

1948 // NATIONAL PROFILE ITALY

By Katalin Takács

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN 1948

In the mid-20th century, landscape architecture in Italy was developing as a distinct profession, influenced by broader European and global trends. In 1948, the country – including the profession of landscape architecture – was in a period of recovery and transformation, influenced by the aftermath of World War II. This marked the beginning of Italy's reconstruction era, both physically and culturally, as the country sought to rebuild its cities, infrastructure, and national identity. This period was also a formative era for landscape architecture, characterized by the establishment of key organizations, the development of educational programmes, and significant contributions from influential practitioners. These efforts laid the groundwork for the growth and recognition of landscape architecture as a vital and distinct profession.

Several organizations and institutions played pivotal roles in the promotion, education, and professionalization of landscape architecture during this period. One of these key organizations, the Italian Association of Landscape Architecture (Associazione Italiana di Architettura del Paesaggio - AIAPP), was established in 1950, two years after the first IFLA congress, on the initiative of Pietro Porcinai and Elena Luzzato. The association was founded to represent landscape architects in Italy and to promote the discipline within the broader field of architecture and urban planning. Since its foundation AIAPP has been instrumental in organising conferences, workshops, and exhibitions, fostering a community of professionals dedicated to advancing landscape architecture. The association nowadays also works on establishing professional standards and advocating for the recognition of landscape architecture as a vigorous component of environmental planning and design.

NOTABLE INDIVIDUALS

Pietro Porcinai (1910-1986) was an Italian landscape architect renowned for his influential contributions to modern landscape design. Born on March 8, 1910 in Florence, Italy, Porcinai's passion for nature and aesthetics drove him to pursue studies in agronomy and horticulture at Regia Scuola Agraria Media agricultural college. His early career unfolded against the backdrop of post-World War II Europe, with travels and works in Germany and Belgium that brought him into contact with contemporary European design and its notable practitioners (Russel Page, Geoffrey Jellicoe, René Pechère and Gerda Gollwitzer). Returning to his homeland he quickly gained recognition for his innovative approach to landscape architecture, in contrast with the Italian tradition of formal garden design. All his works seamlessly blended traditional Italian garden design principles with modernist sensibilities, creating landscapes that were both timeless and contemporary. His designs emphasized harmony between human intervention and natural elements, showcasing a deep understanding of ecological principles. This ecological consciousness was ahead of its time, earning him acclaim



as a pioneer in sustainable landscape architecture.

In 1938, Porcinai established a studio in Florence, where he collaborated with architects, artists, and horticulturists. His projects ranged from private gardens to public spaces including public parks, industrial districts and factories, hotels and tourist centres, motorways and agricultural areas. The hundreds of projects implemented in Italy and abroad, each reflected his commitment to the integration of architecture and nature. Notable examples of his work include: the garden and swimming pool of Villa I Collazzi, Florence (1939-1940) or Villa Ottolenghi, Alessandria (1955-1962); Garden with swimming pool and greenhouse at Villa La Terrazza, Florence (1951-1958); the consultancy work for the UNESCO project (relocation of the temples of Abu Simbel, Egypt -1963-1971); the Brennero Motorway: Verona (1965-1975); the garden and swimming pool of Hotel des Bains at Venice, Lido (1968-1971); the rehabilitation and restoration of the gardens of Villa Rondinelli accompanied by the creation of a modern greenhouse-studios in San Domenico di Fiesole (1960-1986).

Professor Porcinai's impact extended beyond his design practice. He became a respected educator, teaching at the Faculty of Architecture in Florence and influencing a generation of landscape architects. His teachings emphasised the importance of site-specific designs, ecological sustainability, and a deep appreciation for the cultural and historical context of each project. Since the 1930s, he has pursued lifelong efforts for the recognition of garden and landscape design as a distinct, modern profession and has published in the most prestigious Italian and international architectural, horticultural and design journals, including *Futurismo*, *Domus*, *Rivista*

della regia Società Toscana d'Orticoltura, *Il Giardino Fiorito*, *Flora*, *Gardens and Gardening*, *Garten und Landschaft*, *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, etc. In May 1967 his book *Giardini d'occidente e d'oriente*, written with Attilio Mordini, was published by Fratelli Fabbri Editori. His influence has reached far beyond Italy, shaping the European discourse on landscape architecture, as being in 1948 one of the 17 founder members of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) and promoting in 1971 the creation of ICOMOS-IFLA International Committee for Historic Gardens at the First International Symposium on the protection and restoration of historic gardens in Fontainebleau. One of the most influential landscape architects in Italy at the time, he contributed significantly to the field through his designs and advocacy.

Porcinai's work is characterized by his respect for the natural landscape, historical-cultural context, his innovative use of plant materials and sensitivity to regional characteristics in project development. He certainly played a crucial role in bringing modernist principles to Italian landscape architecture.