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Honors theses

Conjugating the past in the future. The Glasgow School of Art extension project

by Matteo Malatesta

Tutor: Pierre Alain Croset

Co-tutor: Michela Rosso

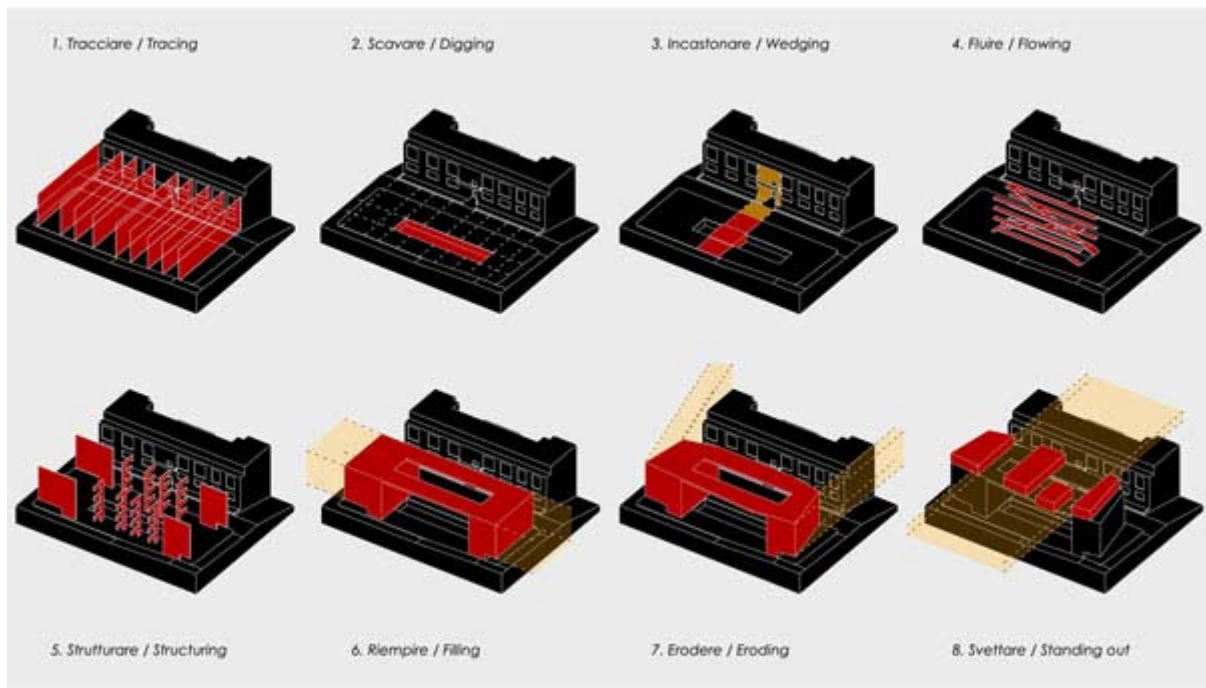
The thesis project theme is about the Glasgow School of Art extension design. This institution is known by the pioneer historical building drawn by Charles Rennie Mackintosh since 1897 to 1909. Nowadays, the academic global context imposes an innovative boost on the School to face this world-wide competition.

Thus, a design contest for a new university building, opposite to the scottish architect's masterpiece, has been announced. This challenge, in my opinion, is extremely charming both for an essential understanding of the historical building and for a personal reinterpretation able to be respectful of the past and, at the same time, coherent with the Zeitgeist.

Deep connection with the pre-existing school, harmoniousness with the scotch urban environment, will to investigate contemporary architecture against any revival are main themes and starting points to this project. Starting with the finnish architect Eliel Saarinen's quotations about work of art ideas, the Glasgow School of Art has been read as the Mackintosh' self-portrait.

Therefore, after a careful analysis of his life and his professional career and a research about the birth and growth of his foremost architectural work, some key-words representing his main influences and basic concepts has been defined.

Proceeding with three-dimensional models to manage the volumetric development of the new building, a concept based on eight steps has been created.



Concept

Tracing generates strength lines and is related to historical building' structural articulation and his north front rhythm. *Digging* has its origin in the historical anglo-saxon university quadrangle scheme, here used passing by an urban scale to an architectural one. *Wedging* permits the introduction of the partly below ground level lecture theatre, visually connected with the central part of the historical School. The action of *flowing* is the basic operation to develop the vertical and horizontal circulation system which is shaped by flights of stairs and footbridges. *Structuring* gives a framework to the new school using a beam-wall system to create a structural serialism along two axis, the north-south one linked to the Mackintosh building and the west-east one related to the remaining context. With the *filling* step the two opposite axis have been physically treated in a different way, the central portion is characterized by transparency, the other way round, the two lateral wings are distinguished by opacity. *Eroding* consists of a sort of edge planing, both at the street level to increase public space and at the upper ones to get a better view over Glasgow. At last, *standing out* means putting four different volumes over the roof to create and to enliven an observation platform which also defines the new school outline.



Southern view toward new school

The planning approach has been somehow “evocative” of the Mackintosh aesthetics cultural sources, not of the historical School shapes, hence, the evolution of the project goes along key themes, such as contrast. This is shown, for example, by the relationship between the dark hall and the wide top-lit central court, between the open-ended nature of the access and the sharp outline of the whole building, between the quadrangle seen as social space and the patio garden representing quietness, between dark slate and bright opal glass.

Furthermore, other significant topics can be listed; the matter of the nature has been developed by the use of rough materials and by planting trees, the Japanese aesthetics’ one has been represented in the glazed façade with the shoji suggestion and the subject of balanced asymmetry has been the main rule to compose each element in space.

This project has been accomplished by all of these factors to lead to a building in balance between site spirit and time one.



Central court interior view

For further information, e-mail:
Matteo Malatesta: malatestamatteo@yahoo.it