Contents

Fascist Heritage in Italy:
From Iconoclasm to Critical Preservation

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In 1939, sculptor Publio Morbiducci (1889–1963) was commissioned to create a monumental travertine bas-relief for the Palazzo degli Uffici, one of the main buildings erected as part of the first Universal Exposition to be held in Rome in 1942.[1] The bas-relief *La storia di Roma attraverso le opere edilizie* (*The History of Rome Through Its Built Works*) (fig. 1)[2] traces a linear history of Rome. Starting from the upper left corner, describing the mythical foundation of the city, the visual narrative guides viewers to the Fascist era, passing through ancient Rome, the Rome of Popes, and Italian indepen-dence, embodied by the hieratic figure of Giuseppe Garibaldi. The "Third Rome,"[3] as Benito Mussolini[4] called it, is depicted in the lower register of the bas-relief, the part closest to the viewer; here Mussolini is celebrated on horseback giving the Roman salute, surrounded by a crowd of women, children, and soldiers who are feting him.

   The use of a spiral figural frieze recalling the Trajan's Column, along with the rhythmical repetition of the *vexilla* (Roman military banners), emphasize the idea of continuity between the Roman Empire and Mussolini's regime, a trope of Fascist pro-paganda which was further consolidated in the *Augustan Exhibition of Romanness* (*Mostra Augustea della Romanità*) held in 1937.

1   Among several publications on the EUR 42 project, see Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo di pietra*, Bari 2007; *Una guida all'architettura moderna dell'EUR*, ed. Adachiara Zevi, Rome 2008; *Esposizione universale Roma. Una città nuova dal fascismo agli anni '60* (exhibition catalog Rome), ed. Vittorio Vidotto, Rome 2015; Luca Acquarelli, *Il fascismo e l'immagine dell'impero. Retoriche e culture visuali*, Rome 2022.
2   On Morbiducci's bas-relief see Elisabetta Cristallini, "Publio Morbiducci. La Storia di Roma attraverso le opere edilizie," in *E42. L'Esposizione universale di Roma. Utopia e scenario del regime* (exhibition catalog Rome), eds. Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Guidoni, Simonetta Lux, vol. 2, *Urbanistica, Architettura, arte e decorazione*, Venice 1987, pp. 307–310. See also Raffaele Cecora, *Publio Morbiducci. Sculture, dipinti, disegni*, Rome 2000; Francesca Lombardi, "Morbiducci, Publio," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 76, 2012, URL: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/publio-morbiducci_%28Dizionar-io-Biografico%29/ (accessed August 8, 2021); Flavia Marcello, "The Norme of 1932 and the Fascist Concept of Monument. Publio Morbiducci's *The History of Rome Through Its Built Works*," in *The Venice Charter Revisited: Modernism & Conservation in the Post-War World*, ed. Matthew Hardy, Newcastle upon Tyne 2009.
3   In a public discourse held in 1925, Mussolini said "Therefore the third Rome will expand over other hills, along the banks of the sacred river, to the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea." *Discorso pronunciato in Campidoglio per l'insediamento del primo Governatore di Roma il 31 dicembre 1925.* The sentence appears in the inscription on the colonnade of Palazzo degli Uffici in Rome. On the expression "third Rome," already used by Giuseppe Mazzini, see Andrea Giardina and André Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma*, Bari 2016, pp. 169–172. On Fascism and its use of History see Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*, Toronto 2003; Paola Salvatori, *Mussolini e la storia: Dal socialismo al fascismo* (1900–1922), Rome 2016.
4   Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) was the founder of the National Fascist Party, which governed Italy from 1922 to 1943.

1. Publio Morbiducci, *La storia di Roma attraverso le opere edilizie*, 1939, travertine, c. 14.20 x 6.10 m x 30 cm, Palazzo degli Uffici, Rome (photo 2020)

All historical periods and events depicted in the bas-relief serve the strategic purpose of constructing a teleological narrative of Rome. They are evoked through architectural elements, monuments, and artifacts ranging from the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter to the Arch of Titus and even the candelabra of the Temple of Jerusalem. The narrative further unfolds with the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, the Campidoglio, and Saint Peter's Basilica to then culminate with the raising of the obelisks under Pope Sixtus V. Alongside the Vittoriano, the national monument inaugurated by King Vittorio Emanuele III in 1911, there are the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (then under construction) and the Axum obelisk, which had been looted from Ethiopia and erected in Rome in 1937. All three monuments are deliberately combined as a *pastiche* within the relief to symbolize Fascism and its aggressive colonial ambitions.

According to architect Gaetano Minnucci's plan, in 1940 the bas-relief was placed on the right wall of the so-called *entrata del commissario* (commissioner's entrance), the main access to the building hosting the highest office responsible for the organization of the 1942 event. Shortly afterwards, however, the Universal Exposition (Esposizione Universale di Roma) was cancelled altogether because of Italy's entrance in World War II; the site, which was still under construction, remained abandoned for years. Today, the EUR district accommodates the facilities of numerous private companies and public institutions. It appears as an urban palimpsest where presences from the original Fascist plan coexist with various architectural structures built in subsequent decades. Morbiducci's relief has remained in its original place and still welcomes visitors entering the Palazzo degli Uffici, which now serves as the headquarters of EUR S.p.A., a joint-stock company operating with the Municipality of Rome and the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance in the management of the EUR patrimony. In a complex interplay with the new functions of the building (which still retains on the colonnade an inscription quoting Mussolini's words), the bas-relief appears as visual evidence of the Duce's tactics in reshaping public space in order to construct the identity of Fascist *italianità* and ensure the lasting power of the regime's ideology.[5] Indeed, it illustrates and continues to project the tropes of Fascist propaganda into the present day. However, if the very presence of the bas-relief seems to enforce an idea of continuity, at a closer reading its material structure reveals signs of rupture. The lower register was heavily damaged by acts of iconoclasm in 1943,[6] something that is still evident on the Duce's face. Morbiducci was asked to design a new composition, which however was never executed.[7]

La storia di Roma attraverso le opere edilizie is just one of many surviving traces of the Italian Fascist past scattered throughout the country's urban fabric, which, through different media, convey anachronic images from the *Ventennio*. Shifting focus from the context of production to the afterlife (the *Nachleben*) of the works raises several questions that have recently been addressed in the global public debate: How do monuments rewrite history? What tensions result from politically charged architectural sites taking on new functions? What frictions exist between preservation

5   Paolo Nicoloso, *Architetture per un'identità italiana*, Udine 2012; Giulia Albanese, "Mappare la memoria del fascismo," in *I luoghi del fascismo. Memoria, politica, rimozione*, eds. Giulia Albanese and Lucia Ceci, Rome 2022.

6   On the iconoclastic wave against Fascist symbols and portraits of Mussolini after the fall of the regime, see Simona Storchi, "Mussolini as Monument: The Equestrian Statue of the Duce at the Littoriale Stadium in Bologna," in *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians*, eds. Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan, and Giuliana Pieri, Manchester 2013, pp. 193–208. On the dynamics of iconoclasm, Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art. Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, Chicago 1997; David Freedberg, *Iconoclasm*, Chicago–London 2021; *Iconoclastia nel lungo Ottocento*, ed. Arianna Arisi Rota, special issue of *Memoria e Ricerca. Rivista di storia contemporanea*, XXVI, 57 (2018).

7   Morbiducci proposed to replace the lower stripe with a more neutral iconography representing the victory in 1918, in order to maintain consistency with the main narrative and avoid explicit references to Fascist Rome. The work was never executed and the relief we see today is the result of a restoration. See Cristallini 1987 (note 2), p. 310.

policies and the maintenance of such powerful images associated with dictatorships in institutional space?

From the 2015 protest movement Rhodes Must Fall to the 2017 demonstrations in Charlottesville in Virginia, rethinking the management of controversial material legacies has become an urgent issue in academic and institutional agendas.[8] In Italy, a lively debate on the massive presence of Fascist buildings and monuments was sparked by an article published by Ruth Ben-Ghiat in *The New Yorker* in 2017. Calling attention to the relationship between the legacies of dictatorships and the resurgence of far-right parties in Europe, Ben-Ghiat, professor of History and Italian Studies at New York University, expressed her concern about the perceived complacency of Italians living in among these imposing legacies.[9] The article provoked many reactions from Italian academics and intellectuals who firmly advocate for the preservation of Fascist-era legacies as historical evidence of the past. The arguments of this debate, primarily revolving around the opposition of preserving these artifacts in their original shape and location versus demolishing them, highlighted a gap in the study of the fluctuating dynamics of the memory of Fascism through its material legacies.

A Difficult Heritage?

On March 11 and 12, 2019, the conference "A Difficult Heritage: The Afterlife of Fascist-Era Architecture, Monuments, and Works of Art in Italy," held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, and the American Academy in Rome, addressed this gap from an interdisciplinary perspective. The year after, while the authors of this volume were writing their contributions, the 2020 Black Lives Matter global demonstrations sparked by the murder of George Floyd stimulated further urgent questions and reflections regarding the interplay between monuments and memory.

In this publication, senior and early-career scholars from different disciplines – History, Art History, History of Architecture, Anthropology, Heritage Studies, Literature, Philosophy, as well as curators – critically examine the cultural biographies of numerous fascist-era artifacts, including buildings, monuments, mural paintings, mosaics, decorative arts, and sculptures. With a focus centered on artifacts and sites located within national borders or managed by the Italian state (such as the Casa Italiana in Marseille, run by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the essays that follow investigate the politics of management of Fascist heritage. Broadening the investigation on colonial heritage would have, instead, required a transnational and transcultural approach together with the analysis of diverse conservation politics and legal frameworks.[10] However, Fascist colonialism and its material remnants arise through several threads in multiple contributions in this volume.

Studies on Fascism have increasingly turned their attention to the legacies of the regime, which operated as a "patron state,"[11] from its downfall to the present day. These works are mainly focused on material heritage, which, compared to other countries that experienced dictatorships, is widespread throughout Italy and well-preserved for the most part;[12] on the re-emergence of the Fascist past in art practices and cinema;[13] and on the history of exhibition of Fascist-era art.[14] Among this growing body of studies, several have embraced the concept of "difficult heritage" to frame the legacies of Italian Fascism. Drawn from the work of anthropologist Sharon Macdonald, "difficult heritage" is "a past that is recognized as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity."[15] It refers to unsettling and awkward histories, rather than to that which can be celebrated or acknowledged as part of a nation's valued history. Macdonald's idea, which was developed through the analysis of the management strategies for the Nazi rally grounds in Nuremberg, is framed by a vivid academic discussion on the handling of material legacies and sites associated with violence, trauma, and histories of power.[16]

8   See Dell Upton, *What Can and Can't Be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South*, New Haven 2015; *A Questionnaire on Monuments*, eds. Leah Dickerman, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Carrie Lambert-Beatty, special issue of *October*, 165 (2018); *Monument Culture. International Perspectives on the Future of Monuments in a Changing World*, ed. Laura A. Macaluso, London 2019; Andrea Pinotti, *Nonumento. Un paradosso della memoria*, Monza 2023

9   Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Why Are So Many Fascist Monuments Still Standing in Italy?," *The New Yorker* (October 5, 2017). On the controversy on monuments in the United States and in Italy, see Joshua Arthurs, "The Anatomy of Controversy, from Charlottesville to Rome," in *The Difficult Heritage of Italian Fascism*, eds. Nick Carter and Simon Martin, special issue of *Modern Italy*, 24, 2 (2019), pp. 123–138.

10   On colonial architecture and city planning, see Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad. Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism*, London 2007; Vera Simone Bader, *Moderne in Afrika. Asmara – Die Konstruktion einer italienischen Kolonialstadt, 1889–1941*, Berlin 2016; Sean Anderson, *Modern Architecture and Its Representation in Colonial Eritrea: An In-visible Colony, 1890–1941*, London 2016; Giovanni Carbonara, Antonello Pagliuca, and Pier Pasquale Trausi, *L'architettura delle colonie d'Oltremare: un riflesso della "modernità" fra sperimentalismo e identità nazionale*, Rome 2021. On colonial heritage, see *Material Legacies of Colonialism*, eds. Markus Wurzer and Sebastian di Pretto, special issue of *Interventions. International Journal of postcolonial studies* (expected 2023). On the material culture of Fascist colonialism, see *Visual and Material Legacies of Fascist Colonialism*, eds. Carmen Belmonte and Laura Moure Cecchini, special issue of *Modern Italy*, 27, 4 (2022).

11   Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy*, Princeton NJ 1988.

12   See among others, "Fascism as Heritage in Contemporary Italy," in *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe*, eds. Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe Veltri, New York 2010, pp. 114–127; *The Cult of the Duce. Mussolini and the Italians*, eds. Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan, and Giuliana Pieri, Manchester 2013; Viviana Gravano, "Il coraggio del conflitto. Tre esempi di interventi sulla 'Difficult Heritage' in Italia," *Roots, Routes. Research on Visual Culture*, III, 10, 2013, http://www.roots-routes.org/relationshipsedute-temporanee-lo-spazio-relazionaledi-manuela-mancioppidi-viviana-gravano/; Nick Carter and Simon Martin, "The Management and Memory of Fascist Monumental Art in Postwar and Contemporary Italy: The Case of Luigi Montanarini's Apotheosis of Fascism," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 22, 3 (2017), pp. 338–364; Hannah Malone, "Legacies of Fascism: Architecture Heritage and Memory in Contemporary Italy," *Modern Italy*, 22, 4 (2017), pp. 445–470; Gabriella De Marco, "L'Ara Pacis di Augusto e la campagna elettorale per le elezioni amministrative del 2006 del Comune di Roma," *ClassicoContemporaneo*, 4 (2018), pp. 1–15; *Architecture as Propaganda in Twentieth-Century Totalitarian Regimes. History and Heritage*, ed. Håkan Hökerberg, Florence 2018; *The Difficult Heritage of Italian Fascism*, eds. Nick Carter and Simon Martin, special issue of *Modern Italy*, 24, 2 (2019); Simona Storchi, "The ex-Casa del Fascio in Predappio and the Question of the 'Difficult Heritage' of Fascism in Contemporary Italy," *Modern Italy*, 24, 2 (2019), pp. 139–157; Davide Lacagnina, *La Farnesina, Il palazzo, gli artisti, le opere*, Rome 2019; Laura Moure Cecchini, "Conspicuously Inconspicuous: Federico Baronello's EUR_Libya and the Photographic Memory of Italian Colonialism," *Third Text*, 166, 34, 3, (2020), pp. 1–21; Giorgio Lucarini, "Fascismo e architettura. Considerazioni su genesi, evoluzione e cristallizzazione di un dibattito," *Italia contemporanea*, 292 (2020), pp. 9–33; *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture. Reception and Legacy*, eds. Kay Bea and Stephanie Pilat, London 2020; Carmen Belmonte, "L'art contemporain pour une tutelle critique des monuments du régime en Italie. Une installation pour *Il Trionfo del fascismo* à Bolzano," in *Le fascisme italien au prisme des arts contemporains*, eds. Luca Acquarelli, Laura Iamurri, and Francesco Zucconi, Rennes 2021, pp. 203–216; *I luoghi del fascismo*, eds. Giulia Albanese and Lucia Ceci, Rome 2022.

13   *Mémoires du Ventennio. Représentations et enjeux mémoriels du régime fasciste de 1945 à aujourd'hui*, eds. Emilia Héry, Caroline Pane, and Claudio Pirisino, Neuville-sur-Saône 2019; *Continuità/discontinuità nella storia dell'arte e della cultura italiane del Novecento. Arti visive, società e politica tra fascismo e neoavanguardie*, ed. Michele Dantini, special issue of *Piano B*, 3, 1 (2018); Romy Golan, *Flashback, Eclipse: The Political Imaginary of Italian Art in the 1960s*, Princeton NJ 2021; *Rue d'Alger* (exhibition catalog Marseille), ed. Alessandro Gallicchio, Paris 2021; *Le fascism italien au prisme des arts contemporains*, eds. Luca Acquarelli, Laura Iamurri, and Francesco Zucconi, Rennes 2021.

14   In addition to many exhibition catalogs on Fascist-era art, see Ilaria Schiaffini, "'Anni '30. Arte in Italia oltre il fascismo'. Note storiografiche attorno al successo delle mostre sull'arte tra le due guerre," *Italia contemporanea*, 279 (2015), pp. 544–555; Luca Quattrocchi, "Esporre l'arte dell'era fascista. Cronache e storia," *Italia contemporanea*, 279 (2015), pp. 529–544. *Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti e l'arte in Italia tra le due guerre. Nuove ricerche intorno e a partire dalla mostra del 1967 Arte moderna in Italia 1915–1935* (conference proceedings, Lucca and Pisa, 2017), eds. Paolo Bolpagni and Mattia Patti, with the collaboration of Livia de Pinto and Biancalucia Maglione, Lucca 2020; Carmen Belmonte, "La Sapienza, il fascismo, una mostra. Snodi critici nella ricezione dell'arte del Ventennio negli anni Ottanta," *Studi di Memofonte*, 24 (2020), pp. 208–244; and the recent miscellaneous book dedicated to the history of postwar exhibitions on Fascism, *Curating Fascism. Exhibitions and Memory from the Fall of Mussolini to Today*, eds. Sharon Hecker and Raffaele Bedarida, London 2022.

15   Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and beyond*, London 2009, p. 1.

16   Notions of a dissonant, contested, negative, undesirable heritage have emerged in the frame of this interdisciplinary field of studies. To trace the development of these concepts, see *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, eds. John E. Tunbridge and Gregory John Ashworth, Chichester 1996; Dann Graham and A. V. Seaton, *Slavery, Contested Heritage, and*

The contributors to this volume apply, test, and challenge the notion of "difficult heritage" as a theoretical frame to investigate how Italy has negotiated the presence of Fascist-era remnants, highlighting limits and potentialities. With a comparative perspective with other countries, including Germany and the United States, essays delve into issues of restoration, display, and critical preservation of artifacts in both public and institutional spaces. Investigating Fascist legacies, the volume also aims to re-direct attention toward the term "heritage," which is marked by fluid definitions and nuances in meanings depending on different languages and cultural traditions.[17] In keeping with recent academic debates in the field of Heritage Studies, this volume addresses heritage as an unstable category – it can be preserved, restored, relocated, but also contested, undermined and re-signified. Heritage is subject to political and social uses and to shifts in reception, despite being protected by national laws and preserved by the technical expertise of conservators. Within this framework, this book expands its focus beyond the realm of material objects to encompass the processes that grant these objects the very status of heritage: so-called "heritagization."[18]

New critical tools and definitions to build such theoretical frameworks are introduced in this volume that combines interdisciplinary historical research with the analysis of the contemporary debate on Fascist heritage.

The essays cross multiple temporalities: from the Fascist patronage during the *Ventennio* to the iconoclastic reactions following the fall of the regime on July 25, 1943, and to the dynamics of postwar de-Fascistization. They reassess traditional historiography from different disciplinary perspectives and challenge accepted narratives, revealing both ruptures and continuities throughout the twentieth century. By investigating the micro-histories of artifacts, the book explores the many possibilities that exist between the demolition and the maintenance of the status quo, including removal from the public space, the creation of counter-monuments, and the shaping of exhibition narratives. Whitin this frame, contributors address contemporary art's role in critically deconstructing Fascist legacies.

2. Mario Sironi, *L'Italia tra le Arti e le Scienze*, 1935 (after the 2017 restoration), Aula Magna, Palazzo del Rettorato, Sapienza Università di Roma (photo 2018)

Conservation and Critical Preservation

In Italy, the process of recognizing Fascist-era sites and artifacts as cultural patrimony started in the 1980s. At the time, the existing legislation stipulated their recognition as cultural property could occur fifty years after their production.[19] In the same period, a thorough debate on the study of architectural sites and works of art created under the Fascist regime developed through academic publications and exhibition catalogs. Until then, many mobile works of art had been concealed or excluded from museum displays, while mural paintings or mosaics embedded in architecture were covered by curtains or partly repainted, erasing the most evident signs of Fascist propaganda. Mario Sironi's mural painting *L'Italia tra le arti e le scienze* (Italy between the Arts and Sciences) located in the Aula Magna of Palazzo del Rettorato at Sapienza University in Rome, was covered with wallpaper when the University re-opened after the war (fig. 2).[20] Although the architectural complex of the University Campus (Città Universitaria), designed by Marcello Piacentini (1881–1960) and inaugurated in 1935, retained its original function, it had to deal with the process of de-Fascistization. Indeed, in 1944 the Ministry of Education ordered the removal of all the emblems of the suppressed Fascist party, suggesting covering them in case the erasure could damage the buildings.[21] An internal commission gathered by the university decided to preserve the

Thanatourism, New York 2001; Maria Gravari-Barbas and Vincent Veschambre, "Patrimoine: derrière l'idée de consensus des enjeux d'appropriation de l'espace et des conflits," in *Conflits et territoires*, ed. Patrice Melé, Corinne Laerrue, and Muriel Rosenberg, Tours 2004, pp. 67–82; Sharon Macdonald, "Undesirable Heritage: Fascist Material Culture and Historical Consciousness in Nuremberg," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12, 1 (2006), pp. 9–28. William Logan and Keir Reeves, *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with "Difficult Heritage,"* London 2008.

17   See Julie Deschepper, "Notion en débat. Le patrimoine," *Géoconfluences*, 2021, URL: http://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/informations-scientifiques/a-la-une/notion-a-laune/patrimoine (accessed July 7, 2022). For an insight on the Italian concept of *patrimonio culturale* see Salvatore Settis, "La tutela del patrimonio culturale," in *Dizionario di Storia*, 2011, URL: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/la-tutela-del-patrimonio-culturale_%28Dizionario-di-Storia%29/ (accessed July 7, 2022); Tommaso Montanari, *Istruzioni per l'uso del futuro. Il patrimonio culturale e la democrazia che verrà*, Rome 2014.

18   Involving different disciplines (History, Anthropology, Art History, Social Sciences), Critical Heritage Studies is a field of research developed in the 2000s, which is still marginal in the Italian academic and institutional discourse on cultural heritage. See Flaminia Bartolini, "Fascism on Display: The Afterlife of Material Legacies of the Dictatorship," *Ex Novo: Journal of Archaeology*, 5 (2020), pp 19–32; Carmen Belmonte, *Art contemporain et préservation critique des monuments du fascisme en Italie. Un "iconoclash" à Bolzano*, in *Le fascisme italien au prisme des arts contemporains. Réinterprétations, remontages, déconstructions*, eds. Luca Acquarelli, Laura Iamurri, and Francesco Zucconi, Rennes 2021; Maria Pia Guermandi, *Decolonizzare il patrimonio. L'Europa, l'Italia e un passato che non passa*, Rome 2021. The manifesto of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies states: "Heritage is, as much as anything, a political act and we need to ask serious questions about the power relations that 'heritage' has all too often been invoked to sustain. Nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, cultural elitism, Western triumphalism, social exclusion based on class and ethnicity, and the fetishising of expert knowledge have all exerted strong influences on how heritage is used, defined and managed." ACHS Manifesto, 2012, URL: https://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/history (accessed July 22, 2022). See Gentry Kynan and Smith Laurajane, "Critical Heritage Studies and the Legacies of the Late-Twentieth Century Heritage Canon," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 25, 11 (2019), pp. 1148–1168.

19   Law June 1, 1939, no. 1089, "Tutela delle cose d'interesse Artistico o Storico," published in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 184, August 8, 1939. The law was issued by National Education Minister Giuseppe Bottai under the Fascist regime. On its subsequent revisions and updates, see Rosalia Vittorini's essay in this volume.

20   On Mario Sironi (1885–1961), one of most celebrated artists of Italian modernism, see *Mario Sironi* (exhibition catalog Rome), ed. Fabio Benzi, Milan 1993; *Mario Sironi. Ritratti di famiglia*, ed. Maria Grazia Messina, Turin 1996; Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism. Art and Politics under Fascism*, Cambridge UK 2000; *Sironi. La grande decorazione* (exhibition catalog Bologna), ed. Andrea Sironi, Milan 2013; Flavio Fergonzi, *Filologia del 900. Modigliani Sironi Morandi Martini*, Milan 2013; and Elena Pontiggia, *Mario Sironi. Sintesi e grandiosità*, Nuoro 2021.

21   Circular of Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale delle Arti, August 19, 1944, in Eliana Billi, "'Per procedere a degna sostituzione dell'affresco': vicende alterne del murale romano tra

mural painting, while covering with an opaque tempera the most explicit symbols of fascism, such as the *fascio littorio*, the fascist date impressed on it, the imperial eagle, and the figure of the commander on horseback represented on the arch. The intervention strongly altered the iconography and the work's pictorial language,[22] however it allowed the mural painting to survive in the Aula Magna and not to be destroyed.

In 1985, the Institute of Art History at Sapienza University organized an exhibition on the artists involved in the Città Universitaria project. The exhibition sparked a debate among academics and conservators regarding methods to be employed in the restoration of works of art from the Fascist era that had been variously covered, damaged, or repainted in the postwar period. At this juncture, the interventions that erased Fascist symbols were perceived as acts of censorship,[23] despite their historical value as evidence of the transition from Fascism to democracy. These debates reveal a paradigm shift in the reception of works of art and architecture created under the Fascist regime. Together with the political changes occurred in the 1980s and the cultural heritage legal framework, this watershed helped lay the groundwork for several interventions in the years that followed, including restorations, exhibitions, and preservation projects.[24] Art History has played a significant role in navigating this shift, as the discipline is actively involved both in preservation and conservation politics and in museum and curatorial practices. Both these politics and practices continue to shape paradigms governing the reception of art associated to Fascist propaganda.

In 2017, the same year of Ben-Ghiat's aforementioned article, two projects divergent in approach and intent were launched in Italy. In the Aula Magna of the Sapienza University, Sironi's mural painting was unveiled after a restoration curated by the Central Institute for Restoration (Istituto Centrale per il Restauro).[25] In keeping with the principles of philological restoration that had already been advocated in 1985, Sironi´s original painting and its symbols of the Fascist regime were uncovered. In Bolzano, instead, one of the first projects of critical preservation promoted in Italy, developed with the active involvement of the local community, was inaugurated. The project was shaped around the monumental relief representing *Il trionfo del fascismo* by Hans Piffrader (1888–1950),[26] where the figure of Benito Mussolini on horseback, with his slogan "believe, obey, fight" (*credere, obbedire, combattere*) engraved on the central panels, serves as the main element in a visual narrative illustrating key events of the *Ventennio*. The work was executed in the late 1930s for the façade of the Casa del Fascio (later converted into the Palazzo delle Finanze). The city of Bolzano hosts a trilingual society (German, Italian, Ladin) affected by two dictatorships: Fascism and the Nazi occupation[27]. Therefore, the Fascist rhetoric of Hans Piffrader's relief positioned

3. Michele Bernardi and Arnold Holzknecht, untitled LED light installation, 2017, on Hans Piffrader, *The Triumph of Fascism*, 1939–1942, Palazzo delle Finanze, Bolzano

in one of the main squares of Bolzano continued to arouse antagonism between the Italian- and the German-speaking populations and generated heated debates over the course of the last few decades.

In 2017, following a contest launched by the Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, two South Tyrolean artists, Arnold Holzknecht and Michele Bernardi, carried out an artistic intervention on the monument with the aim of subverting the grandiloquence of the Fascist rhetoric associated with it (fig. 3). They superimposed a LED-illuminated inscription over the relief quoting the German Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, with the sentence "Nobody has the right to obey" appearing in the three local languages. The new inscription forms a strip of light that intersects and highlights the relief, effectively questioning the significance of the Fascist slogan. The incorporation of the two works generates a novel artifact with multilayered temporalities and meanings, an "iconoclash" that, according to Bruno Latour's definition,[28] does not destroy but creates new images, doubts, and uncertainties. Moreover, the installation is part of a didactic path focusing on the history of Bolzano and its dictatorships, with several panels positioned at different points of the Piazza del Tribunale. The panels correspond to sections of a dedicated website exploring the iconography of Piffrader's relief, the 2017 installation, the history of Bolzano, and sites of memories embedded in its urban space. In keeping with the principles of critical preservation, the installation undermines the relief's ideological power and provides viewers with new critical tools without affecting the preservation of the artifact.[29]

Therefore, various approaches and diverging paradigms of reception currently coexist in Italy, affected by enduring tensions between the historic, aesthetic, and political values inherent in the works created during the Fascist regime. Consequently, the analysis and management of the afterlife of Fascist-era art and architecture

negazione e recupero. Il 'caso' Siviero," in *Sironi svelato. Il restauro del murale della Sapienza* (exhibition catalog Rome), eds. Eliana Billi and Laura D'Agostino, Rome 2017, pp. 121–140, p. 121.

22   Billi 2017 (note 20).

23   *1935: Gli artisti nell'università e la questione della pittura murale* (exhibition catalog Rome), eds. Simonetta Lux and Ester Coen, Rome 1985. On the exhibition and the paradigm shift in the reception of Fascist heritage, see Belmonte 2020 (note 14).

24   In 1987, a huge exhibition dedicated to the EUR 42 architectural and artistic projects was staged in the premises of the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, located in the same area: *E42. Utopia e scenario del regime* (exhibition catalog Rome), eds. Maurizio Calvesi, Enrico Guidoni, and Simonetta Lux, 2 vols., Venice 1987, vol. 2: *Urbanistica, architettura, arte e decorazione*. On the exhibition and its cultural and political frame, see Pippo Ciorra's contribution in this volume.

25   As part of restoration project, scholars and conservators thoroughly investigated the "life" of the work after 1943 and the artistic techniques used by Mario Sironi in 1935 and by Giuseppe Marzano, the painter charged to hide the Fascist symbols under the supervision of the artist Carlo Siviero, in the early 1950s. In 2017, the restoration was shown to the public in the context of a temporary exhibition at Palazzo del Rettorato. See the exhibition catalog *Sironi svelato* 2017 (note 20). Concerning artistic interventions realized during the *Ventennio* in university venues see Marta Nezzo, *Il Miraggio della Concordia. Documenti sull'architettura e la decorazione del Bo e del Liviano: Padova, 1933–1943*, Treviso 2008.

26   Mathias Frei, *Hans Piffrader 1888–1950: Entwürfe zum Relief am Gebäude der Finanzämter in Bozen*, Bolzano 2005. On the 2017 project developed around the monument see Belmonte 2021 (note 18).

27   See Ferruccio Canali, "Urbanistica nazionalista e piani regolatori per 'Bolzano italiana', città metafisica e déco (1929–1941)," in *Piani regolatori comunali: legislazione, regolamenti e modelli tra otto e novecento (1865–1945)*, ed. Ferruccio Canali, special issue of *Annali di Storia Urbanistica e del Paesaggio*,

4 (2016), pp. 21–70; *A Land on the Threshold South Tyrolean Transformations, 1915–2015*, eds. Georg Grote and Hannes Obermair, Bern 2017; *La difficile riappacificazione Italia, Austria e Alto Adige nel XX secolo*, eds. Andrea Di Michele, Andreas Gottsmann, Luciano Monzali, and Karlo Ruzicic-Kessler, Rome 2022.

28   *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (exhibition catalog Karlsruhe), eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weiber, Cambridge, MA 2002.

29   In Bolzano, another project of critical preservation was shaped around the Fascist Monument to the Victory. See *BZ '18-'45*, ed. Sabrina Michieli, Vienna et al. 2016; Håkan Hökerberg, "The Monument to Victory in Bolzano: Desacralisation of a Fascist Relic," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23, 8 (2017), pp. 759–774.

necessitates a context-specific analysis in each individual case. Indeed, certain artifacts may not even fit the definition of "difficult heritage," because they are not perceived as "difficult" by the local community.

The volume begins with an interdisciplinary section discussing the theoretical frames applicable to different categories of artifacts realized during the *Ventennio*. Mia Fuller (University of California, Berkeley) explores the concept of "difficult heritage" as defined by Sharon Macdonald and clarifies the use of the expression as it applies to the management and reception of the Fascist past within Italy. She distinguishes between Italy's approach to its Fascist past and Germany's handling of its Nazi past. Investigating the afterlife of a mosaic depicting the figure of Mussolini which remained placed on the façade of a church in Sabaudia, Fuller introduces the expression of *inertia memoriae*. This term refers both to the vestige remaining intact and apparently becoming completely inoffensive, and to outsider's attention stimulating the Italian discussion about how to deal with Fascist vestiges.

Focusing on the relationship between fascism and the arts, Giuliana Pieri (Royal Holloway, University of London) addresses the critical prejudice and the fraught legacy of Fascist art in postwar Italy though three specific case studies: Renato Bertelli's *Profilo continuo (Testa di Mussolini)* (1933), an unlikely icon of Italian interwar design; Primo Conti's monumental painting *La prima ondata* (1929–1930), a celebration of the March on Rome; and Duilio Cambellotti's fresco decoration in the Prefecture of Ragusa, Sicily (1934). In examining the discursive construction of the legacy of Fascism, the author emphasizes the pivotal role of historical historiography. By scrutinizing exhibition catalogs, academic publications, and textbooks she detects specific epistemological processes and narrative frameworks employed when analyzing Fascist art.

Hannah Malone (University of Groningen) challenges the notion of "difficult heritage" as applied to architecture of Fascist Italy. She tests the concept through several case studies in different Italian regions and emphasizes diverse and sometimes conflicting responses to Fascist vestiges in Italy from 1945 to today. Acknowledging multiple meanings and recognizing the memories embedded Fascist-era buildings, the author suggests employing the metaphor of a palimpsest as a tool to frame Fascist legacies. This metaphor provides a lens to examine the buildings not just for the traces of their Fascist past, but for a complex range of reactions and intentions developed in the postwar period.

Dell Upton (University of California, Los Angeles) adopts a comparative perspective on nationalist monuments as a difficult heritage. He compares Italian and American patterns of monumentality and rhetorical strategies, highlighting the use of common tropes. In addition, the author critically addresses the timely question of removal, demonstrating how "monuments work collectively, and they reflect and inflect one another."

From an anthropological and philosophical perspective respectively, Liza Candidi (Humboldt Universita of Berlin; University of Milano-Bicocca) and Davide Grasso (University of Turin) address the National Socialist heritage in Berlin, focusing on architecture and delving into the multifaceted development of the German approach to Nazi architectural heritage. They explore the policies of removal, the presence of visible traces, and processes by which the Nazi past resurfaces and re-emerge.

Crossing multiple temporalities, the second section explores the legacies of Fascism and the interlaced idea of modernity addressing different media, from architecture and monuments to postwar literature. Franco Baldasso (Bard College, New York) concentrates on the transition from the fall of Benito Mussolini in the summer of 1943 to the victory of the Christian Democrats over the left in the 1948 democratic elections, exploring the dynamics of memory in a liminal period, during which the cultural and the literary realms constituted battlegrounds for political hegemony. Baldasso examines how authors such Carlo Levi, Anna Banti, and Alberto Savinio

approached ruins as a recurring visual trope that remains prevalent both in the Fascist and post-Fascist national landscapes.

Adachiara Zevi (Bruno Zevi Foundation, Rome; Association "Art in Memory," Rome) explores the relationship between modernity and Fascism by scrutinizing architectural competitions and projects. After contextualizing the contemporary debate on the presence of Fascist-era monuments, Zevi introduces counter-monuments as a meaningful alternative occupying a middle ground between demolition and "uncritical" preservation.

Rosalia Vittorini (Tor Vergata University of Rome) also deals with the "modern" in architecture, but with a focus on the analysis of structures and building materials and techniques. She delves into Fascist-era architectural projects in their context of production and assesses their place in the postwar debate, tackling the challenges related to conservation strategies for buildings that were long abandoned and subsequently repurposed.

Joshua Arthurs (University of Toronto) surveys the use of Fascist-era heritage in contemporary political discourse, investigating recurring themes and motifs that are still employed when referring to the Fascist past. Addressing the memory politics of Fascist modernity, he traces a genealogy of this discourse and how it continues to shape contemporary debates around the physical remains of Fascist dictatorship.

Lucy Maulsby (Northeastern University, Boston, MA) focuses on late Fascist Italy and analyzes the design of Palazzo del Littorio at the Foro Mussolini and the coeval urban landscape in Rome, which reflects the regime's colonialist politics. Shifting to the postwar period, the author explores the management of the Case del Fascio in the aftermath of Fascism and their repurposing with new functions.

The last section brings together scholarship and curatorship to reflect on recent contemporary art interventions in dialogue with Fascist heritage. Pippo Ciorra (Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome; SAAD School of Architecture & Design) focuses on Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani's work, *Freedom of Movement*, which was made possible thanks to the museum's support. The analysis of the 2017 video installation opens with a reflection upon the multiple memories embedded in Fascist architecture and sites from the postwar period to the 1980s; then the author addresses the role of contemporary art in negotiating conflictual memories of Fascism.

Luca Acquarelli (Université de Lille) centers his essay on Mimmo Paladino's temporary re-semantization project in Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, a contemporary artistic intervention in dialogue with the city's Fascist heritage. By way of a thorough analysis of the constellation of iconographies evoking Fascist past, he highlights the mute dialogue between Paladino's *Stele* and the empty space left after the removal of the 1936 sculpture *Era Fascista* by Arturo Dazzi.

Alessandro Gallicchio's (Sorbonne Université) essay on the Casa d'Italia in Marseille adopts a combined approach: on the one hand, he explores the 1935–1936 mural paintings by Angelo della Torre decorating the building, on the other introduces the exhibition project *Rue d'Alger* (organized as part of the Manifesta 13 biennial of contemporary art) that invited artists to challenge the visual rhetoric of the building, which hosts today the Italian Cultural Institute and the Italian Consulate (*Consolato Generale d'Italia*).

Gathering different voices and perspectives, these essays shed new light on the multiple narratives developed around Fascist heritage, on public discourses, changing paradigms, and institutional interventions. Aligning with a critical approach to preservation, many strategies might contribute to undermining the political value of Fascist artifacts, providing the viewer with a framework for interpretation. We hope this book will inspire fresh ideas and further reflections about fascist legacies' preservation and display, taking into account the expectations of an increasingly transcultural society that challenges nationalist heritage narratives.