

*Casa Del Fascio (House of Fascism)*

by: Robert Little

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World Cultures

Royal Ontario Museum

*[Animated ROM logo appears with sound sting]*

*[Robert Little gestures in front of the drawing Casa Del Fascio (House of Fascism) by Giuseppe Terragni; full-screen view of drawing]*

One of the great objects in the exhibition, not necessarily this object itself, but the ideas that it embodies, is this project drawing for the House of Fascism, designed by Giuseppe Terragni in the early 1930s. And it's kind of interesting because of all the issues that it deals with. Mussolini, unlike people like Hitler and other fascist and totalitarian dictators had a kind of equivocating attitude towards accepting modernism, and many architects in Italy at this particular point in time felt that they were kind of behind the times in terms of, in comparison to what was going on, shall we say, in Germany and France. And so, Terragni designed this building, which is supposed to be the local headquarters of the fascist party in Cuomo, which is the northern part of Italy, embodying very, sort of, what has now become, archetypal modernist elements. *[Close-up scan of drawing]* The building is, sort of, very simple white cubic sort of structure. It has no cornice or anything like that – very simple shapes that are related to the types of buildings that were being evolved by Le Corbusier in France and architects associated with the Bauhaus in Germany, which is where the most modern architectural ideas were emanating from. *[Robert Little gesturing in front of the drawing]* And a lot of architects in Italy wanted to absorb this into the part and parcel of the Italian architectural style at the time, in order to make Italy appear to be modern and on the world stage, as it were. But the thing about anything modern, that was going to be modern, in Italy, as far as Mussolini was concerned, is that it had to speak to its Italian origins and traditions. *[Close-up scan on windows in the architectural drawing]* And so, while this building is sort of a lovely simple sort of rectangle – it's full of windows on the outside, and it's built around an anterior courtyard which is also full of windows, and the openness in the windows is suppose to be analogous, or to be symbolic of the openness of the fascist regime, or the so-called openness of the fascist regime – the building has many Italian precedence. *[Robert Little gesturing in front of the drawing]* The fact that it is a building that is built around a courtyard, has references that go back to the classical buildings of the Italian Renaissance, for example, buildings by Bramante and others, and even the arrangement of these windows on this sort of... *[Close-up of drawing]* an arrangement of solids and voids as it were on this wall and the more open aspects of this part of the wall over here, has references to the kind of country *barchessa* or barn-cum-dwellings that you would find dotting the Italian countryside. *[Robert Little gesturing in front of the drawing, pointing to the balconies and around the other side of the building]* And so, notwithstanding its modernity, it has all of the requisite inherently Italian references. And it's, because of, it synthesizes all of these aspects, it's really considered one of the great monuments of Italian architecture. And Mussolini, when he would have come to Cuomo, would have probably given a speech from one of the balconies, either the balcony here or more probably over around the other side of this building, where he would have spoken out onto a multitude of people in front of the square, juxtaposed to the much earlier building, the duomo, or the cathedral. And in so doing, in a way, was kind of

appropriating onto himself as a dictator, the kind of papal discourses that the Pope would have given from St. Peter's cathedral in Rome. So, he was kind of appropriating that onto his own role as the dictator. So, it's a building that is kind of interesting for many reasons, and it had a lot of importance as far as Mussolini is concerned. After the war, of course, and with the defeat of the fascist government, the building is still revered as a great work of architecture, but it's now known as the House of the People rather than the House of Fascism. *[Close-up of drawing]* But it became kind of an important sort of paradigm for other architects, and it was seminally important for the acceptance of modernism in Italy at this particular time.

*[Video ends with animated ROM logo and sound sting]*