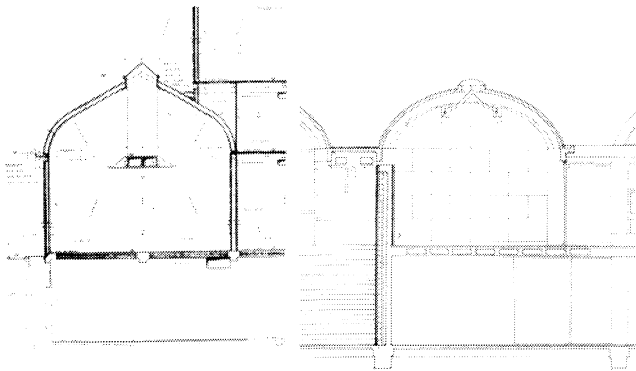


Suspending Modernity: Franco Albini & Louis Kahn

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Section through interior vaults
Albini's New Pinacoteca project

Section through interior vaults
Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum

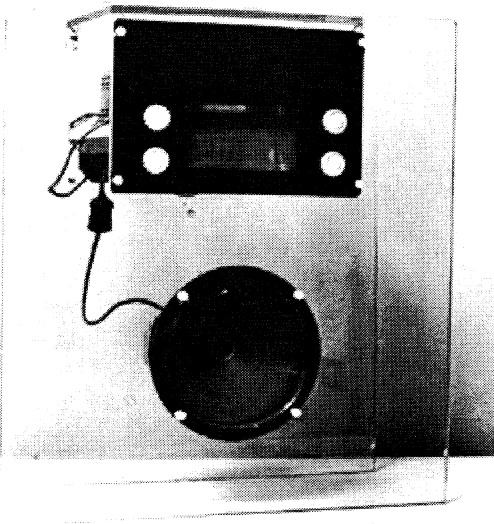
Early post-war architecture allegedly contributed little to the manifestoes or canons of avant-garde modern architecture. During the late 1940s and 1950s, some significant modern experiments by great individual talents were built with idiosyncratic forms for international audiences, but with the exception of the Smithsons, Team X and Italy's MSA, there were few place-based schools or shared ideas for new architecture.¹ Upheaval of positivist utopian visions had just begun, with criticisms of tendencies to obfuscate history and technology's ubiquitous signs. Nation building was paramount, while city building was dominated by infrastructure and grand narratives that took precedence over cultural consciousness, social spaces, and specificities of place. Almost simultaneously, Louis Kahn practicing architecture in Philadelphia while teaching at Yale, and Franco Albini, designing in Milan while teaching in Venice, began to make quiet breakthroughs with sublime alternatives to international style dictates.

Comparisons between Albini and Kahn allow us to place the Italian architect in an international milieu and encourage

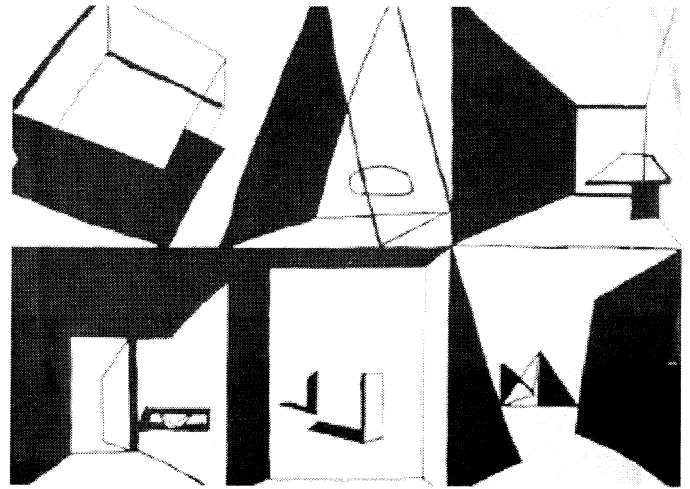
revision of Albini's role beyond nationalist boundaries. Because he appears to share similar values and formal tendencies with Louis Kahn, who has been recognized outside the United States as one of the most important architects of the later half of the century, I believe that Albini re-emerges in a broader context as a paragon with a unique perception of the needs and tendencies of his time, most apparent in his realized projects for buildings, urban plans (Milan and Reggio Emilia) and even furniture. Therein a fresh *Zeitgeist* appears.

In 1955, when Franco Albini spoke to the MSA in Milan (*Il Movimento di Studi per l'Architettura*) promoting continuity of tradition in a debate with fellow architects, students, and art critics, Louis Kahn was working far away on the Jewish Community Center Bathhouse in Trenton, New Jersey.² Kahn's strong structural volumes for the series of outdoor pavilions based on a Greek cross plan demonstrated his first use of the architectural hierarchy of 'served' and 'servant' spaces. Kahn considered this project to be a turning point in his career, and wrote years later in his sketchbook, "If the world discovered me after I designed the Richards towers buildings, I discovered myself after designing that little concrete-block bathhouse in Trenton."³ As his work evolved and the scale of his public projects grew, Kahn redefined modern monumentality, privileging mass along transparency and diminishing the presence of the open plan within the overall building organization. Kahn had spent part of a year on fellowship at the American Academy in Rome in 1951 where he encountered ancient Roman masonry construction and the endurance and grandeur of primary geometric forms. His drawings from that period showed a fresh and willful abstraction of ancient artifacts and vibrant public spaces with whimsical interpretations in colors inspired by the Mediterranean sun. Kahn could always recognize the essence of timeless form.

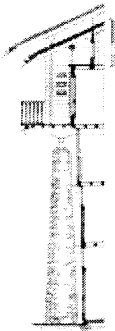
Kahn's progressive redefinition of modernism provokes one to imagine his possible reaction had he attended the Milan MSA debates on that day in June. How would he have responded to



Albini's 1938 transparent radio



Kahn sketches: studies for a mural



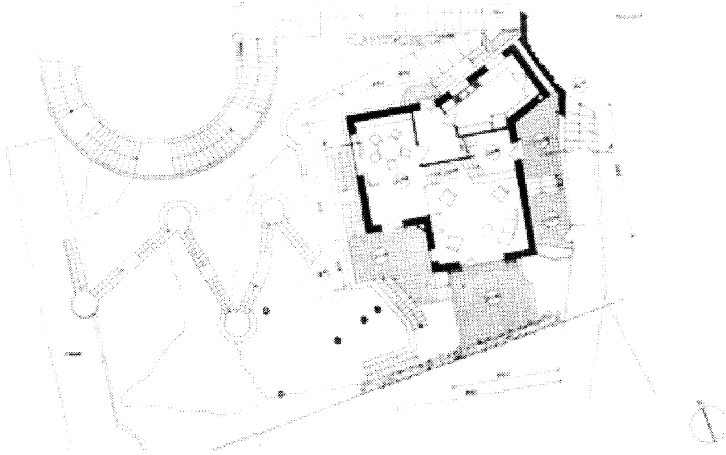
Franco Albini 1949 Pirovano youth hostel, Cervinia

Albini's call for tradition's reconsideration? Kahn was just four years older than Albini, then age fifty, and like the Italian Rationalist, he had practiced architecture since his early twenties. Leading the debates, Albini posited that knowledge of tradition was a critical and forward-looking stance. He contradicted the illusive ideologies of both International Style modernism and Futurism. Futurism, which had proposed the total erasure of history, had run its course without producing any buildings. Albini had been educated in a culture seasoned by radical ideas and actions. As a young architect, he had criticized the naivety of the movement's exuberance for change based on simplistic, short-sighted values as articulated by Marinetti and Boccioni, primary authors of Futurist manifestoes.⁴ Albini had published Giuseppe Pagano's documentation of Italian vernacular construction in *Costruzioni Casabella* in 1946.⁵ He had also practiced architecture during Fascism. He saw history not as singular events or physical sites constrained by the past, but as a plurality of ideas, some of which required

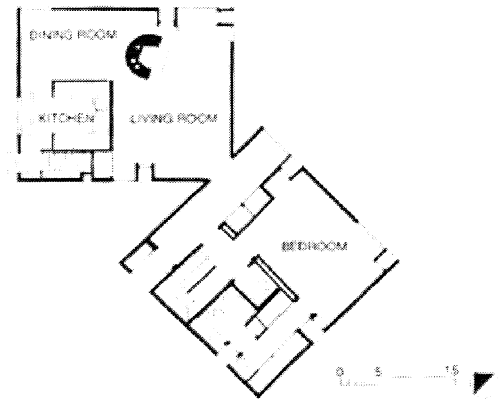
confrontation while others deserved revitalized renewal. Only a culturally sophisticated and discriminating consciousness could decide between the two. Albini had built the neo-alpine Pirovano youth hostel at Cervinia six years earlier and had embedded modern museums in baroque palazzi in Genoa. His awareness heightened through these experiments, he addressed his colleagues in Milan identifying the critical role of tradition in modern architecture. He began as follows:

"The history of mankind is not the history of nature in which everything that can happen happens. It is brought about through the repeated conscious acts of human beings who forever alter the course of its flow. The continuum of events is not in itself tradition. It becomes tradition when it enters human consciousness. Tradition does not inhabit the works, objects, or activities of men just like that. It becomes tradition when people in the present become aware of it and can recognize it in these works and activities. . . . tradition takes on the force of a law that is accepted by everyone. It is thus a collective value consciously accepted and respected. . . . Tradition as discipline is a barrier to capricious license, the vagaries of fashion, and the harmful errors of mediocrity."⁶

Albini's reflection on the role tradition played in contemporary architecture echoed the tenor of the Rationalist project, which defended 'logic and order' while situating new tendencies within continuities of shared culture. Kahn, too, had distinguished between natural history and progressive architecture, which he defined as the product of human thought and construction.⁷ Fully accustomed to taking public action, Kahn possessed a discriminating eye. He had invested his energies in studies of ancient forms to assess those traditions that persisted in western consciousness. He grew to realize that the American



Albini's Villa Minorini 1955-62



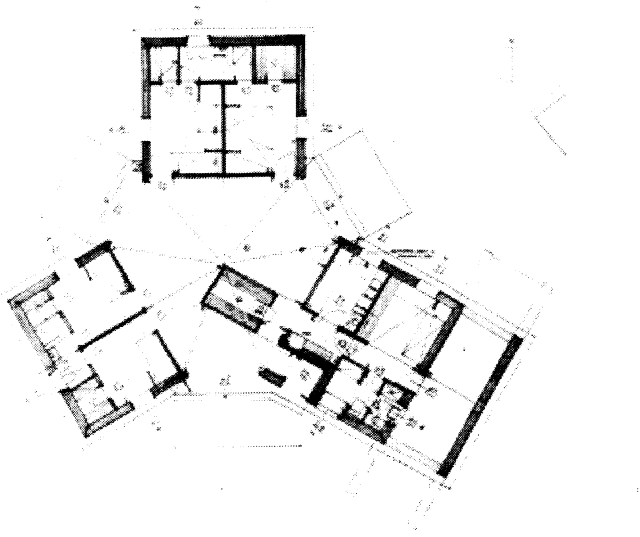
Kahn's Fisher House 1960-67

modern movement had overlooked valuable signs from the past when oppositional departures by revolutionary figures were in fact aimed at challenging collective values on political or social grounds. Both men appear to have been socially cognizant and politically alert in the immediate post-war period, but restrained in their activist engagement.⁸

Albini has been recognized by Tafuri and other scholars as a talented designer known for the "technically faultless" refinement of his individual artifacts, including the Palazzos Bianco and Rosso and the Museum of the Treasures of San Lorenzo.⁹ Perhaps due to his taciturn personality and minimal writing, he has received less acclaim outside of Italy than those credited with reshaping design and discourse in postwar Italy (renowned cohorts include: E.N. Rogers, Ignazio Gardella, Ludovico Quaroni, Carlo Scarpa, and Aldo Rossi). Yet Albini emerged as an important leader in tradition's radical renewal, to which his built work attests. His high quality construction and evolving language throughout his Rationalist and Neo-Realist phases call attention to his personal experimentation and serious, yet poetic, intent. [TAB]Like Albini, Kahn seemed wholly sympathetic to the need during the 1940s and 1950s to reroute the course that ideological or minimalist modernism had taken. His desire to return phenomenal weight to the art of building and replace the monumentality that contemporary architecture had come to lack, a loss mourned by Giedion, led the American émigré to a discovery of new forms with roots in Western classical traditions. Kahn began a series of typological innovations that were informed not only by his travels but also by his early Beaux Arts training at the University of Philadelphia with Paul Cret. His earliest studies provided a foundation in the rigors and patterns of formal relationships prevalent in so much historic architecture, with particular attention to light, which he would shape with progressive care as he found his plastic medium in masonry. Kahn first learned to represent daylight in neoclassical rendering exercises. He later asserted that "a sun never knew how great it was until it struck the side of a building."¹⁰

Albini's preparation, on the other hand, succeeded the Rationalist manifesto influenced by a radicalism that had been eschewing historic symbols close to home for several decades. Working for Gio Ponti before beginning his own practice in 1931 offered Albini a pluralist sense of decorative style, rich with figuration, symbols, and a colorful palette, especially at the scale of the house and the domestic object. His early exposure to works by Mies van der Rohe in Barcelona and Le Corbusier in Paris helped him to know the best of modern abstraction produced during the 1920s before Italian nationalism and forced economic sanctions limited contact north of the Alps. However, Albini's greatest intellectual and formal influences came from his contacts with Edoardo Persico and Giuseppe Pagano, who aided in the development of his critical faculties beyond questions of style.¹¹ He used every design opportunity to evolve his own lyrical modern expression, specifically the lightweight construction evident in his early exhibition installations. Less a public speaker or theoretician than a conscientious technician, Albini's decisive responses to the architectural dialectics of the day were almost exclusively in built form.

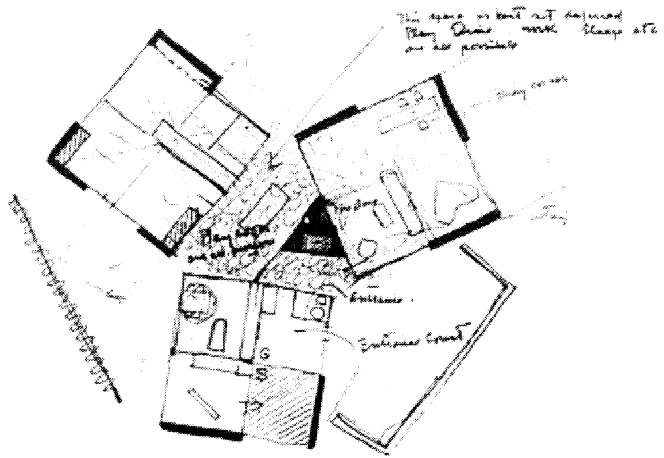
After Kahn's first European tour in 1928, during which he was exposed to the Bauhaus School in Germany, he returned to apprentice with his former teacher, Paul Cret.¹² The Great Depression of the 1930s soon left him unemployed. In 1932, the Museum of Modern Art "International Style" exhibition came to Philadelphia following its debut in New York. His connections with modernist George Howe and the short-lived *T-Square Club Journal of Philadelphia* gave Kahn opportunities to reflect on the spirit of the times and remain professionally engaged while forming his ideas. His personal perspective about the role that architecture must play in addressing social demands while exploiting new possibilities of changing technologies developed during the Depression. Kahn had become a modernist, as was apparent in the domestic designs and housing complexes he produced during the 1930s and 40s. His sense of social responsibility guided his studies of *siedlungen* (German settlement houses), urban planning, designs for worker's



Albini's *Villa Allemandi at Punta Ala* 1959-61

collective residences with his partners, Stonorov and Kastner (Mackley Houses), and government-sponsored housing contracts in Philadelphia.

Albini, too, had designed government-sponsored housing in the thirties in and around Milan, often with Renato Camus and Giuseppe Palanti, but for a different political structure. The trio produced the Fabio Filzi Housing quarter (1936-38), the most noteworthy among Albini's pre-war era residential projects, which was published by Pagano in 1939 in an article entitled "an Oasis of Order." New Deal politics and the programs of FDR may have been more inspiring to Kahn than the social engineering and Milanese rebuilding campaigns of Mussolini were to young Albini.¹³ Kahn began his career as an urbanist heading the drafting room for the Philadelphia Planning Commission¹⁴, and developed a passion for craft, materiality, and knowledge of construction only in later years. In contrast, Albini established his revered 'magical abstraction' by composing the part that became the whole, constantly experimenting with modern materials and technologies. He embraced opportunities to experiment with ephemeral installations, while also addressing housing needs of the day. Giuseppe Samona' wrote that for Albini "every problem must present itself as a great problem, even if referring to small and modest things."¹⁵ In 1935 Kahn went to Washington D.C. to work for the US Housing Authority (originally Roosevelt's Resettlement Administration) and later was employed by the Philadelphia Housing Authority. As an expert on housing design, his role went beyond planning and executing efficient modern structures in viable neighborhoods. Kahn also found himself required to work as an activist for a national housing program in 1940 when Philadelphia's mayor opposed federally-funded social assistance based on a moralist argument.¹⁶

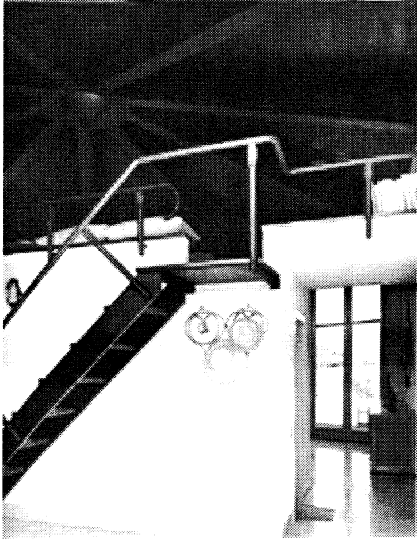


Kahn's project for the unrealized *Fruchter House* 1952-53

EXPERIMENTATION WITH THE DOMESTIC

Kahn's unrealized Fruchter House plan was designed at the same time that he was building the Yale Art Gallery, with its triangular stair within a cast concrete cylinder and tetrahedral concrete ceiling coffers. Anne Tyng described the New Haven museum as instrumental in Kahn's emerging interest in "the archetypal order of geometry."¹⁷ Although diagrammatic and incomplete, his residential proposal suggested three volumes, each square in plan, made similar by abstract planar enclosures around their sides, to shape an equilateral triangular space between them.¹⁸ The rough and incomplete sketch indicates a novel space with open corners that served to arrange different dwelling functions grouped into discrete areas around a nuclear center. To effectively serve as circulation in the Pennsylvania climate, the triangular room would probably have been closed to the natural elements. Handwriting on the sketch noted that the middle area was planned for "playroom and no purpose," while the indicator label added, "This space is best not defined. Play, dine, work, sleep, etc. are all possible." Additional functional activities were noted as "study corner," "entrance," and "entrance court." The off-center triangular mass was intended as the "fireplace," possibly with a 3-sided hearth.¹⁹ Kahn's expression for the simplified house was apparently modern, judging from the wall compositions and window placements, although it appeared at the time that his interest in geometry was beginning to suggest other formations and fabrications. His palette had already been colored by vernacular materiality informed by typical houses in the Pennsylvania landscape,²⁰ and would soon include the pitched roofs of the Trenton Bathhouse.

Albini had been investigating the rapport between each new building problem and its unique site situations along with his partner, Franca Helg, paying special attention to local tradi-



Albini's Villa Allemandi at Punta Ala



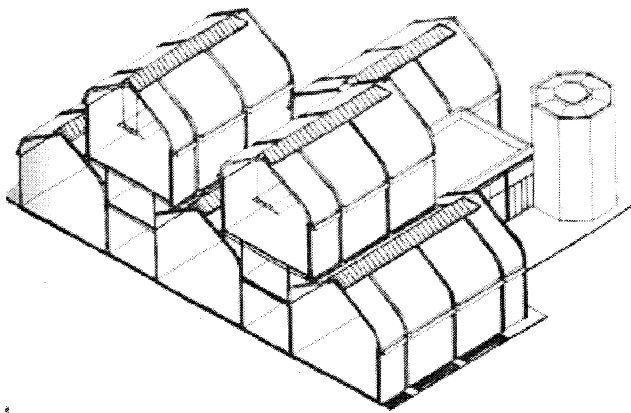
Entry facade

tions, by the time they received the commission for Roberto Olivetti for a wooded site near Canavese (1955-58). The sloped tile roof had entered the studio's vocabulary when Albini built the controversial Pirovano lodge in the Alps. The polycentric Olivetti proposal was sought to embed the dwelling into the hillside slopes and incorporate views of the landscape. Cesare De Seta noted what he called a reference to the ancient hut or vernacular cabin (*capanna*) that emerged in Albini and Helg's work during the Olivetti studies and was later realized in their Villa Allemandi.²¹ The similar, albeit more modest, house on the Ligurian coast at Punta Ala bears a striking resemblance to Kahn's Fruchter house plan. De Seta recognized Albini and Helg's pattern of beginning with the dwelling archetype throughout their search for the suitable house for contemporary life. Type innovation and technological adaptation may have altered the look, but not the essence, of their Italian dwellings. Recognizing the studio's variation of site contexts, including other single-family dwellings built at parco del Tigullio (1955), Forlì (1956) and Pieve Ligure (1963), De Seta confirmed their tendency to consult the *genius loci* as a faithful guide.²² [TAB]The Villa Allemandi was evidently a simplification of the unrealized previous Olivetti proposal, each project showing discrete volumes of varying geometric clarity organized by a hexagonal nucleus, but each also was adapted for specific local conditions. Coverage of the middle room with a sloped polygonal roof introduced a radial type while echoing the profiles of traditional cottages. Gathering toward the center was a motif used in Albini's San Lorenzo Museum, which draws energy inwards rather than thrusting it outwards through open panes of glass. All three of the rectangular solid elements housed sleeping areas, each with a private bath, to comfortably accommodate a large family or various individuals. The largest rectangle contained a car park at the outer end and an internally focused kitchen to serve the social nucleus of the dwelling. South-facing entry was arrested by a ladder-stair and

closet that supported a sitting area nestled off-center in the elevated nucleus. The hexagonal space was open and loose-edged, but defined by the central oculus, plan geometry, and overhead structure.

While the exterior massing denied the usual front façade, the overall form fit into the surrounding context of hillsides with similarly scattered villas. The interior composition was rich in tension between solid and void, between the platonic geometry of closed right angles in contrast with the open, amorphous space in between. Yet the served and servant hierarchy was conceptually reversed when the looser middle became the dominant volume due to the radial ceiling and central oculus of light able to hold the repetitious elements in place. [TAB]Among Albini's consistent and noteworthy tendencies throughout his career was his internally focused integration of modern space and furniture.²³ Albini's repeated affirmation of the room as the unit element of modern architecture has a particular twist in this house. The Villa Allemandi allowed both the rectangular solid and the resulting hexagonal void to define interdependent conditions of the new room. The novel centerpiece to the house challenged containment and was geometrically defined. The intersection of archetypes resulted in a tight plan, surprising in its simplicity and clarity. The interior experience presented a poised duality to suggest the plurality of possibilities for the modern room, a "Mediterranean *Raumplan*."²⁴

The coincidence of the primacy of the room in the search for contemporary architecture is the most salient parallel in works by Kahn and Albini. Since Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Gropius and other early modern architects had privileged the object presence of the entire building as the unit of modern architecture, the departure taken by Kahn and Albini became an important indication of the *Zeitgeist*. Kahn's Yale Art Gallery



1969-79 Studio Albini's innovative museum typology

and most of his preceding work depended upon the open plan to free the internal conception of space as revealed in the blank exterior panels of solid masonry or transparent glass. Kahn later grew suspect of the transgressions he observed in the occupancy of overly flexible and weakly defined volumes. According to David Brownlee, "Kahn's commitment to open planning had declined as he came to see the discrete 'room' as the basic architectural unit. By 1959, he was already announcing that his next museum would be divided into spaces with 'certain inherent characteristics.'"²⁵

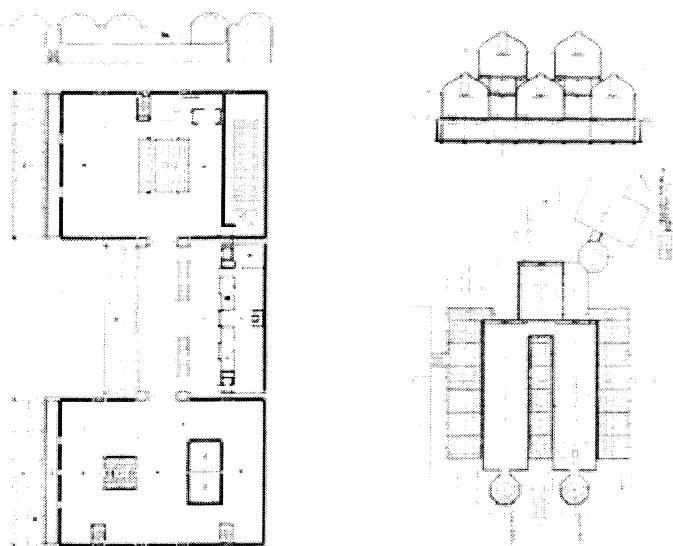


Kahn's interior room 1966-72

LATER MUSEUMS: KAHN'S KIMBELL AND STUDIO ALBINI'S NEW PINACOTECA

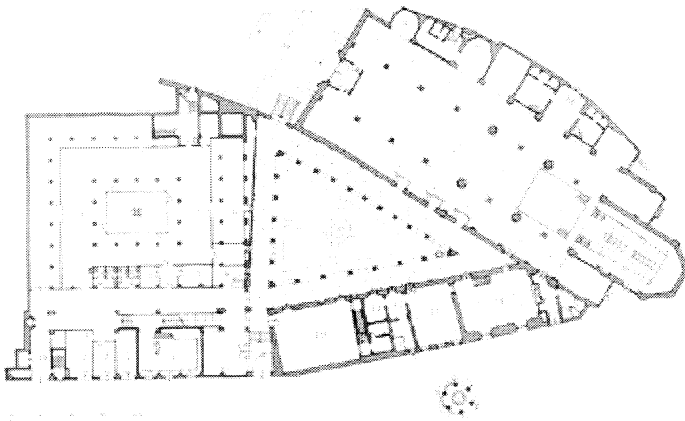
Both architects influenced the emergence of the modern room, which took shape throughout their independent searches for new building types. Some of their most poignant innovations came during mature career phases in the domain of new museum design. Kahn's elegant and quiet Kimbell Art Gallery, fifteen years after the Yale Art Gallery and just before his British Art Center in New Haven, has been discussed in detail.²⁶ This *tour de force*, the last work he completed while alive, is well known to scholars of architecture as one of the most beautiful buildings of the 20th century. Unmistakable among the qualities that has earned the concrete and travertine structure such acclaim is the graceful 22-foot wide cycloidal vault, repeated to cover six 150-foot long bays, and providing flexibility in strong form to accommodate all functions within the museum. The flattened arch section was generated by following a fixed point on the circumference of a circle as it rotates 180 degrees. Monumental in form but domestic in scale, Kahn's vault has been particularly celebrated for its infiltration and control of daylight, and the resulting interior composed of sophisticated juxtapositions of refined warm and cool materials is well suited to the collection of small paintings.

Load bearing cast-in-place concrete shell vaults bring light into the space along the entire length of the form with counter curving concave scoops that reflect the light upwards to wash the smooth arched structure. Additional ceiling-mounted spot canister lamps allow directed light to be focused on the small, framed canvases in the Kimbell collection. Two types of rooms exist in the interior: One is the approximately 18 foot tall expanse under the vault and the other, adjacent to it, is the 10-foot tall compressed area between vaults. The pattern of served and servant spaces does not follow from an obvious collocation of the two adjacent taller and low forms. Instead a network of utility zones and other functions (auditorium, library, book-



Kahn's Kimbell in plan and section 1966-72

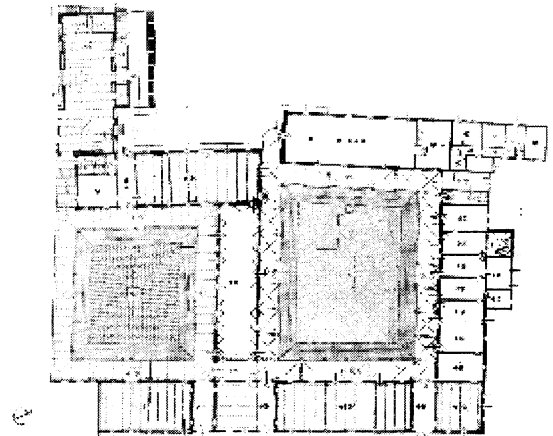
Studio Albini's Pinacoteca for the Civic Museum 1969



Sant'Agostino Museum, Genoa 1962

store, stairs, courtyards, restrooms) are woven throughout the simple fabric along with galleries, occupying both types of space and revealing the flexibility of the well-articulated modern room.

The processional path as extruded gallery volume with hidden service spaces is a common museum diagram, one that preceded the white box of the modern gallery. A plethora of 'new' museums grew from reutilized historic artifacts during the postwar period, particularly in Italy (note: BPR's Castello Sforzesca in Milan and Scarpa's Castelvecchio Museum in Verona.) After producing the Sant'Agostino Museum in a bombed and ex-consecrated double cloistered convent in Genoa, Albini and Helg with the other collaborators were invited to address a similar problem in Padua. For the Civic Museum of the Erimetani, the Studio Albini team capitalized on a unique opportunity to facilitate the needs of the collection and infill a void in the urban context with a newly inserted structure. Their New Pinacoteca portion of that project was never realized, yet its fully developed section resembled an analogous typology proposed for a more compressed and contained site. Like the Kimbell diagram, five continuous narrow vaulted bays delineated circulation of collections in a repetitive pattern that allowed variables of spatial composition using only three room types (two stacked galleries occupy the interstitial spaces between vaults). Studio Albini's proposed section took the form of a pointed vault, raised in the center, which implied something more medieval than Renaissance or modern in character. His continuous roof gestured more aggressively upward than did Kahn's softened vault. Daylight was admitted in a comparable way by breaking the central ridge along the length of the vault, then reflected light was directed upwards to highlight the architecture of the room. Reflector planes rendered as angled surfaces on suspended solids also

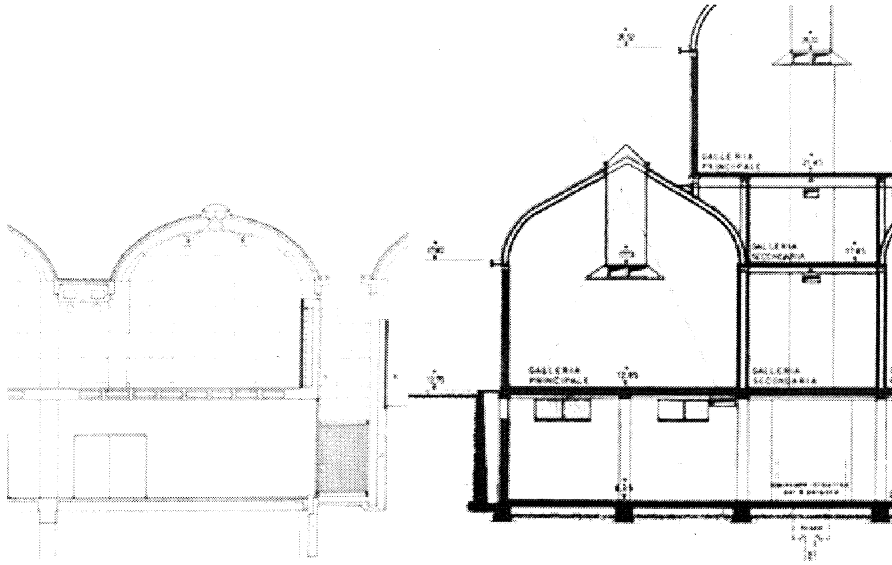


Museo Civico degli Erimetani 1969

held lamps for interior lighting focused on artworks and housed mechanical systems that ran through their length. Kahn's mechanicals are hidden in the ceiling section of the bays between the vaults, and his inverted vault-shaped reflectors are located near the surface of the vault where sunlight is the most intense. Studio Albini's infrastructure was instead lowered to the level from which the vault springs, possibly giving the effect of a suspended ceiling. The drawings for Studio Albini's detailed sections show light being eliminated from the center of the room, but allowed to wash the full extent of the side walls.

The staggered section diagram of the Civic Museum Pinacoteca placed support rooms and secondary galleries with lower soffits paralleling the sky lit rooms. Of the five vault-covered bars, two are elevated, which in effect significantly varied the resulting museum circulation from Kahn's type. The painting gallery sequence moved in section as well as in plan, and corresponded to the adjacent two-story convent it was intended to join. Movement was extended along the length of each bay, and their arrangement allowed for facile control of cross axes while accommodating service areas positioned as desired along the course. The Pinacoteca section drawing notes larger vaulted areas as the 'principle galleries' with two lower levels of gallery in the interstitial zones as 'secondary galleries.'

The Pinacoteca's elevation profile suggested a vastly different compositional hierarchy than that of the horizontal Kimbell, which sublimely echoed the planes of the Texas landscape. The rolling Kimbell vaults are presented as graceful end elevations. The entry is instead characterized by an absence of facade, brilliantly replaced by the vaulted porch and a grove of yaupon trees. Kahn did not compete with Philip Johnson's Amon Carter Museum on the same Fort Worth site. Similarly, the New Pinacoteca section allowed the galleries to fit snugly between

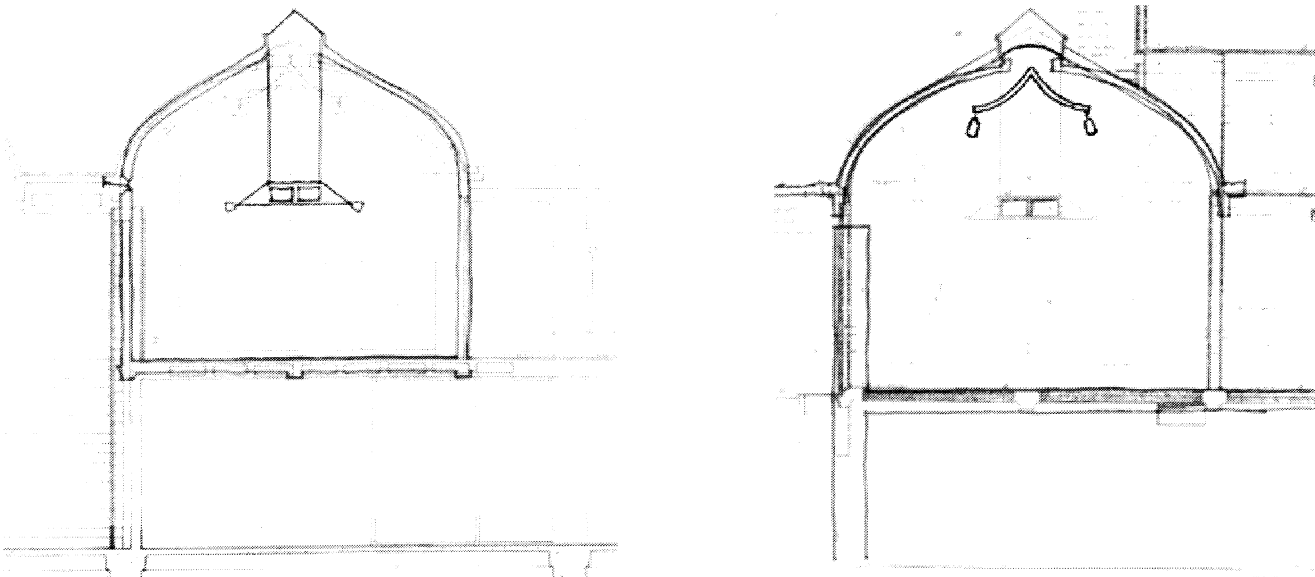


Kahn's 22 ft cycloidal vault rests on 2 ft square columns

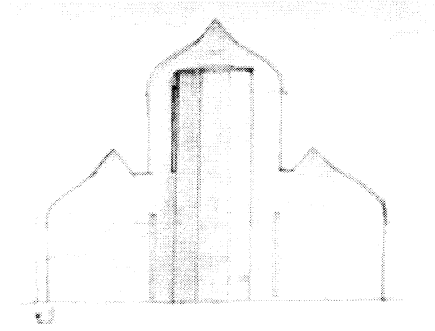
Padua's medieval houses to the east and the Eremitani convent cloisters containing two levels of rehabilitated museum space to the west. The public sequence called for two of Albini's signature spiral stairs, this time expressed as exterior volumes. The solid circulation towers can readily be contrasted to Kahn's geometric stairs within concrete cylinders located inside the two New Haven art galleries. Where Kahn preferred the compression of solid, enclosed mass, Albini sought tension and lightened the load with suspended risers and treads. Linear stairs in the narrow bays at the Kimbell extended access from the main level to the library above and offices and auditorium below to carry visitors or employees beyond the gallery path. The straight stairs were formed to align with the dominant vault

motif, and operate differently than the more public cylinders at Yale and in Padua.

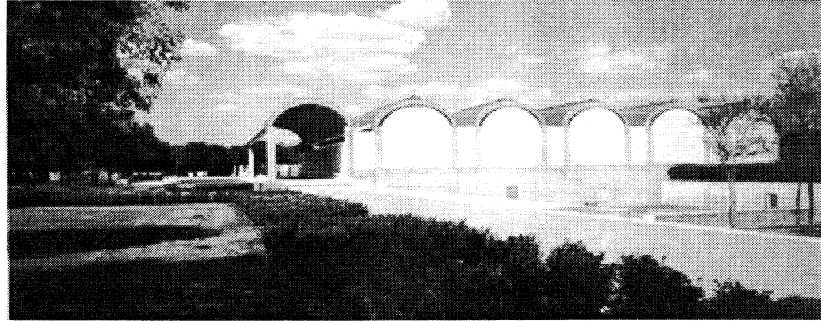
Scale comparison of the two schemes shows the Kimbell vaulted unit to be about four-fifths the size of the section of Albini's Pinacoteca proposal. The Kimbell 'room' was specifically scaled to enhance viewing of small, traditionally framed paintings. The Pinacoteca was designed for a variable collection of artifacts including large canvases, and were it realized, would have undoubtedly been experienced differently than the Kimbell, perhaps more like the monumental galleries of the Louvre, the Vatican, or the Uffizi. The typology of long halls for art is not new, yet the daylight filled vaults, at once belonging to



Studio Albini's proposed Pinacoteca – comparison in scale



Studio Albini façade study with stair



Kahn's Kimbell side elevation with exposed concrete frame

tradition, rendered both concepts fresh and innovative, providing a rational organization that offered flexibility even within simply composed rooms.

Overlapping section outlines reveal the uncanny similarities in proportions and volume in the two projects. Kahn's exposed concrete structure and travertine panels qualified both his interior spaces and exterior volumes. He accomplished through simple, silent mass an affectively monumental modernism, classical in principle and refinement, innovative in typology and technology. Albini rendered the Pinacoteca in exposed steel structure, the same tectonic expression he emphasized for the Sant'Agostino Museum in Genoa and the Rinascente Department store in Rome. His brick-infilled planes for the Pinacoteca facades are a poor version of Kahn's travertine infill and make a material link to the existing Eremitani complex. Both architects evolved traditionally inspired erudite interpretations of monumental and domestic modernity. Their successful experiments with site-specific forms, expressed tectonics, and pristine craft link them in sophistication and spirit, as they presented fresh, lyrical solutions for some prosaic design problems.

Career parallels between the two early modernists are all the more intriguing when considering cultural disparities at this

time. Each of the two men was the beneficiary of his own ambitions during a time when it was difficult to secure public or private commissions, while they worked in different political spheres for vastly different clientele. Kahn had been displaced as a boy, removed from his cultural origins. He searched for formal bearings on the grand tour but later evolved in Southeast Asia. Albini's formal and professional foundations were rooted in progressive modern Milan among European intellectuals. But did Kahn and Albini know one another or one another's work? Albini's son told me that they had met at CIAM (*l'congres internationaux d'architecture modern*)²⁷ after the war, yet it seems unlikely that they would have had extensive knowledge of each other's design work by the early 1950s or 1960s. While international circulation of design journals had surely exposed the two architects to each other buildings, their familiarity with work in progress is improbable. Each participated in the top academic dialogs of their day. Kahn turned down offers to teach at Harvard, and instead accepted a teaching position at Yale under his mentor, George Howe, where he could be closer to his Philadelphia studio. Albini commuted to teach in Venice for Samona', who, in 1958, wrote appreciatively about his logical rigor, analytic reasoning, yet artful and exuberant fantasy, consistently inspired by a close reading of



Albini's Rinascente stair 1959



Kahn's Kale Art Gallery Stair 1951

the problem.²⁸ Albini also taught briefly in Turin, but remained based in Milan among Lombard sensibilities.²⁹

Kahn's poetics and Albini's 'magical abstraction' emerge as parallel responses to the larger questions of a post-ideological modernism. Both architects elected as mid-career themes variants of the expression worn thin by mediocre interpretations of the International style. They emerged from different traditions and chose opposite material languages that characterize their *oeuvre*. Kahn preferred materials of mass and compression, while Albini's tensile steel and glass celebrated levity and suspension, in contrast with the existing historic city, to confront new with old, but both understood and exploited technology to express the fundamental *Zeitgeist*. Further, both Albini and Kahn embraced human nature and its cultural past as radical architectural knowledge. They read tradition as critical ground for architectural research and fertile territory for new ideas.³⁰ It would not be surprising to learn that the two had shared ideas or conversations, or merely distant mutual admiration. The significance of similarities in their tactics and techniques, as they employed modern building technologies without fetishizing its high tech capabilities, suggests complexities of the international construction environment whose intermingling tendencies were yearning for change. Albini stood on the threshold of postmodern architecture but did not cross over. His commitment to modernity had been many times affirmed, as his work alone and in collaboration was characterized by continuity. Like Louis Kahn, Franco Albini now belonged to a culture rich in modern tradition from which his ideas grew and to which his buildings contributed. Introspective and poetic, their modern masterpieces while internationally renowned, internalized the modern quest within.

NOTES

¹ *Il Movimento per Studi di Architettura*, or The Movement for the Study of Architecture was begun by Franco Albini in collaboration with other modern trained architects based primarily in Milan to establish debates and advocate for timely urban objectives during the post-regime political reformation.

² Matilde Baffa first brought to my attention the similarities between Kahn's residential architecture and Albini's project for the Canavese villa for Roberto Olivetti. I am grateful to Prof. Baffa for sharing her insights.

³ David B. Brownlee discussed the importance of the period of transition in Kahn's career between 1951-61 in *Louis I. Kahn; In the Realm of Architecture*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991) p. 78.

⁴ Marginalia in Albini's copy of Boccioni's 1914 *Pittura e Scultura Futuriste* demonstrates his skepticism toward the principles of Futurism. For example, Albini wrote, "the base concept of Futurism, life as movement, anxiety, and velocity is a bit infantile and esoteric." As noted by Antonio Piva in *Franco Albini 1905-1977*, (Milan: Electa, 1998) p. 42.

⁵ Albini, along with Giuseppe Palanti and Anna Castelli-Ferrieri, reinstated *Costruzioni Casabella* vols. 195-198 (Sept.-Dec., 1946) after the war with homage to Pagano that included his photographs of Italian vernacular in an essay by Luigi Comencini pp 56-69.

⁶ Albini, p. 498. Edited by Baffa, et. al. *Il Movimento per Studi di Architettura*, (Roma: Laterza & Figli, 1995) p. 497-499. English translation by author.

⁷ Michael Brawne quoted Kahn, "Nature does not build a house, nature does not make a locomotive, nature does not make a playground. They grow out of the desire to express." Brawne cites Wurman from the International Design Conference at Aspen Colorado, 19 June 1972. *Kimbell Art Museum. Louis I. Kahn*, Architecture in Detail series, (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1992). First page.

⁸ Kathleen James-Chakrobarty has discussed Kahn's role in US international propaganda during the Vietnam controversy via USIA (United States Information Agency) involvement through his work in Southeast Asia decades later.

⁹ Manfredo Tafuri, in describing Albini's submerged San Lorenzo Museum, recalled, "one of the most original ingredients of Albini's poetics: a surrealism all the more subtle in that it was resolved in a technically flawless vocabulary." *History of Italian Architecture, 1944-1985*, (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1989) p. 50.

¹⁰ Brawne, "architect, poet, builder," *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture*, first page.

¹¹ Pagano, editor of *Casabella* until his death in 1945, and Persico, astute art and architecture critic, heightened the level of critical dialogue in Milan during the 1930s. Pagano gave Albini opportunities to develop his metaphysical work in Milan Triennale expositions, and Perico (with Nizzoli) built a series of sublime shops and installations that had a profound formal influence on the young designer. Both were outspoken proponents of Albini's early work.

¹² Although Kahn visited his friend in Paris who was employed by Le Corbusier on this trip, he did not visit any of Corb's buildings.

¹³ For discussion of Mussolini's social program and how it impacted planning in Milan, see "The Sterile City," by David Horn in *Social Bodies*, Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernity (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Brownlee, p. 25.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Samonà, "In questa situazione di lavoro la personalita' di Albini prende un singolare rilievo con la sua qualita' estremamente concisa e penetranti a cui si lega un metodo di lavoro che potrebbe sintetizzarsi in questa verita', assiomatica per l'artista: ogni problema deve sempre porsi come un grande problema, anche se si riferisce a piccole e modestissime cose." *Zodiac* no. 3 1958, p. 84.

¹⁶ On May 30, 1940, Mayor E. Lambertson called public housing an untested social experiment and cautioned, "some people are so utterly shiftless that anyplace they live becomes a slum." Kahn had worked with Catherine Bauer and Frederick Gutheim during 1939 on a public education campaign that included Kahn's sketches in pamphlets about the US Housing Authority's mission and products. He mounted the New York MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) show on "Houses and Housing," and campaigned to direct wartime allocations toward permanent projects with lasting social value. Brownlee p. 26-28.

¹⁷ Brownlee, p. 52 from Tyng interview with Alessandra Latour.

¹⁸ Tyng, See Kahn's letter to Tyng of March 16, 1954, which includes a freehand diagram of the Fruchter house. P. 113.

¹⁹ Graphic sketch was published in "The Mind Opens to Realizations," by Brownlee of *Louis I. Kahn*, p. 55.

²⁰ See Kahn's other Pennsylvania single-family houses from the period, including the Oser house (1942), Weiss House (1950), Genel house (1951) in Brownlee and De Long pp 37-41.

²¹ De Seta, Cesare, "Franco Albini architetto, fra razionalismo e tecnologia" in *Franco Albini 1930-70*, (Firenze: Centro Di, 1979) p. 23.

²² De Seta, p. 23.

²³ Albini's innovative modern room can be observed in many early interiors including residential interiors in Milan, Villetta Pestarini, and Palazzo Bianco. See also Kay Bea Jones, "Seeing through Franco Albini: Domestic Modernity in Rationalist Italy," *Why does Modernism Refuse to Die?*, ACSA Montreal Proceedings, 2002. pp 111-120.

²⁴ Although Albini's idea of the modern room differed significantly from the perceptual and section strategies of Adolf Loos, Fabrizio Rosso Prodi has argued that Albini's persistent patterns could be identified as the Mediterr-

near version of the new open space or *raumplan*. Franco Albini (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1996) p. 151.

- ²⁵ Brownlee, p. 130. Among the 'certain inherent characteristics' inferred by Brownlee is Kahn's composition of natural light. The quotation from Kahn is noted as from his talk given at the CIAM Otterlo Congress in 1959.
- ²⁶ The Kimbell will not be completely analyzed for its extensive merits for the purpose of this comparison. For more discussion and photographic documentation of Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth Texas, see Michael Benedikt, *Deconstructing the Kimbell* (New York: SITES/Lumen Books, 1991). Brownlee, "Light: the Giver of All Presences, chapter 6 pp 126-143, of

Louis I. Kahn in the Realm of Architecture, and Michael Brawne, *Kimbell Art Museum. Louis I. Kahn*. Architecture in Detail series. (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1992).

- ²⁷ Kahn gave a talk at CIAM in Otterlo, Netherlands in 1959. Albini that final CIAM congress in 1959 .
- ²⁸ See Giuseppe Samona', "Franco Albini e la cultura architettonica in Italia." in *Zodiac* n. 3 1958.
- ²⁹ Albini shifted his tenure to the Milan Polytechnic in 1964, where he taught until his death.