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# Contamination Between Architecture and Contemporary Art: Good Practices of Temporary Use of Spaces in Historic Context

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## Abstract
Since the early 2000s, the mixing and contamination of different artistic forms has led to original examples of temporary use of spaces in the context of the assets registered on the World Heritage List. Specifically, the experiments between architecture and contemporary art have represented an opportunity for dialogue between different values and reflection on the role of public art.
This research aims to study some cases of temporary insertions of contemporary works of art in the Turin system of Savoy Residences. This heritage was the protagonist of an aware use of contemporary art which represented the premise for an extension to other urban spaces with interesting enhanced effects. One of the most significant examples is the Turin event *Arte alle Corti. Passaggi nel contemporaneo a corti aperte* (2015-2016) which involved numerous urban courtyards including the spaces of Palazzo Reale and Palazzo Carignano.
In addition to constituting good practices of the encounter between ancient and new expressive languages, these examples can also represent an attempt to rethink traditional ways of enhancing cultural heritage in favour of a more innovative model for the use of public spaces.

**Keywords:** heritage, contemporary art, conservation, enhancement

## 1. Introduction
In examining the theoretical and methodological orientations of the restoration in the late 2010s, Giovanni Carbonara stated that one of the fundamental aspects of modern society is its complex character and openness to values often in contrast with each other. He also saw, as a future perspective for the disciplines of conservation, an extension of interest towards an opening, in the architectural field, to the mixing and contamination of different artistic forms [1].
In this direction, an interesting research topic linked to the contamination between different artistic expressions concerns the temporary use of spaces in the context of the assets registered on the World Heritage List. Specifically, a series of significant examples have involved the Savoy residences in Turin over the past twenty years: in this context there have been cases of insertion of contemporary works of art that have represented an opportunity for comparison with the pre-existing architecture [2]. However, these forms of experimentation also lend themselves to further consideration that go beyond the simple encounter between present day creativity and historical architecture, reflecting on meanings that art can assume with reference to historic contexts and their enhancement.
The present research therefore aims to study some examples of these contemporary paths that have included the Savoy Residences and the city of Turin: the relationship between Turin and contemporary art has been consolidated through numerous recent experiences and is reflected in the will to strengthen the tourist and cultural identity of the city since the second half of the 1990s [3]. Recent years have been marked by a new focus on contemporary art and by the economic and cultural investment to promote a new image of Turin as a reference point for these experiences [4]. The very presence of Turin artists at the events being studied is a symptom of the particular vitality of the city in this area.

Some of the experiences studied in this essay can be traced back to the theme of the biennials of contemporary sculpture, which have been placed continuously since the early 2000s involving a several locations within the Residences of the Royal House of Savoy (Villa dei Laghi in the La Mandria Regional Park, Castello di Agliè, Castello di Racconigi): they are characterized by the same promoter (Piedmont Region) and by a theme articulated according to different aspects depending on the location of reference.
Secondly, *Arte alle Corti*, an urban-scale initiative held in Turin in 2015 and 2016, which was organized by private lovers of contemporary art will be analysed. In this context, the urban historic heritage, including some Royal Residences, was the protagonist of a conscious use of contemporary art which was the premise for an extension to other urban spaces with interesting enhancement effects.
As part of the investigation, these experiences will not be analysed in the perspective of art criticism, but above all in relation to the methods and effects on cultural heritage that have characterized the relationship between contemporary art and historic context.

## 2. International Sculpture at the Savoy Residences

The theme of contemporary art and open spaces [5] has found interesting experiments in the Savoy Residences since the early 2000s [6]. From this date, the first cases of international contemporary sculpture exhibitions date back, mostly every two years: the works of art are not only inserted inside the closed spaces of the residences but also in the parks and adjoining gardens. Contemporary art is located within a context already full of memories and stratifications.
Promoted by the Piedmont Region, these initiatives are characterized by the choice of well-known international artists. In these experiences, authors do not seek abstraction from the context. On the contrary, a visual relationship between places and works offering particular points of view on monuments is reaffirmed. Specifically, the choice of different locations emphasizes the relationship with nature or with the historical architecture inserted within the parks or gardens.
From a more strictly artistic point of view, an aspect common to the different manifestations is the fact of inserting contemporary sculptures in an unprecedented context such as the natural landscape. This scenario allows the public to expand the possibilities of using work that acquires new values, reacting to changes in nature and seasons. The experiences are therefore configured not as a simple static display of sculptures in an open space, but instead represent a dynamic experience of interaction between sculptures and context [7].
The first two exhibitions were held in 2000 [8] and 2002 [9] within the La Mandria Regional Park in the area adjacent to the Villa dei Laghi. At the basis of the event, there was the idea of the sculpture park, accompanied by an international symposium with the participation of the main sculpture park directors of the world. [10]. In these first two experiences, the relationship affected almost exclusively sculpture and the natural environment. Even in cases where the architecture of the villa related to the artistic installation, it was always architecture strongly characterized by the presence of vegetation, with a strong reference to the natural component and the degradation caused by the passage of time. The initiative was an opportunity to allow access to an area normally excluded from use and, at the same time, bring a public normally alien to this world closer to contemporary art. Therefore, on one hand there is a contamination of different forms of expression and on the other also a contamination of different types of users (fig. 1-3).
The exhibitions moved (2004 [11], 2006 [12], 2008 [13]) to Castello di Agliè, establishing a more marked interrelation between sculpture, nature and historical architecture. In 2004 the sculptures were set up in the park, in the orangery and in the lemon house; in this case, the comparison did not only concern nature but above all the architecture of the castle. As stated by Daniela Biancolini, “the exhibition of works of contemporary sculpture in the marble Olympus of putti and cherubs, nymphs and gods of the past does not merely represent a stimulus to look at and see properly, by contrast, our artistic past and present, but also marks the continuity of art" [14]. In this two-way relationship, the work of art added the value given by the contemporary stratification to places that had already had a high artistic quality. In 2006, the biennial was hosted in the same locations at Castello di Agliè but paid more attention to the park and the sculptural episodes present in it. Closer attention to the dialogue between art and nature characterized the 2008 edition with aspects related more to environmental reporting (fig. 4-6).
A similar operation also took place in Castello di Racconigi. The castle was the scene of contemporary art exhibitions in 2010 [15] and in 2013 [16]. The operation also involved the park and the monumental buildings inside. As in previous experiences, the environment in this experience was not a neutral element, but an active factor capable of dynamically interacting with the work. The work of art was captured in a different dimension from the usual museum. In this sense, two comparing paradigms are underlined: "this is aperture, the intention to relate, as opposed to drawing back into closure, isolation and statuary; it is extension […] as opposed to the object" [17] (fig. 7-10).
From the point of view of the estate, in all the experiences analysed, the insertion of the sculptures constituted a minimally invasive factor for the historic context in terms of view and practicability of the

spaces. On the contrary, the layout designed for the works created unprecedented points of view which enhanced the architecture, as in the work Piazza Duomo '08 by Mauro Staccioli in the park at Castello di Racconigi in 2010.
These experiences of contamination between contemporary art and the historical-environmental context, however, bring further reflections on the connected meanings that go beyond the more immediate aspect of dialogue between culture and nature, between preservation of historic memory and experimentation in the artistic field. First of all, an interesting element that overlaps the first reading level is the sociological dimension of the exhibitions which become a vehicle for transmitting messages of a more ethical nature: the works allow the public to focus on current issues (ecology, globalization) and raise awareness on the issue of landscape protection and enhancement [18].
By shifting attention from the object to the process, the dynamism that characterizes the artistic experimentation is also reflected in terms of spacial use of the residences. The cases analysed offer original cultural models without compromising the need of protection: the initiatives are in fact configured as examples of enhancement that respect the testimonies of the past and make them coexist with present values.
Through the initiatives carried out, the Savoy Residences and the annexed parks are interpreted not as static testimonies but as active actors of an enhancement process. The proposed experience is called to arouse the curiosity and interest of the spectator who is placed at the center of an "atto di seduzione" [19]. Furthermore, these events reveal an attempt to activate a more lively participatory process and a greater sense of belonging to places and heritage [20]. The current notion of heritage is strictly connected to the recognition of socially shared values and to the construction of communities that share identity values [21]: attention to cultural heritage is already seen in the initiatives analysed as key factors for the construction of meaning community and for development in cultural, economic but also quality of life [22].

**Fig. 1, 2, 3:** Scultura Internazionale a La Mandria (2002): William Pye, *Offspring II* (left); Arnaldo Pomodoro, *Rotativa di Babilonia* (middle); John Aiken, *Centotto* (right).

**Fig. 4, 5, 6:** Scultura Internazionale ad Agliè (2006): Masayuki Koorida, *Flowers* (left); Giò Pomodoro, *Colloquio col figlio* (middle); Takamichi Ito, *Flowing Light* (right).

**Fig. 7, 8:** Scultura Internazionale a Racconigi (2010): Arnaldo Pomodoro, *Stele I-II-III-IV* (left); Igor Mitoraj, Torso di Ikaro (right).

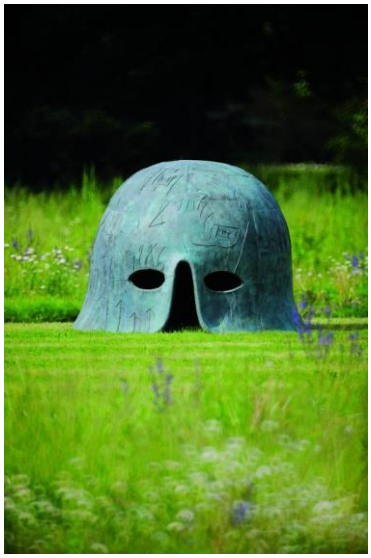

**Fig. 9, 10:** Scultura Internazionale a Racconigi (2010): Mauro Staccioli, *Piazza Duomo '08* (left); Mimmo Paladino, *Elmo* (right).

## 3. Contemporary Art in the Historic City of Turin: the Case of *Arte alle Corti*

Another Another example of temporary use of spaces in Turin's historic city concerns an experience held in 2015 and 2016 entitled *Arte alle corti. Passaggi nel contemporaneo a corti aperte*. In this case, the promoter was not the Piedmont Region but a private organizing committee consisting of a group of professionals united by a passion for contemporary art. The initiative was sponsored by the Municipality of Turin, the Piedmont Region and the Metropolitan City [23].

The first event took place from 27 May to 10 November 2015, the second from 30 June to 10 November 2016: the dates were not random, but chosen so that both editions ended in early November, in conjunction with the major events in Turin concerning contemporary art (among them Artissima and Paratissima) [24]. At the basis of the event there was, therefore, the willingness on the part of the organizers to link this event, interweaving it with other city events that are much more relevant in terms of turnout.

The event consisted of the opening of some courtyards or gardens of historic buildings to host the works by contemporary artists. Spaces normally closed or inaccessible to the public opened their doors to contemporary art in a new way for the Turin urban area. Among the spaces chosen, some Savoy Residences were also involved in the operation: specifically, Palazzo Reale, Palazzo Carignano and Palazzo Chiablese (fig. 11-16).

The initiative was conceived as an exhibition-itinerary in the open spaces of the historic courtyards and gardens where large site-specific installations and sculptures were placed. As can be seen from the choice of the works, there is a heterogeneous panorama of artistic practices with a strong hybridization between different fields [25].

Despite the temporary nature of the event, it is possible to recognize the search for a connection between the work exhibited and the archetecture: contemporary insertions in fact generate interesting solutions based, depending on the specific case, on coexistence and dialogue with the built context or on the “autonomia-dissonanza" [26]. The first case is, for example, Botto & Bruno's *Waiting for the last bus?* (Arte alle corti 2016), which cohered with the shape and materiality of Palazzo Carignano respecting the design of the internal flooring, or the work of Luigi Stoisa *Di materia in materia* placed in direct relation with the fountain in the courtyard of Palazzo Chiablese (2015). The extraneousness to the context and the disorientation for the visitor are, instead, the stylistic code of Elisabetta Benassi's work *Mareomerz* in Palazzo Carignano (Arte alle corti 2015) and Davide Rivalta's *Bufale mediterranee* in the Piazzetta Reale (Arte alle corti 2016).
From the point of view of compatibility with the existing context, the insertions of the works were not visually invasive as they allowed users to perceive the spatiality of the courtyard and maintain the possibility of crossing it. Furthermore, they did not involve the construction of anchors or other support elements on the ground. In some cases, only the installation of reversible exposed system connections were used.
As in the previous case study, even in this experience there are elements of originality in the proposed model that offers interesting effects of mutual enhancement for the architectural container and the work on display. At the center of the operation, there was an attempt to promote contemporary art outside the classical museum circuits [27] and to experiment with the concept of public art [28]: the sculptures and installations were freed from isolation and decontextualization of a museum room or an art fair to interact with the urban environment. From the point of view of contemporary art, the proposed model could guarantee greater accessibility and usability: in this sense, experience could constitute an experiment of participation that is as broad as possible to the benefit of greater social inclusion [29].
The case analysed presents significant elements also in relation to the ways of enhancing the urban space. The courtyard of the Turin Baroque palace is not perceived as a public space but is in many cases an exclusive area, separate from the public sphere [30]. On the other hand, the exhibition contributed to breaking the barrier between outside and inside and promoting greater permeability in the urban fabric through the absence of a rigid and defined exhibition path. The urban dimension of the event offered a free and alternative itinerary compared to those usually travelled by the community. In this sense, the initiative can be interpreted as an original model of enhancement, proposing an action capable of supporting the promotion measures already in place, mainly concentrating on the attracting poles of the city, and guaranteeing a better impact on an urban scale.
Specifically, the spaces chosen correspond to different types in relation to the mode of use: the first type of space concerns urban areas already for public use (Piazzetta Reale) or widely known, such as the Giardini Reali, the Manica Nuova of Palazzo Reale and Palazzo Carignano. The second type of space regards the interior of public courtyards that are usually inaccessible and poorly known by the public: contemporary art, in addition to an element of dialogue with historical architecture, is interpreted as a means of allowing greater knowledge of the spaces and for urban enhancement. Among these, the most relevant are Palazzo Chiablese (seat of Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Torino), Palazzo Civico and Palazzo Birago di Borgaro (seat of the Chamber of Commerce). A third type of space is the private courtyards which opened their doors to the public on the occasion of the event, guaranteeing greater enjoyment of the historic core: among others, Palazzo Asinari di San Marzano and Palazzo Costa Carrù della Trinità.
The extraordinary opening was also an opportunity to insert these spaces in the cultural programming that involved the city. The Turin Conservatory in fact organized classical music concerts within the courtyards, further contributing to the contamination between different art forms.

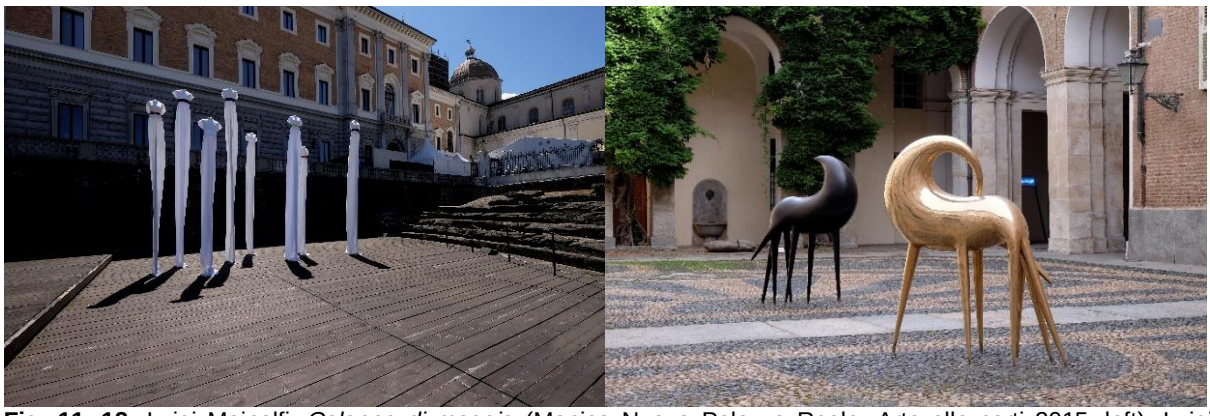

**Fig. 11, 12:** Luigi Mainolfi, *Colonne di maggio* (Manica Nuova Palazzo Reale, Arte alle corti 2015, left). Luigi Stoisa, *Di materia in materia*; Luigi Mainolfi, *Centaura e centaura d'oro* (Palazzo Chiablese, Arte alle corti 2015, right). Photo credit: Massimo Forchino.

**Fig. 13, 14:** Elisabetta Benassi, *Mareomerz* (Palazzo Carignano, Arte alle corti 2015, left). Botto & Bruno, *Waiting for the last bus?* (Palazzo Carignano, Arte alle corti 2016, right). Photo credit: Massimo Forchino.

**Fig. 15, 16:** Carlo Ramous, *Continuità* (Giardini Reali, Arte alle corti 2016, left). Davide Rivalta, *Bufale mediterranee* (Piazzetta Reale, Arte alle corti 2016, right). Photo credit: Massimo Forchino.

## 4. Conclusion

The experiences related to the Savoy Residences and the Turin urban context bring to the attention the contamination between different artistic expressions and can be considered good examples of encounter between historical architecture and contemporary insertions. The search for a connection does not alter the spatial perception of the context and it is not configured as a physically invasive operation towards pre-existences.

These events, loaded with meaning, go beyond the most immediate interpretation of dialogue between different expressive forms. Leaving aside the aspects most related to art criticism and the sociological nature of these operations, the ability to create a virtuous model by networking the artistic experiences and connecting them to other initiatives already present in the territory emerges from these manifestations.

Focusing attention on the process, the operations described offer ideas for re-evaluation of traditional ways of enhancing assets, in favour of a more dynamic model. The contemporary element not only adds curiosity and amazement to an already consolidated cultural experience, but it can also

represent an opportunity for the enhancement of already known places, to be proposed to the public in a renewed vision, and to the knowledge and relaunch of traditionally closed or inaccessible spaces. The proposed actions can therefore contribute to balancing the measures already in place which are not often a guarantee of an adequate impact on the urban level.
Another aspect worthy of further study is linked to the relationship with the public involved in the experience: in the cases analysed, the use of art is strictly connected to the themes of social inclusion and participation in cultural heritage which become requirements at the basis of the project idea. In this direction, these contemporary paths, developed within a historic context, can represent an attempt to increase the link between the community and the place [31].
The positive aspects that characterize the cases studied are configured as replicable models also in other less courtly contexts: if in the examples mentioned we are dealing with contexts with a heritage of great value, it is possible to devote the same attention to urban suburbs and more degraded areas and try to raise the quality level of these places. Such an operation can therefore have a cultural meaning of improving the usability of urban contexts [32] and reappropriation of cultural identity, enriched by the contribution of new contemporary values for the community [33].

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