

communiqué /press release

For Immediate Release**CCA presents *Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History*
First Full-Scale Exhibition in North America Reassesses Modern Master**

In the Main Galleries

Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

26 May to 31 October 1999

Montréal, 26 May 1999 — For the first time, museumgoers in North America will have a chance to see in depth the work of a legendary, idiosyncratic modern master — and architects and critics will be able to begin the long-delayed, comprehensive reassessment of his contribution — when the CCA presents ***Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History*** on view from 26 May through 31 October 1999.

The exhibition addresses a central and extraordinarily timely aspect of the work of Carlo Scarpa: its distinctive approach to contending with the layers of history that mark the fabric of a city and a building. Two decades after his death, the Venetian architect and designer — while widely admired — remains a figure of controversy. Many of today's architects, especially of the younger generation, revere Scarpa's work. They draw upon his commitment to drawing, artisanship, and local building traditions in their own work and are inspired by his revival of a sense of personal expression within the public vehicle of architecture. For others, Scarpa's work continues to provoke discomfort — even alarm — because of its challenging use of the colouristic, ornamental traditions of Venetian architecture, its obsessive attention to detail, and its highly-wrought sense of theatre.

In addressing Scarpa's ability to weave new work into — and often out of — the disparate fragments of the old, ***Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History*** moves beyond the focus on artisanry, detail, and material. It begins to unravel the complex and sometimes enigmatic symbolic programs that mark Scarpa's work and reveals how he uses the irrational — anxiety and uncertainty — to open up architecture's expressive possibilities. These characteristics bring Scarpa surprisingly close to the theoretical agenda of the current avant-garde. The exhibition is based upon unprecedented access to the Scarpa family archive and to the repositories of Scarpa's work at museums in Verona,

Venice, and Palermo. It features 150 of Scarpa's own extraordinary drawings, which serve as a window onto his mental process and a stunning demonstration of his design virtuosity. Added to these are a major body of new photography, commissioned by the CCA from the Italian photographer Guido Guidi, which reveals through carefully developed sequences of colour images — made in different seasons and at different times of day — how Scarpa's projects unfold in time, light, and space. Four specially fabricated study models detail critical passages in key projects. The models are the work of the studio of George Ranalli, Professor of Architectural Design at Yale University, who also designed the installation. An introductory exhibition of bibliographic material locates Scarpa in the context of Italian architectural debate in the years following World War II. The exhibition has been organized for the CCA by guest curator Mildred Friedman.

The CCA is the exclusive North America venue for the exhibition **Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History**. The presentation at the CCA of the architectural work of Carlo Scarpa coincides with an exhibition of art glass designed by Scarpa, held at the Museum of Decorative Arts of Montréal from 27 May to 11 September 1999.

Organized in Venice by guest curator Marino Barovier, **Carlo Scarpa in Murano: Art Glass by an Architect (1926–1947)** brings together over 50 works which illustrate the different techniques Scarpa experimented with during the twenty years of his association with the famous glass studios on the Venetian island of Murano.

"Faced with the imperative of intervening in the historic fabric of Italian cities, Carlo Scarpa devised symbolic journeys through time and space: uncovering the various layers of a building's past, rediscovering the power of its strongest elements, transforming even its most banal accretions and returning the structure to a vital role in public life," notes Phyllis Lambert, Founding Director and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the CCA. "He employed contemporary means rather than a repetition of old forms; he accepted and incorporated the commonplace, the damaged, the accidental, as well as the monumental.

Guest curator Mildred Friedman argues that "Scarpa's focus on the specificities of place, and his revival of architecture's concern for narrative and symbol, engaged him in a subtle and sometimes subversive debate with the prevailing architectural concerns of the 1960s and 1970s. Many younger architects still draw critical ideas from his idiosyncratic practice. Yet the deeper significance of his architecture — its singular ability to accommodate the structures of the past — is often overlooked. Today, when many major cities in America, as well as in Europe, have vast sections that require extensive

adaptation in order to function, Scarpa's example provides lessons that are increasingly relevant."

Eight Masterworks, 1953–1981

Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History documents in great depth two crowning works of Scarpa's career: the restoration and reorganization of the 14th-century Castelvecchio in Verona (1956–73) as a municipal art museum and his construction of a private tomb – "a city of the dead" – for the Brion family near Treviso (1969–78). In the first of these, Scarpa embarked on an intriguing strategy of demolition, change, and modification, which allowed each layer of the Castelvecchio's history to come alive and take its place next to the others. Older elements of the building complex were provoked into conversation with wholly invented new forms, surfaces, textures, and motifs. For the Brion Tomb, Scarpa integrated all the concerns of the works that had preceded it. He established a new landscape within an old one, constructed a complex narrative out of startlingly fresh free-standing forms, and explored radical design and construction techniques to effect them.

Extensive material on other projects from Scarpa's mature years, 1953–78, show how his ideas for the Museo di Castelvecchio and Brion Tomb projects evolved. Two of these projects reworked or added to historic structures to accommodate carefully planned visual narratives, in which light, space, and structure came into dialogue with works of art. These are the transformation of the 15th-century Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo as an art museum (1953–54) and the addition of a gallery for plaster casts to the Antonio Canova Museum in Possagno (1955–57). A third transitional work, often overlooked, reflects the influence on Scarpa of Frank Lloyd Wright: a freestanding house in Udine for the lawyer Luciano Veritti (1955–61). This project introduced to a narrow urban site a sense of narrative through the new architectural and landscape forms that Scarpa conceived for it.

Other projects responded to denser, history-laden urban contexts into which Scarpa intervened in diverse ways. These were the design of a showroom for the Olivetti company on the Piazza San Marco in Venice (1957–58); the reorganization of the galleries and courtyard of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, a research library and art collection housed in a 16th-century palazzo in Venice (1961–63); and the layout of the main premises and annexes of the Banca Popolare di Verona (1973–81), completed after Scarpa's death under the supervision of Arrigo Rudi. The Banca's highly articulated facade, a provocative variant on classical models, aroused international controversy. Two comparative works from this period, also examined, are the design of the facade for the

Gavina Showroom in Bologna (1961–63) and the restoration of the Balboni house in Venice (1964–74).

“Each of Scarpa’s later projects seems to be invented *de novo*,” says Nicholas Olsberg, Chief Curator of the CCA. “Distinctively new forms and ideas develop to match each new situation, but certain key themes and motifs link them. Among these are the play of levels and the idea of bridging; the use of water and its play with light; the concept of semi-transparency through perforation, screen, and layer; the notion of composing with light and shadow and even with the void of the sky itself; an evolving fascination with circular forms; and a return to the sense of architecture as allegory, narrative, and journey. The projects chosen to represent Scarpa’s work show how these ideas ripen into the climactic achievements of Castelvechio and Brion.”

Putting the work into context, George Ranalli links Scarpa with one of his great American contemporaries: “By the late 1950s, two architects – Louis I. Kahn in the United States and Carlo Scarpa in Italy – had begun to distance themselves decisively from the functionalist aesthetic and machine technology of the modern movement. They commenced what was essentially an alternative discourse: establishing a dialogue with the history of architecture; returning to the idea of craft, construction method, and on-site invention as the ultimate creative acts in architecture; and moving into a new realm of thinking about interventions in the historic fabric. This recombination of history, craft, and invention, applied to the conditions of the latter half of the twentieth century, constituted a major contribution to the discipline of architecture. For North Americans, Scarpa’s reinterpretation of the architectural vocabularies of Frank Lloyd Wright in an Italian context is also especially interesting.”

Carlo Scarpa: Life and Work

Born in Venice in 1906, Carlo Scarpa entered the fine arts academy there and pursued general courses in painting, sculpture, architecture, and design until 1922, when he chose the four-year architecture course as his specialization. For a number of years after 1926 he worked with his teacher, Guido Cirilli, and from 1931 on developed a wide-ranging practice of his own, renovating domestic and commercial interiors and redesigning the medieval Ca’ Foscari for the University of Venice. He designed art glass for the Venini company in Murano and from 1941 on worked regularly on the redesign and installation of exhibition spaces, in particular at the Venice Biennale and the Galleries of the Accademia.

Though unlicensed as an architect, Scarpa left Venini in 1947, broadening his practice with projects for banks, churches, tombs, and private houses, and developing his work in installation design. In 1953, he began work on the first major project of his mature years: the redesign of the Palazzo Abatellis in the old centre of Palermo as the National Gallery of Sicily, the project with which the CCA exhibition begins.

Carlo Scarpa died after an accident in 1978 while visiting Japan and is buried in the “garden of the dead” he designed for the Brion Tomb.

Major Catalogue to Accompany Exhibition

The CCA is publishing *Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History* a 256-page catalogue featuring 57 black-and-white illustrations, 90 colour reproductions of Scarpa’s drawings, and two photographic essays of 59 colour images by Guido Guidi of the Brion Tomb, the Palazzo Abatellis, the Canova Plaster Cast Gallery, and the Museo di Castelvecchio. The catalogue includes a biographical introduction on the evolution of Scarpa’s work by Nicholas Olsberg; discussions of eight mature projects by George Ranalli, with project notes by Jean-François Bédard; an essay by Guido Guidi on his approach to photographing Scarpa’s works; an analysis by Sergio Polano of Scarpa’s approach to museum design and display, focusing on the Palazzo Abatellis; a reconstruction by Alba Di Lieto of the stages of Scarpa’s work at the Museo di Castelvecchio; and an examination by Mildred Friedman of Scarpa’s influence today, based on interviews with contemporary architects. Co-published with The Monacelli Press, the catalogue will retail at the CCA Bookstore for \$59.95 and will be available at other fine bookstores.

Guided Tours, Film Screenings, Lectures, and Other Programs

A variety of public programs is being organized by the CCA in conjunction with **Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening with History**. Starting 5 June, group tours of the exhibition are available to the general public as well as to university and Cegep students. Presented in May and June in association with the Cinémathèque québécoise, a film series entitled *The Architecture of Venice on Film* illustrate how five great filmmakers drew upon the architecture of Venice as a powerful component of their work. Thursday evening lectures on the subject of Scarpa will be launched on 16 September with a talk by the historian and Scarpa scholar Francesco Dal Co, Editor-in-chief of *Casabella* and Head of the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. A one-day symposium on the impact of Carlo Scarpa’s work on North American architects is being organized by the University of

Toronto's Faculty of Architecture in collaboration with the CCA and will be held in Toronto on Saturday 18 September 1999.

Concluding Exhibition in the CCA's Italian Season

Carlo Scarpa, Architect: Intervening With History is the third and final show in the CCA's Italian Season, a series of three exhibitions and accompanying public programs that was launched in January 1999 and celebrates contemporary Italy, its architecture, its architects, and its photographers. The other two exhibitions are **Photography and Transformations of the Contemporary City: Venezia-Marghera** (9 December 1998 - 25 April 1999) and **32 Italian Photographers: A Tribute to Phyllis Lambert** (21 April - 26 September 1999). The major body of new photography commissioned for this exhibition by the CCA from the Italian artist Guido Guidi is a part of the Mois de la Photo à Montréal.

The CCA is grateful to the Parnassus Foundation (Courtesy of Raphael and Jane Bernstein) for generous support of the photographic commission.

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Information:

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