

collezioneMaramotti: via Fratelli Cervi 66, Reggio Emilia, Italy

Via Fratelli Cervi 66 was the site of the first purpose built building for the newly established Max Mara fashion house. Constructed in 1958 to accommodate both administration and manufacturing for the company, the building was designed by Pastorini & Salvarani architects as a fully adaptable, open plan structure in reinforced concrete with a non load bearing perimeter enclosure of over 60% glazing allowing for a largely daylight and naturally ventilated interior. Future flexibility was maximised through a repeating modular structure and the relegation of servant spaces, including toilets and stairs, to the outside of the floorplate, housed in an independent tower in brick. An adjacent building, housing staff facilities, the company canteen and mechanical plant, further clarified the main building's potential for future development. This radical approach to the design of industrial accommodation was informed by the developing architecture of contemporaries such as Franco Albini, Enea Manfredini and by the structural engineering of Pierluigi Nervi and Aldo Favini mirroring the revolution of Max Mara's development of the prêt à porter fashion industry. It set the foundations for the architecture of their future buildings. The original building at Via Fratelli Cervi 66 was extended over the following ten years in three phases by Cooperativi Architetti e Ingegneri di Reggio Emilia, and, while stylistically different from the original building, these maintained the ruthless functionality of the original, completing the building in 1969.

In 2002, the company had outgrown its accommodation and moved to a new purpose built headquarters on the outskirts of Reggio Emilia, leaving the original, iconic, building vacant, and it was decided to locate the contemporary art collection of Max Mara's founder, Achille Maramotti, at Via Fratelli Cervi 66.

A clear and respectful approach has been taken to the reuse of the building for the new gallery, clearing away many of the accretions that had built up through its life while retaining the rawness of the basic construction and accepting the original design intent that it was a structure intended for adapted use and ongoing change. Beyond this stripping back and repair of the structure, three new interventions define the reinvention of the building as a setting for the collection.

Firstly, and key to the changing perception of the building in its context, has been the reorientation of the building's principal access away from Via Fratelli Cervi (Via Emilia), and a retreat from its dominating commercial presence that was marked not only by its architecture and main entrance but also (originally) by the signage that stood proudly on its roofline. A new 'cut', parallel to via Fratelli Cervi, has been made through the building along the boundary between the original building and its extension, extending out into the site through new entrances on the east and west elevations of the building. This new route through the building exposes the differing architectures of the original building and its extensions, and places the arriving visitor at the centre of the new gallery providing access to the ground floor functions including reception, two temporary exhibition spaces, library, offices and archives. A site-specific piece along a 14m long wall forms a pivot on the ground floor around which all the other activities are located.

Two new volumes have been created within the fabric of the building through a rooftop extension and internal demolition, extending daylight into the heart of the floor plan.

Located above the main entrance, and at the centre of the permanent collection, is a three storey high space in which 'Caspar David Friedrich', a key piece of the collection by Claudio Parmiggiani is suspended. This is visited and then returned to again several times as one tours the building, forming a luminous point of reference in the visit. This space, together with a new two storey high space at second floor that accommodates larger works, are illuminated by three new east-west linear rooflights concealed above the primary concrete structure between the rooms. These provide daylight via internal reflectors to clerestories, thereby maintaining contact with the external environment through the changing nature of the daylight being reflected into the spaces below.

The first and second floors are devoted to the permanent collection, consisting mostly of large scale two dimensional works with a lesser number of three dimensional pieces / installations. This required a large area of hanging surface, something that the open plan building lacked, as well as an area of free space for three dimensional works, a distinction that was accommodated by the different architectures of the original building and its extensions. Where the original, Pastorini Salvarani, building has been stripped back to its expressive structure in fair faced concrete to provide open plan exhibition space for three dimensional pieces, the (larger) extension has been divided internally to provide a sequence of 'rooms' and walls within which the greater part of the collection is hung. These spaces are composed of simple partitions within the building's fabric which is expressed at the perimeter and at passages between spaces where the structural frame is left exposed. The galleries are largely daylit by the perimeter glazing, with solar gain and light levels controlled by the refurbished external solar shading, originally installed in the 1970s.

The existing building's construction and design provided the direction for the design of the temperature and humidity control systems that the new use, as galleries, demanded. The environmental performance of the building envelope has been upgraded with new glazing and perimeter insulation, allowing a radiant heating and cooling system within a shallow ceiling to provide temperature control with treated primary air controlling humidity. The reinstatement of the external solar shading limits solar gain while the mass of the exposed building's concrete structure and floor provide thermal inertia, assisting with dampening of any fluctuations in temperature and allowing the radiant panels to maintain a constant temperature.

The approach taken for the landscape setting for the gallery has been one of controlled re-establishment of the site with local landscape and planting typologies and species, thereby making evident the change in character and notions of new use of the site as a whole and diversifying habitat value. Existing trees on the site have been reinforced with additional trees and understory species from the poplar woodland palette while new oak woodland has been introduced enveloping the building and creating a sense of discovery on the approach to the building. The original service yard, between the main building and the canteen, has been repaved as a new courtyard serving the new gallery, and planted with creeping aromatic groundcovers and brownfield stonecrops that reinforce the idea of re-colonisation of the site by native planting and the understanding of the site as a post industrial landscape.

