

# And Now the Good News

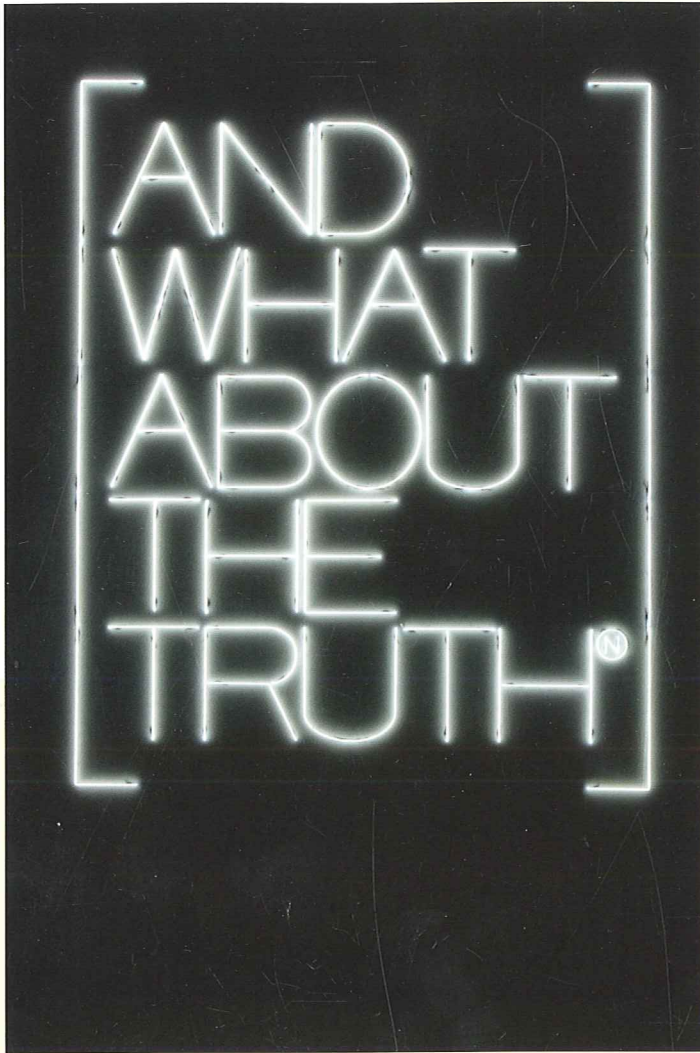
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Italo Rota  
in Milan

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Occupying great minds  
but eluding most mortals,  
the essence of architecture  
is revealed in eight easy  
steps in the exhibition Good  
N.E.W.S. designed by Italo  
Rota for Milan's Triennale.



Installation by Atelier  
Mendini.



Art installation by Maurizio Nannucci that makes visitors of Good N.E.W.S. leave with only more questions.

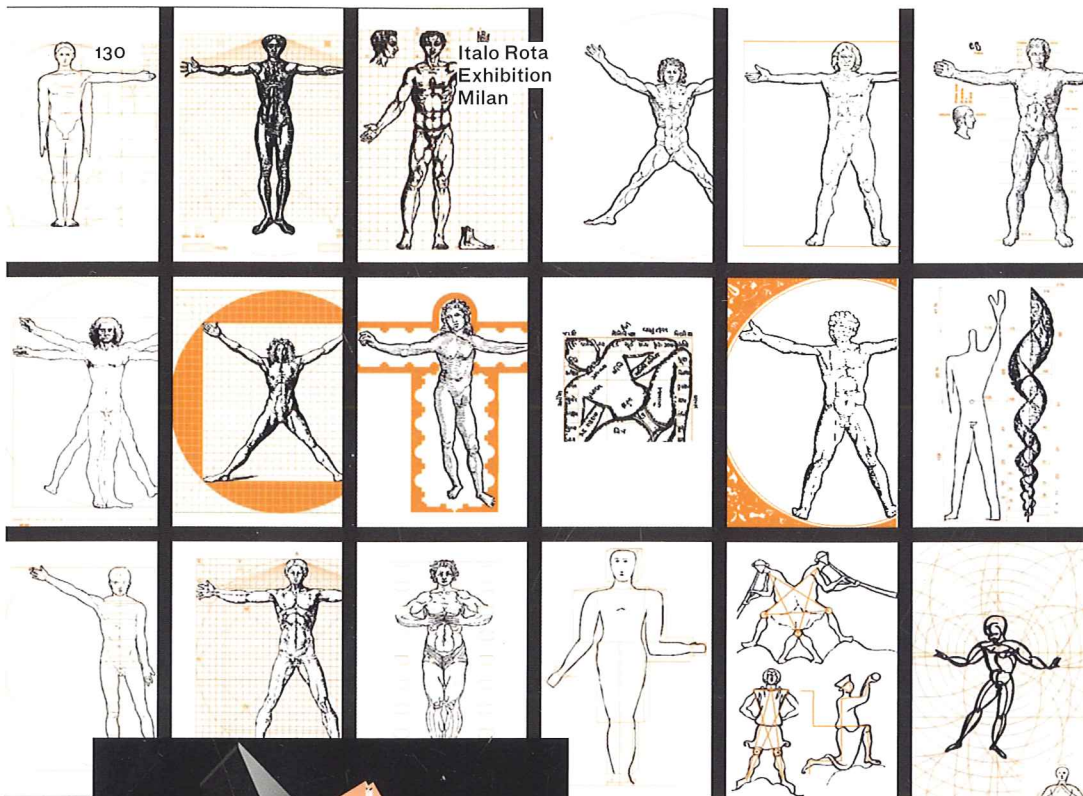
Visitors to the Triennale in Milan were encouraged to delve into the meaning of architecture at an exhibition entitled Good N.E.W.S. The letters in the title – selected by joint curators Italo Rota, the architect who designed the exhibition, and Professor Fulvio Irace – stand for ‘North’, ‘East’, ‘West’ and ‘South’, the cardinal points of the compass. Shunning didacticism, the show gathered the four directions into an evocative whole. According to Rota and Irace, the exhibition was ‘like a workshop for a large audience invited to approach architecture in some of its complexity’. Visitors discovered ‘what it means to found a town, build a house, design a monument’.

Dream, fiction and reality – past and present – were presented as facets of a personal compilation. Uniting these elements, and always central to the story, was the human presence, as architecture is made *by* people *for* people. The tone of the exhibition was set at the entrance with the words ‘Images Talk’, a statement attributed to German art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929). Throughout the space, interrelated objects, drawings and texts offered clues and suggestions without giving clear explanations. To create the desired ambience, Rota and Irace opted for soft lighting and soothing music.

The exhibition comprised eight galleries devoted to eight subjects: Proportions, Shadows, Origins, Objects, Domes, Cities, Allegories and Portraits. As presented here, the adventure of architecture started with the dimensions of the human body and with ancient and modern measurements based on the body. Each gallery

contained a central structure that expressed the theme in terms of architecture. Arranged around this structure was a motley collection of theme-related odds and ends that shed a ray of light on the architectural significance of this particular topic. Priceless items on display included original drawings by Michelangelo; the sacred Hydra bronze vase discovered at Paestum; and paintings by Picasso, Mondrian and De Chirico.

Covering the walls were over 1500 drawings, renderings, photographs and other images, which together lent a strongly graphic character to the exhibition. Quotes from famously quotable figures – Andy Warhol supposedly said that ‘Rome is the example of what happens when the monuments of a town last too long’ – complemented the image-heavy galleries. Not easy to understand at first glance and not always intelligible, the images displayed were labelled on the back with welcome information. On leaving the exhibition, visitors passed an illuminated work of art by Maurizio Nannucci. White neon tubes spelling out the query ‘And What About the Truth?’ reminded them to question whether or not the concept of truth can be applied to architecture. Should we even look for truth in architecture? In any case, the show left its audience feeling as if they had gleaned a factual foundation for pondering the meaning of our built world.



Italo Rota  
Exhibition  
Milan

Frame #53  
2006



## PROPORTIONS GALLERY

This *wunderkammer* brimmed with admirable exhibits, including coffee pots by Alessi, items collected by Renaissance princes and a motorcycle. Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* and Le Corbusier's *Modular Man* appeared beside a perfect reproduction of a 16th-century *studiolo* (small studio) containing precious reference works by Serlio, Viollet-le-Duc and many more. Old drawing instruments used by architects transported visitors to a distant past, while Picasso's *Femme Nue* (1907), a preparatory drawing for *Les Femmes d'Alger*, swept them forward to the birth of modernism. Trying to understand the meaning of each and every piece or the relations between them was a futile pursuit. The secret here was to make one's own connections while sinking ever deeper into the setting.

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## SHADOWS GALLERY

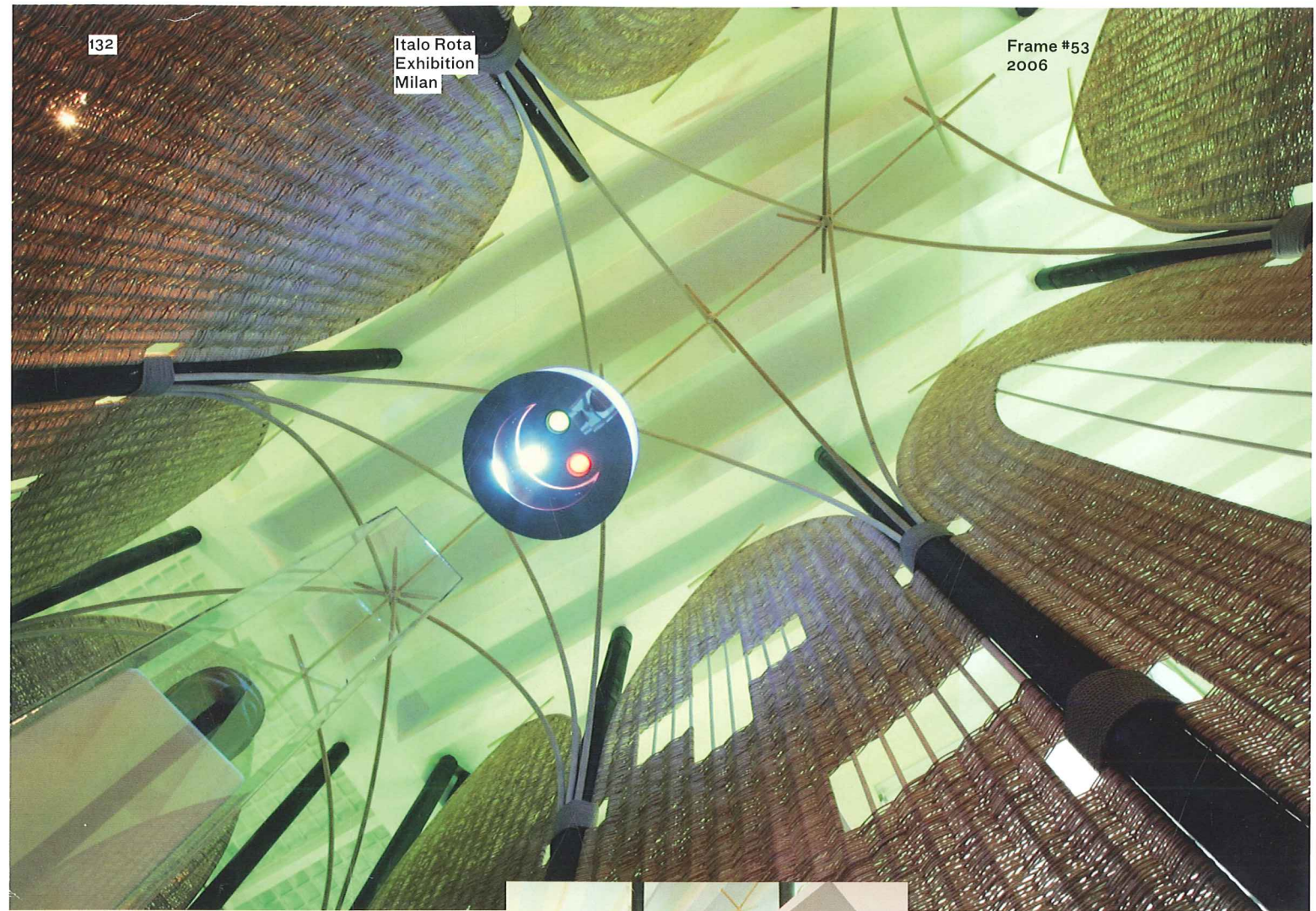
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Shadows, here defined as 'evident disorder', was the name given to a gallery with a focus on opposites. A grey interior – quiet and relaxing – held nothing but beautiful sculptures: *Lines and Strengths of a Bottle* (1912) by Umberto Boccioni and *Sculpture N.24* (1935) by Fausto Melotti. The brightly colourful and dynamic space surrounding the sculptures contained fragments of often unrecognizable shapes, both natural and artificial, which represented the beauty of the unknown. Some things were closer than they appeared to be. Projections produced with measuring instruments used by Michelangelo (*modano*) and the 'mendingraph' (a tool

designed by Mendini) helped capture the imaginations of all who entered the central area, where a world of black and white shadows had been drawn on the walls.

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## ORIGINS GALLERY

Do architectural forms emerge from man's observation of the natural world or from necessities dictated by human behaviour and evolution, which give rise to new discoveries and the birth of social behaviours? At the centre of the Origins Gallery, a steel-framed, tentlike enclosure recalled the primitive hut, the first work of architecture. Inside, models in clay and stone depicted primitive dwellings suggesting that the origins of architecture lie in man's primary need for shelter. Arches impressively defined a second installation, which was made from rope and string. Pervading the space was the sense of a lost golden age, a time of purity gone forever. In one translation, the philosopher Seneca is quoted as having said: 'Philosophy taught men to build houses: before they wandered here and there, sheltering in caves or in trees hollows. . . . Believe me, those times, in which neither architects nor decorators existed, were truly happy.'

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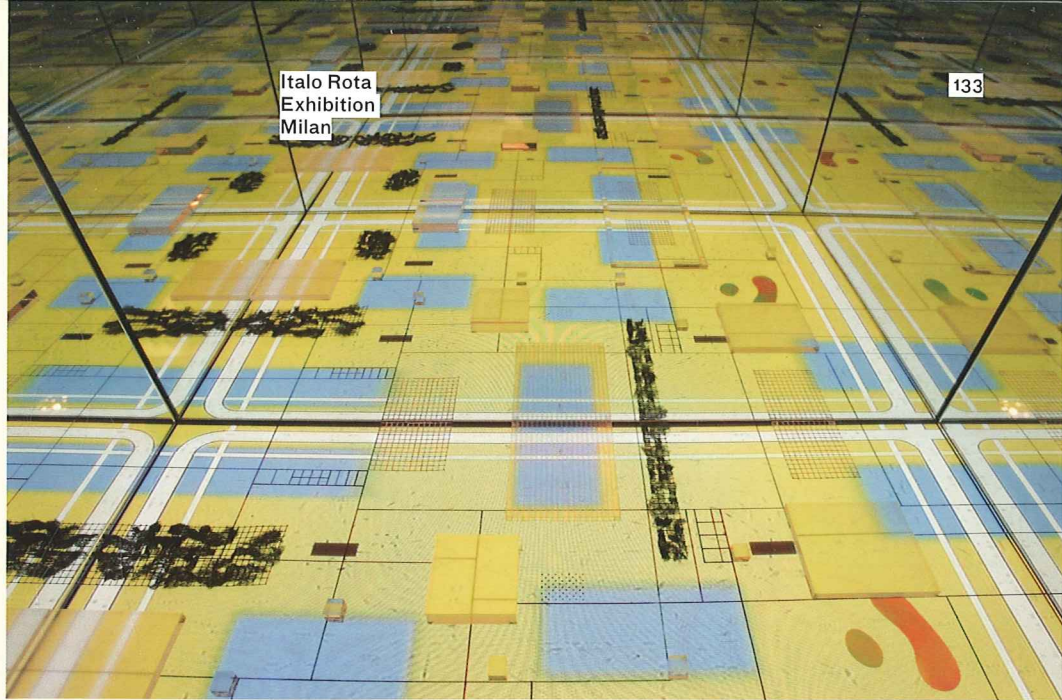



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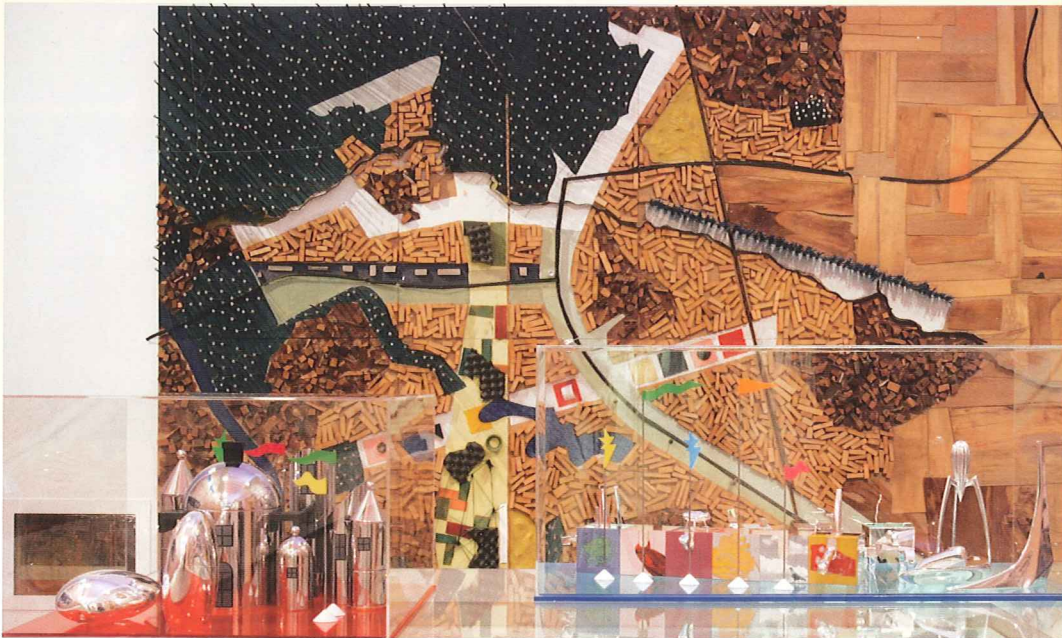
## OBJECTS GALLERY

Never-ending movement – genuine perpetual motion - creates a worryingly metaphorical vision of nonsensical life in the modern metropolis: these words describe *Enzyme Territory*, an amazing project by Andrea Branzi that appeared in the Objects Gallery. Mirrored on all sides, Branzi's big box featured a video on the floor alive with hundreds of 'enzymes' running in all directions. Soothing music by Philip Glass failed to reduce the tension in the room. Another installation, *City Scrapes* by Alessandro Mendini, displayed models of cities made out of stainless-steel products and prototypes, mostly coffee-pots, which have been described as 'micro-architecture for the table'. Huge black-and-white architectural photos by Gabriele Basilico and a large plastic model of OMA's Melun-Sénart were also displayed here, in a space where humankind seemed to have abandoned architecture.



## CITIES GALLERY

A topic so big it deserves an exhibition all its own filled the Cities Gallery. To condense the meaning of urban life into something that would fit into one room, Rota and Irace chose from a wide range of possibilities, both old and new, in compiling their personal selection of ways to represent and illustrate the city. By juxtaposing art and artefacts from very different places and times, they attempted to answer several questions. What induced man to make pictures of cities? Is it possible to represent, at the same time, *urbs* and *civitas*? Among the creative minds presented here were Gian Battista Piranesi, Umberto Boccioni and Vittorio Gregotti.





## DOMES GALLERY

‘Rome is the example of what happens when the monuments of a town last too long’

Andy Warhol

Metaphor of the sky and symbol of universal harmony, the dome holds a pre-eminent place in the constellation of architectural elements. Occupying the centre of this gallery was a large dome made of rectangular wooden panels



nailed together. Peering through gaps between the panels, visitors saw models of domed structures, ancient and modern. Hemispherical,

elliptical, parabolic, articulated, smooth, corrugated – domes cover religious and secular public spaces the world over. The vaulted structure has been tested extensively over the centuries, with the use of building techniques that have pushed the rotation of an arc around a vertical axis to the utmost limits of materials such as stone, brick, concrete, wood and steel. Among the projects in this gallery were the 16th-century church of Santa Maria della Consolazione at Todi and the Museo Universale by Alessandro Mendini – examples of the kind of architecture that tells big stories.

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# PORTRAITS GALLERY

## ‘Images talk’

Aby Warburg

ArchiEgo, a series of posters displayed from floor to ceiling, featured portraits of architects from the past. Visitors were invited to take a seat and guess the names of these designers – difficult even for the architects among them. (The names appeared on paper labels attached to the back of each poster.) Voices emanating from an adjacent video wall broadcast interviews with celebrated contemporary architects such as Renzo Piano, Jean Nouvel and Zaha Hadid. ‘Super-Gehry’ was even shown starring in an episode of *The Simpsons*. Many voices and different languages formed a chaotic mix from which visitors could distinguish only fragments, phrases and the odd word. An unbroken flow of images and sounds linked architects down through the centuries with the world of today.

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## ALLEGORIES GALLERY

Here, 21<sup>st</sup>-century virtual reality rubbed shoulders with Canaletto's famed *Capriccio con Architetture Palladiane* (1740), a painting that depicts an ideal town that does not exist but has the look of authenticity. Equally nonexistent are game cities by eBoy, although London landmarks like Big Ben and London Bridge make these animated urban spaces seem rather familiar. An interactive installation, *Visit Photoshop City: Infinite Space, Infinite Terror*, invited the visitor to create a personal ideal city. The result was two ways of approaching and perceiving architecture from two epochs separated by three centuries. A partially chronological sequence moved from allegorical representations of 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>- century architecture, passed through the moment of *capricci*, showed representations of architectural ideals in ancient and medieval times (neoclassical and neogothic), and ended at the breaking point that marked the avant-garde movements of the 1900s.

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