



Proceedings of the 2nd MoMoWo International Conference- Workshop

Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, France Stele
Institute of Art History, 3–5 October 2016, Ljubljana

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**Proceedings of the 2nd MoMoWo International Conference-Workshop
Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, France Stele Institute
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Collected by Helena Seražin, Caterina Franchini and Emilia Garda

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Egle Renata Trincanato: Unbuilt

Francesco Maggio

“Being an architect always led her to unbalance the role of technician with the artist’s soul. Her work as historian was inseparable from that of relentless experimenter”¹.

Urban planner, designer, artist, restorer, Egle Renata Trincanato affected the Venice physiognomy due to her multifaceted figure. She was born in Rome in 1910, and moved with her family to Venice in 1926 where she attended the High School of Art². Soon her artistic skills will demonstrate superior than those of other colleagues, so that the sculptor Adolfo Wildt³, noting her sculptural talent in plaster models that she made, asked her to become her pupil in Milan. However the young student preferred to continue her studies at the High School of Art. After that, she attended the college and graduated in 1938 at the Regio Istituto Superiore di Architettura in Venice.

The relationship between Egle Renata Trincanato and the city of Venice became indissoluble. She put her professionalism serving her city, but it is also true that Venice taught and transmitted a lot to her, as it was the constant object of her studies. These ones were based on the understanding of the environment that according to Renata means being able to “feel the face of the city” and “interpret the feeling with which people acted

inserting themselves into the natural environment”⁴. Her famous book *Venezia minore* is an example of it. It was published in 1948 in Milan, focused on non-monumental architecture of Venice, which tries to give a new interpretation of the architectural heritage of Campiello and Dorsoduro districts, dividing it into ‘types’ through a completely original inductive method of analysis⁵.

Her expertise served the city throughout her career as she was a militant for the protection and conservation of Venetian buildings.

During an architectural period of about fifty years, a clear vision dominated her work: her message for Venice to collect and persevere⁶. Renata Trincanato tackled each of her works with a clear idea of Architecture, conceived as environmental order, and never referred only to the construction element⁷. The ‘Venetian’ architect intended the environment as the intense interweaving of cultural expressions, economic dynamics, social balances and political intentions. As historian, she felt the need to look back not betraying the past with the project, in order to highlight the quality of civilization told.

In 1960, Egle Trincanato is strenuously engaged in the battle for the protection of Venice against the building speculation:

¹ Maddalena Scimemi, *Riscrivere l’architettura: Venezia minore e il volto delle città*, in Scimemi M., Tonicello A. (ed.), *Egle Renata Trincanato 1910-1998*, Venezia 2008, p.19.

² Emiliano Balistreri, *Egle Renata Trincanato: regesto delle opere*, Mestre 2007.

³ Adolfo Wildt, sculptor, Professor of Plastica at the Accademia di Brera of Milan.

⁴ Maddalena Scimemi, *Riscrivere l’architettura...*, cit., p.19.

⁵ ibidem, p.12.

⁶ Lion Angela, *Egle Renata Trincanato 1910-1998: verso una rappresentazione organica di Venezia e dell’architettura minore*, Venezia, 2000, p.61.

⁷ Paolo Torsello, *Il restauro attraverso la narrazione*, in Scimemi M., Tonicello A. (ed.), *Egle Renata Trincanato...*, cit., p. 27.

published articles and research carried out within the University Institute of Architecture add to conferences during which she dealt with the situation of Venice problems.

Dates back to 1982, the award of the Pietro Torta prize for her studies about the lagoon city, perhaps the most important awards related to Venice and its context. On this occasion Egle Trincanato said: «the study of the city's monuments was the deepest reason of my cultural life, I have been drawn in a special way by the diffuse urban fabric, non-aulic architecture, as a little expressive element of the city's image»⁸.

In her autograph production we can identify some recurring elements like the study of history, the importance of the concept of environment, the use of photography as a first survey tool on the built environment, the approach of a general register to systematically collect the whole knowledge about built Venice, and the detailed analysis of the architectural elements. Drawing, sketching, and graphic annotation are the main tool of her way of surveying: she used the drawing as an extension of the word, never abandoning new research scenarios⁹.

The Trincanato's method was based on the drawing technique as an essential guide in the direct experience of the building's forms¹⁰. The survey operation at sight is essentially linked with the drawing, which is able to clarify and explicate something better than words. Indeed,

⁸ Cfr. Egle Renata Trincanato, *Il restauro della struttura edilizia più diffusa e la sua importanza nel futuro di Venezia*, in AA. VV. Ateneo Veneto - anno 1982- XX n.8, I e II semestre, vol n. 20, Venezia, 1982.

⁹ Paolo Torsello, *Il restauro attraverso la narrazione*, in Scimemi M., Tonicello A. (ed.), *Egle Renata Trincanato...*, cit., p. 26.

¹⁰ Maddalena Scimemi, *Riscrivere l'architettura...*cit., p. 11.

through the technique of drawing she carried out a study on the urban planning and the building environment of Venice in the book *Venezia minore*, published in 1948 in Milan, through which she added a new method on non-monumental architecture investigation. This inductive method, based on the combination of historical-critical and descriptive sheets with several freehand drawings, will form the analytical basis and *modus operandi*, which she will adopt in future. In the book *Venezia minore* you can identify the codification of repeated and in series elements, while the architectural heritage is standardized into 'types'. The building is divided into two categories: the former lofty and bourgeois, referred to the palaces, the latter utilitarian and popular one¹¹. The alternation of text and drawings, photographs, paintings to describe particular items or technology solutions characterizes the Trincanato's work. The photographic document is therefore a useful tool for in-depth investigation of reality, to study the relationship between built and natural environment. However, this must be accompanied by graphic representations, because you have to take into account that the photograph of the buildings, in confined spaces such as the Venetian ones, is not able to return the accuracy of architecture because the image is distorted by the optics of the camera. The hand drawing with its precision and perfection completes the photographic documentation, which assumes a value of authenticity's demonstration of what has been represented by hand¹². The method of investigation on the built environment, adopted by Trincanato, proofs that the recurrent element in her artistic and

¹¹ *ibidem*

¹² Maria Ida Biggi, *L'archivio fotografico*, in Scimemi M., Tonicello A. (ed.), *Egle Renata Trincanato...*, cit., p. 93.

architectural research is the drawing. Most of all this is a practical way to analyze the visual reality, perceive lights, colors, masses and shadows, to include the prospective view, stereometry, composition and architectural representation inserted in the urban context. In other words, the drawing becomes a «speculative exercise of image decomposition to understand each constitutive object of the reproduced object “two-dimensionally” on paper»¹³. Drawing is the only device of knowledge of things¹⁴, especially when we talk about unbuilt projects. If architecture has to be understood as a set of signs, then drawing is a particular type of language through which express a theory, a concept, and in particular the perception of the designer¹⁵. So representative tools, including the simple line, become words making tangible an idea, create in our minds, as well as on paper, a project that probably will never be built. Through the line, you can understand with satisfactory accuracy the structure of bodies, because it is what connects and separates with a resolving power¹⁶. The purpose of this study is to highlight some of the Egle Renata Trincanato projects through the operation of the critical re-drawing and graphic interpretation encoding the architectural process at every stage, before the final project. All this with the certainty that «the statement that no design event can fully be reconstructed, perhaps even by the protagonist, even more so is based on the certainty that it is impossible to know

down the line a building»¹⁷. The critical re-drawing is a complex work because it means deeply understand a building even though this is a plural knowledge, because there are many factors that contribute to the conception of the project to which the reader should go back. For example, the complexity inherent to this knowledge comes from mutual influences developed between who analyzes the object and the object itself. The identification of a building, involves a preliminary “empathizing with it”, because the object is able to activate independently a composite network of relations. The analyzing subject knows that the design thinking led by the architect is so complex to make impossible its returning through a telling¹⁸. The designer expresses the concept of drawing, referring to the representation, cataloging and imagination during the architectural process, giving rise to the observation of the real environment (cataloging) and then to the extraction of those concrete objects, useful for the project to be realized, to the application of *ratiocinatio*¹⁹ (imagination), to express a shift intention, and representation, to make manifest the design intention. Representation, in fact, is an indispensable tool of knowledge that need of the logos and theory, reasoning, and things intended in their empirical meaning. Therefore, the representation is a conceptual and formal structure (*Vorstellung*) not a simple graphic drawing

¹³ Emiliano Balistreri, cit.

¹⁴ Cfr. Franco Purini, *Un disegno plurale*, in FIRENZEARCHITETTURA, anno VII, nn. 1-2, 2003.

¹⁵ Cfr. James S. Ackerman, *Convenzioni e retorica nel disegno architettonico*, in Architettura e disegno. *La rappresentazione da Vitruvio a Gehry*, Milano 2003.

¹⁶ *ibidem*

¹⁷ Franco Purini, *La conoscenza degli edifici*, in “Disegno” n. 8, Istituto di Rappresentazione della Facoltà di Architettura di Genova, Genova 1984, pp. 161-164.

¹⁸ *ibidem*

¹⁹ When Vitruvio talks about *ratiocinatio* in *De Architettura* he refers to the theory and meaning of “reasoned calculation”.

an end in itself (Darstellung)²⁰. Going back to this conceptual and formal structure which gave rise to the project, one must set up a parallel process to that conducted by the designer because who analyzes a work has to advance some arguments, think about the why of structural or formal choices and, sometimes, find answers through a comparison with other projects carried out by the designer, in order to produce a critical redrawing, resulting in a second “representation” of the object and not with an “end to itself graphic drawing”. This representation will have an important task: to communicate new knowledge.

The drawing, conceived in this sense, is the survey tool of an unbuilt and little-known project of Egle Renata Trincanato. In the spring of 1947, the ‘Venetian’ architect took part in the competition, organized by the Municipality of Venice, for a series of houses to be built in the north and south estuary of the Venetian lagoon, obtaining the first and second prize, both *ex aequo*, with projects for residences proposals in Burano and Pellestrina. In these two unbuilt works, we can trace some important methodological aspects about the approach to the project by the architect who will make Venice the city subject of her later studies. According to Egle Trincanato the relation with history is necessary, because the project must highlight the qualities of told civilization as she hoped an integration between conservation and innovation. Her interest focuses on the drawing of a schematic layout, with the repetition of some building models on which to make many formal variations. The attention put on non-monumental architecture and the analytic approach highlighted in the book *Venezia minore* published in 1948, can be

²⁰ Vittorio Ugo, *L’architettura e i suoi doppi*, in Ugo V., *Fondamenti della rappresentazione architettonica*, Bologna 1994.

found in house projects designed for Burano and Pellestrina, where we find the intention of making clear the rigorous functionality, pure rationalism and witty spatial organization, typical of the city. «In no other city like Venice, the unique urban topography has so strongly influenced close architectural features, especially the minor one, more connected to the environment, maintaining in part the original medieval appearance. [...] Of course, the changes in taste and the overlapping of the new buildings on the oldest ones transformed some primitive features»²¹. For this very strong relationship between the Venetian territory and the forms of built environment, was essential, for the architect, to face to with the Venetian construction in order to design several houses in the lagoon city. The study carried out is therefore strictly scientific, analytical and technically controlled, intended to catch those formative criteria of the system of spaces unchanged over the centuries²². In the project, Egle offers various building, from “A” to “E” types in Burano and from “F” to “H” types in Pellestrina. These ones do not refer to the general concept of ‘type’ applicable everywhere because Renata banishes from old architecture any typological discourse, typical of a predetermined reality. She is convinced that the type is pre-eminently in the architectural mentality and that it must be linked to the context and the site in which insists. Thinking that architecture, like Venice, may arise in any other city is a nonsense: every place has its own unique building of structural elements, an architectural taste

²¹ Egle Renata Trincanato, *Venezia minore*, Venezia 1988, p. 35.

²² Cfr. Angela Lion, *Egle Renata Trincanato 1910-1998: verso una rappresentazione organica di Venezia e dell’architettura minore*, Venezia 2000, p. 67.

formed for centuries and by society that lives there. Some stylistic and formal solutions are sometimes the result of a constriction with respect to the conformation of the site²³.

The study previously carried out by Trincanato on the typical features of the minor Venetian architecture affects a lot the design of these houses and looks like the son of Venetian culture while obeying a modern language. The common features between the project studied and the 'venetian house' are not few. Indeed, we can catch important similarities observing the houses in calle Cappello, going back to the seventeenth century, and type "D" of the house designed for Burano: «houses are the result of the coupling of two buildings, each comprising two overlapping apartments [...] This planimetric layout, symmetrically repeated with respect to a central cross-cut wall, presents well-structured and balance. Important elements are also the powerful redundancy fireplaces and staircase that allows access to two different apartments, sharing the staircase»²⁴.

The planimetric layout of the project in Burano consists in specular buildings in relation to a central cross-cut wall, like the "H" type designed for Pellestrina, and responds to the typical Venetian residential type of twin house. However, the "D", "E" and "B" types are row houses, the "A" type is a single two-family house, the "C" type is a multi-family house, the "H", "F" and "G" types are multi-family houses. The distribution of the inner spaces, common element of the houses designed, meets an organization that

responds to the typical layout of the "Venetian house", with separate living and sleeping area: the central space, where you access by the entrance, is formed by the dining area, lighted by a window, while the side and rear rooms are independent²⁵. You can also argue that these houses are a modern version of what that Giorgio Gianighian²⁶ called "the complex Venetian house"²⁷ and in particular, it can be compared with Le case dei Cappello, in Calle del Magazen, dating back to 1547. Furthermore, Egle Renata Trincanato drew these houses in her book Venezia Minore, published a year later than the competition. This is due to her study on the Venetian urban fabric carried out over many years before the publication of the book and then, in 1947, she was very familiar with the Venetian housing types and used these knowledge for the preparation of the two projects. Among the Venetian houses and those ones designed for Burano and Pellestrina you can recognize many common features: the privacy of the entrances, two overlapping floors, the solution of stair that allows each family its own entrance and private staircase. After all this is a traditionally Venetian way of living, with a well-equipped ground floor as service room (entrance, warehouses), the first and second floors, where you find the

²⁵ *ibidem*

²⁶ Giorgio Gianighian, *La casa veneziana complessa del rinascimento: un'invenzione contro il consumo di territorio*, in http://www.persee.fr/web/ouvrages/home/prescript/article/efr_0000-0000_1989_act_122_1_4610.

²⁷ With regard to the "complex" Venetian house Giorgio Gianighian means the residential building formed as a result of structural changes over the centuries, that already in the early sixteenth century begins to make its appearance. It is characterized by elements such as the privacy of the entrances, the presence of the inner cistern, the overlap of two noble and interdependent floors, and the use of stairs at the Leonardesque way.

²³ *ibidem*

²⁴ Umberto Franzi, *Studio di restauro, risanamento, conservazione e utilizzazioni di edifici monumentali e di complessi edilizi residenziali a Venezia*, in <http://www.comune.pv.it/museicivici/pdf/atti/10%20Franzi.pdf>

residential functions of the family (kitchen and bedroom), and finally the loft²⁸. However, compared to Le case dei Cappello you may notice some differences because Egle also pursues a modern language, not totally imitating the Renaissance Venetian house, but extracting the essential characteristics such as, for example, the overlapping floors in the project are not interdependent like in the Cappello family's houses.

However, we can obtain a greater number of similarities comparing the "A" type with one of the two Case in Campo della Pescheria, in the Castello district: the distanced rhythm of the single-lancet windows, the compositional unity of the whole characterized by the balanced spacing windows, the symmetrical layout of shops at the ground floor and the dormer which rises on the central axis of the two buildings with gable roof²⁹.

You can make a comparison also between the "D" type and Case a schiera in campiello e fondamenta Tron, in the Dorsoduro district³⁰ where the common features are: the presence of powerful chimneys that form a magnificent architectural motif, enhanced by smallness of square windows, the distribution in rhythmic groups of doors and windows, the great simplicity of the stair allocating different apartments. This is a clue of less individualism³¹.

However, in order to explain the issue we need to briefly deal with the Venetian architecture.

The buildings of the XII and XIII centuries show, in the minor Venetian topography, a lively participation at the general harmony

of the whole, both for the ingenious distribution of their planimetric layouts, and for the sauciness and the picturesque taste with which they are composed in the facades determining the balance of volumes. Very elementary layouts form this construction responding to the basic needs of housing, in accordance with the local use of living, and, as far as possible, it refers to "major" architecture in order to imitate its characteristics³². Indeed, it is obvious the intention of tracing, according to a pare-down issue, the porch forms of the great stately palace with the emptying of masonry masses at the ground floor made of discontinuous elements on beamed pillars, as with different taste, inserting the shops, reiterated characteristic even after the Gothic period. You can catch this use in the "A" type of the project for Burano.

However, in minor buildings, built between the XII and XIII centuries, the main characters are: a taste of opposing large breaks, with a wall, and groupings of close spaces in facades, from which probably the triptych composition of the facades derives, with the absence of the loggia on the upper floors and a monumental court.

During the Gothic period, the stately palace is characterized by a portico in the ground floor and in the upper one corresponding to a multi-arched window. While the minor architecture finalizes its types: it uses a more closed pattern, with one or two doors on the canal and the calle, designed in a wide variety of ways, or adopts an open layout with discontinuous beamed elements, inserting shops and the entrance rooms to dwellings, alternately arranged.

During the Renaissance period, in minor architecture, where there are no shops, the part relating to the basement is full, with sparse high windows and some

²⁸ Ibidem

²⁹ Egle Renata Trincanato, *Venezia minore*, cit.

³⁰ Cited houses in Castello and Dorsoduro, going back to the '700 and belong to the "minor" building of Venice.

³¹ Egle Renata Trincanato, *Venezia minore*, cit., pp. 375-376

³² *op.cit.*, p. 51.

doors, echoing compositional schemes of gothic buildings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Some of these schemes have two doors, with a different-sized few decorated volume in the middle, which corresponds to an interesting planimetric organism of twin house symmetrically disposed relative to a central axis. This is also in the competition project of the "D", "B", "E" and "H" types. In Post-Renaissance architecture, the triptych motif is often used. It is a characteristic of Venetian architecture since the Gothic period, which organically corresponds to planimetric configuration of the house with central living room overlooking the elevation through a multi-mullioned window. The two side spaces overlooking with two single-lancet windows, one at the edge of the building and the other at the multi-mullioned window. This arrangement allows to obtain in the lateral spaces a large part of wall between two windows, to lay out a piece of furniture and in many cases the chimney appears in the outside and marks even more clearly the cadence of the openings. The layout just described has been adopted, revisited, in "A" and "H" types where the multi-mullioned window turns into a central group of four windows. In lofty architecture, the chimneys appear in the main facade while in minor architecture these elements are used as a picturesque resource in the spatial composition of its facade. The layouts of this typical way of composing with fireplaces and triptych elements are of extraordinary variety³³.

Usually the 'head' zones, located at the end, are full, Egle Renata Trincanato repeats this in the "F" type, and only occasionally they are linked to the main facade with an angular two-mullioned window. The other windows are arranged with wider and shorter spacings,

alternating with respect to the chimneys, which take a rhythmic preeminent value, often marking the 'head' of the building. This can be seen in the "D", "B", and "E" types.

This scheme and other ones very similar, that in the palaces are in secondary elevations, are taken and developed with endless variations at the main facade of minor houses, where the double fireplace or the central one assume a prominent value in determining the rhythm of spacings.

You can consider very interesting the rear elevations of those buildings whose plan, for the prolongation of one or two rows of chambers adjacent to the living room over the rear wall of this, assumes an "L" or "U" shape. The buildings in this case are composed with vigorous spatial effects of masses: the projecting wings, often very narrow and high, are generally drilled in the front 'head' by a pair of windows that allow a solid volume at the center. The built-in part, corresponding to the living room, is usually open by a continuous arched fenestration. Such differences, created by the dwelling's internal needs, make more picturesque the setting of volumes. The "D" type resumes this particular feature of the facade.

Egle Renata Trincanato, experiencing contamination between rural architecture building uses and modern architectural features, realizes a project that consists of two poles of research oscillation; combining modernity and tradition, she tries to develop a new language based on the knowledge of the past.

The minor architecture elements of Venice have some specific features. We have already talked about the presence of the shop at the ground floor and fireplaces. However the Venetian window has a wide variety of forms, from the simple single-lancet window, to the oldest round arched windows, to the two-mullioned and three-

³³ ibidem

mullioned windows, to the lancet Gothic window, to the Renaissance rounded window. Egle revisits the window shape for her project, as this is more than any other element, a result of the style of the historical period in which it was produced, so she adopts a rectangular shape, more related to the language of the modern movement. Often entrance doors, at the ground floor are beamed shaped.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, in place of the balconies was used a parapet, in correspondence of the wall or slightly projecting, feature that in the competition project is taken for the "H", "B" and "E" type.

Other elements, like the chimneys, contributing to the picturesque minor buildings, are the dormers and roof terraces. The dormer window is very common in the minor architecture and can be of two types: the former, very simple, is formed by a small elevation covered by a lean-to roof and front consisting by a rectangular window, the latter, more complex and generally larger is that one covered by a gable roof developing on the facade as a pediment. This feature is clearly manifested in the "A" type.

However, the roof terrace, which is accessed by a small skylight, is a unique wooden terrace on the roofs; it consists in four, six, eight brick pillars, according to the size of the building, on which stands a wooden structure of pedestals and horizontal beams with a rectangular or round cross section³⁴. This element are also in the "C" type

Almost all Venetian palaces and many stately houses owned, in the past, a portion of garden, arranged as a vegetable garden in the minor tone houses; Egle takes up again in the project an outdoor space dedicated to this latter function.

³⁴ Egle Renata Trincanato, *Venezia minore*, cit., p. 93.

In the minor architecture since the sixteenth century a type of cross-ramps stair spreads. It is said "in the Leonardesque way", which reaches two apartments with two independent entrances. The apartments are located at the opposite sides of the same plane or at different planes. This type of stair is widely used until the seventeenth century even in the poorer building, for space saving, which creates an independence that allows various entrances. The house of "C" type adopts this characteristic type of stair.

With the "Concorso per case nell'estuario nord e sud della laguna di Venezia" (Competition for houses in the north and south estuary of the Venice lagoon) Trincanato also demonstrates a strong interest not only for the building form, but also for the environment on which it insists. The project includes, in addition to construction of housing, a reorganization of the surrounding environment.

The real goal of this work of Trincanato is to strive towards a planning able to throw the preconditions for a project planning, not an end in itself, but able to communicate with the changes that are going to happen in the years ahead. So, the project is characterized by significant purpose as well rich in comparison with urban issues³⁵.

The project is woven in the territory for which it was designed, and if it had been carried out, it would seem that in that place it has always existed, both in Burano and in Pellestrina, because its roots lie in the Venetian architectural culture.

³⁵ Angela Lion, *Egle Renata Trincanato ...*, cit.

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