>Rava does not specify in his article which of the three brothers Castiglioni is the project’s author along with Bo and Pagani. We can probably exclude Achille (Milan, 1918-2002) because he graduated from the university in 1944. However, it could be Livio (Milan 1911-1979) or, even more likely, Pier Giacomo (Milan, 1913 - 1968) as he had written with Carlo Pagani in 1937 a libel about the Regulation Plan for Milan. Considering the acquaintance of the two, they are likely to have collaborated also in this case.

<sup>15</sup>DE GRADA, R.; RIZZI, C. Angelo Casati. Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2003.

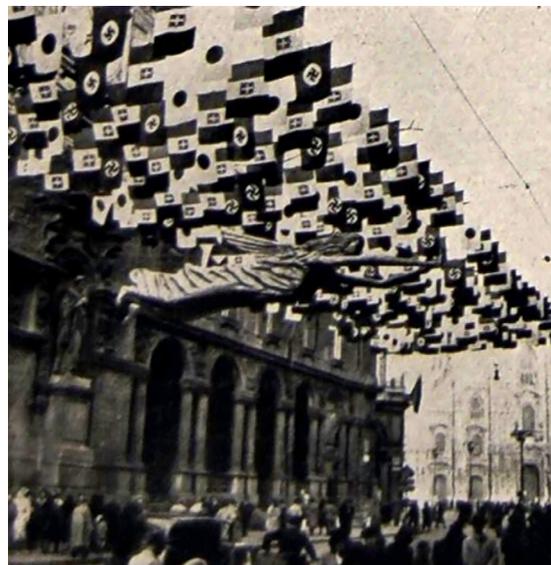
Architecture of Ceremonies”) in May 1942, which he wrote himself, together with Guglielmo Ulrich and Virginio Vaj. It was intended to be the first of a series on the subject, but as we now know it was the only one ever printed. Some of the texts from this volume were reproduced word for word by Carlo Enrico Rava in his article for *Lo Stile*. The author also mentions his commission to develop a section dedicated to the subject of the art of stage sets, or rather “the art of dressing, preparing and decorating public celebrations and exhibitions”, at the next Triennale exhibition. Furthermore, according to Rava, the renaissance of the art of “staging” had to be pursued with the active involvement of the most representative architects and the best painters, sculptors and musicians.

This long introduction about the contents of the article aims to contextualize the images that illustrate it, which must have been selected by the author as models of good practice, or a modern way of working that he considered appreciable and appropriate. This selection includes three designs for Milan: the staging of the “War poster exhibition” and that of the wool collection, which both saw the participation of Lina Bo; and the exhibition of “The Italian Youth of the Lictor”, designed by some final

year architecture students under the supervision of Mazzocchi and Rava.

The work for the “War poster exhibition” was carried out by Castiglioni<sup>14</sup>, Pagani and Bo, and it is documented in the article with a perspective sketch and three photos showing Via Mercanti – the part nearest to Piazza Duomo between Palazzo dei Giureconsulti and Palazzo della Ragione. Over the street there is an aerial roof, covered with little Italian, Nazi German and Japanese flags. Angelo Casati’s iconic sculpture of Victory<sup>15</sup> hovers over the street, suspended below the banners.

Symbolically, the three principal Axis countries, represented by their standards, are guided by Nike, depicted in flight with her arms stretched towards the Palazzo della Ragione. A rectangular banner with its edges smoothed off, suspended over the street, bears the inscription “war poster exhibition” in thin black linear capital letters on a white background. A few simple iconic elements define this setting along Via Mercanti, combining different shapes and materials, which create a varied visual and material impact: the rhetoric of the sea of colourful little flags, which could seem light and almost joyful if we did not know in hindsight of the



**Figures 3, 4 e 5.** Bo, Castiglioni, Pagani, setting of the "War poster exhibition" in Milan, photographs. Source: article RAVA, C.E. Addobbi delle città o l'architettura delle cerimonie. *Lo Stile nella casa e nell'arredamento*, n. 19-20, p.79-81, jul-ago 1942.

tragedy they would lead to, is interrupted by the flight of Victory, corporeal and yet uplifted, which probably marked the entrance to the exhibition space. Nike's hair, wings and dress are ruffled by the movement of her flight, which contrasts with the smooth clean exhibition banner. Unfortunately, we do not currently have any pictures of the exhibition itself, which would have contributed to completing the critical analysis of the project. However, the three photos published in the article in *Lo Stile* certainly show the "modernity of forms and means of expression" in "the urban decorations", which Rava hoped would lead to a renaissance of the "art of staging", capable of engaging "a vast range of spiritual, ethical and political values".

There was also another project by Bo and Pagani that took the form of an actual architectural construction in Piazza Duomo in Milan, near the left side of the facade of the cathedral. A high truncated pyramid with a rectangular base rises up, transparent airy and empty because it was made of metal tubes, partially covered with Italian flags. At the base, on a green lawn, there were some tents for the collection of wool for soldiers in the war. Like the previous one, this design also uses contrasting shapes, surfaces and materials... The tower, adorned with Italian flags, communicates with the cathedral spires, and shares its upward surge and perforated design that lets in the air and light, but in a simplified modern form. It is like an urban totem paying tribute to the Homeland and it seems to express Rava's words when he said, "the art of decoration has a huge potential today, and it can take advantage of immense resources provided by modern technology, regulated by a feeling of security and aesthetic responsibility".

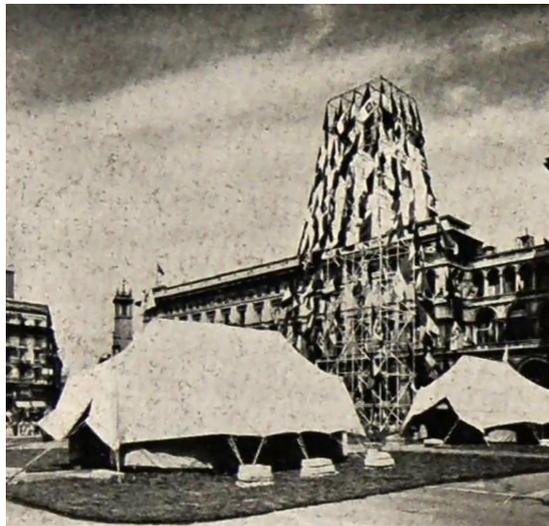
The tower's transparency, spaciousness and height contrast with the three low tents with opaque coverings, heavily anchored to the ground. The lawn unites the work at its base, and separates it from the paving of the square. The choice of the grassy covering also takes the tents back to their natural habitat, as if it was an army encampment in a war. Thus the tents have both a symbolic and a more utilitarian function, related to collecting wool.

There is a documentary film and numerous photos of this event, related to the propaganda of the autarchy. Some of them can be found in the archive of the Istituto Luce (<[archivioluca.com](http://archivioluca.com)>), from which

we have discovered that the event took place from 10th to 12th May 1942, which has allowed us to determine when Bo and Pagani's work was carried out. The Luce News video comments on the ceremony with the following emphatic words: "Milan: the red crusade encampment set up in Piazza Duomo in order to collect wool is the destination of a patriotic pilgrimage, which continues from dawn till dusk with an increasing number of offerings from the public. A mountain of wool is slowly growing in Piazza Duomo. Cheered on by the crowd, Maria di Piemonte brings her offering... and the mountain becomes bigger". This political demonstration, with a large turnout by the people and the authorities, was undoubtedly a great opportunity for the two young architects to gain visibility.

It is not known what the respective input of Lina and Carlo into the conception of the project was, and so far no architectural drawings that explain the design procedure have been found. In the "literary curriculum", Lina does not mention these two projects in Milan, probably because both of them are inevitably connected with the Fascist regime, and therefore contrary to the human, cultural and professional life that she was trying to build for herself in Brazil. However, this does not diminish the historical and critical interest of the two projects, which are traces of her debut in Italy during World War II, made together with Carlo Pagani. This should not be forgotten because it was quite probably him that brought this "important" commission to their young practice, as he was a Milan born man, in a male-dominated industry, and he knew the local area well.

The entrance of the exhibition of "the flight into art" by Agnoldomenico Pica in 1939 could be considered an iconic suggestion of these two designs that Lina Bo was involved in creating. It combines the use of metallic scaffolding and hanging sculptures, which is a combination of the principle themes of the staging of the war poster and the wool collection events. In general the use of metallic scaffolding in temporary architecture was a subject of research in Italy at that time, and rationalist architects were particularly involved in experimenting with it. A particularly significant example of this was the "publicity construction in the Vittorio Emanuele II Gallery in Milan" in 1934 by Edoardo Persico and Marcello Nizzoli.



**Figures 6, 7 e 8.** Bo, Pagani, setting of the wool collection in Milan, 1942, photographs. Source: article RAVA, C.E. Addobbi delle città o l'architettura delle cerimonie. *Lo Stile nella casa e nell'arrendamento*, n. 19-20, p.79-81, jul-ago 1942.

It also seems clear that certain design choices, like the use of scaffolding and tents, which were present in these two projects in Milan that Lina Bo was involved with, were later developed by her in the Teatro Oficina in São Paulo (1984) and various other designs for pavilions. What is more, the theme of the tent, with its peculiar shape and structure, had been put forward by Bo and Pagani several times on the pages of the magazine *Lo Stile* in the early forties, which means that it interested and even fascinated her in some way.

For my research, I considered it essential to trace the book *Architettura delle Cerimonie*, in search of more information about the Milan staging designs that Lina Bo took part in. Finding this book was extremely difficult, because there are very few copies in Italy, and many turned out not to be accessible. In the end I managed to have a look at the one conserved in the Library of the Adriano Bernareggi Foundation in Bergamo.

However, all my expectations were shattered. In fact the book does not contain any reference, photographic or textual, to the two projects mentioned, or to any other works by the same authors (Bo, Castiglioni or Pagani). So the pictures of the staging for the "war poster exhibition" and the wool collection event were only used to illustrate the article in *Lo Stile*. Why? As has already been pointed out, the staging of the collection of wool is believed to have taken place in May 1942, and it may therefore have been too late to include it in the book, although we can assume that the design was conceived at least a few months before, and the drawings could therefore have ended up in it in any case. However, this probably would have given away the surprise effect, which was undoubtedly required for a political demonstration of this kind. The date of the war poster exhibition, on the other hand, is still not known, so it is not possible to say whether it was not included in the book for the same reason, or not. Nonetheless, the fact that various leaflets on the subject were planned suggests that there was an idea to publish the designs in subsequent editions. Alternatively, it could be hypothesized that the inclusion of these designs was the result of a tendency that was very common in Gio Ponti's magazine, that of giving space on the pages of *Lo Stile* to the work of its closest associates, like for example Pagani, who was editor in chief, and Bo.

## Conclusions

These two designs, analyzed here for the first time, are still open to further insights that may result from the discovery of new bibliographic and archival references. In particular, no other materials about the war poster exhibition have been found, as if this event had taken place without leaving a trace. However, further investigation could certainly lead to the acquisition of more information.

In the meantime, this paper on the two works has recovered a piece of the experience Lina gained in Italy, putting together a fragment of her story and a part of Italian architectural heritage from those years that had been forgotten.

Analysing Lina Bo Bardi's Italian years means being able to understand what she took with her from her own country to her new life in Brazil, in terms of knowledge and experience, and being able to understand what she decided to continue with, develop and transform, and what to abandon, leave behind and forget ...

These two previously unknown examples of public and political works carried out by Bo and Pagani's practice in Italy, which emerged unexpectedly from an examination of the magazine *Lo Stile*, undoubtedly show how careful and conscientious research can reveal new information that may help to increase our knowledge about Lina Bo Bardi and find new interpretations. The main sources to be considered when analyzing her Italian period are the publications of that era, magazine archives, archives belonging to other architects she knew, above all Carlo Pagani's, as well as those of public and private institutions that operated at that time, and the materials in the Lina Bo and P.M. Bardi Institute, which have been catalogued, but in the case of documents dating back to the Italian period, not always precisely identified.

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