

POLYTECHNIC OF TORINO  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE  
Degree in Architecture  
*Honors theses*

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**The Civic Theatre of Susa and the work of Otto Maraini**

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The "discovery" of Otto Maraini took place one year ago, while working on a degree thesis that focused on the restoration of the Civic theatre of Susa, one among the first of his architectural works. The peculiarity of Otto Maraini's career and personality encouraged us to study his work as an architect and artist.

Otto Maraini lived mostly in Torino from 1904 to 1970 and worked as an architect, painter, engraver, ceramist and sculptor, in almost complete anonymity. His architectural works are remembered by many, but are only very rarely mentioned in articles and publications.

Our research has enabled us to divide his productions in two main periods.

The first, from about 1930 to the outset of the World War, is characterised by a certain interest in the avant-garde movement, by the use of the "new" modern materials, by the purist forms in his designs of furniture and architecture. These are the year of the adventure in Lenci ceramics, of the Zucca cafe in the new Via Roma, and of a series of experiences in the Novecento style, with a wide use of crystal, plate glass and bas-relief; the choice of themes, materials, and interaction between techniques can be traced to a style, that was common to all contemporary forms of applied arts. His frequentation of the lively intellectual circles in Turin before the war, however ( the same circles known to the Pogatschnig brothers, Ottorino Aloisio, Nicola Diulgheroff, and especially Carlo Mollino), can't erase the fact that most of his works are markedly linked to the taste and style of the high-bourgeoisie of the start of the century, to which he himself belonged.



Zucca cafe in Torino

The second major period in the work goes from the end of the war to the end of the Fifties, and is characterised by a great freedom of expression accompanied by an opulent and even decadent mood.

His employers are mostly rich piedmontese bourgeois and industrialists, that ask for renovations of villas and luxury apartments. In these works ( such as his villas near Biella, or Villa Marentino in Torino), Maraini makes a constant use of his personal repertoire of decorative subjects and materials: bas-reliefs, fountains with mother-of-pearl incrustations, and especially mosaic. Mosaics, initially used in a traditional way, become gradually more characterised both by the ironical distortion of figures and subjects and by the imaginative use of the "scale" technique, such as at Plinio's Restaurant in Torino.



kitchen or the Plinio's Restaurant

In the effort to redraw a complete image of the architect, also his parallel production in painting and sculpture was considered.

His paintings can be divided in two groups: those tied to the passion for the romantic landscape painting, with landscapes and marinas, and those that seem to be inspired by Bruegel, with crowded and visionary scenes ( in " The Music", every detail is described with an almost cartoon-like graphical precision, the same that had enabled him, in his youth, to illustrate children's books).

His works as a sculptor is at first concentrated on a bas-reliefs ( especially during the thirties), and later on full relief sculptures; almost always these works are created for and set in his architecture.

Maraini liked to define himself, other than architect, painter, sculptor, also a poet. This last activity is testified by the "Novelle impossibili" ( a collections of poem and tales) and by his only published book, "Messico", that is a product of his stay in central America during the Fifties, and contains also the only written evidence of his architectural thought.



"the Music"