Italian Rationalist Architecture (1922-1945)

■ Birth of Italian Rationalist Architecture

The history of Italian Rationalism is made of groups, movements, exhibitions and reviews, even more than of architects and buildings. The creation of the Gruppo 7, in 1926, marks the beginning of this short season. Important members of Group 7 were Luigi Figini (1903-1984), Guido Frette (1901-1984), Gino Pollini (1903-1991), Giuseppe Terragni (1904-1943) and Adalberto Libera (1903-1963).

■ Gruppo 7 and MIAR

The Gruppo 7's writings highlighted the influences of the European modernism, most remarkably of Le Corbusier, but also of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius.
In 1928, the Gruppo 7 created the MIAR (Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale), which organized a short-lived series of the Esposizioni Italiane di Architettura Razionale. The Triennale Exhibitions organized initially in Monza and later on in Milan were a valuable occasion to build full-scale models of rationalist architectures. An interesting example is the Casa Elettrica, built by Figini and Pollini, with the collaboration of Guido Frette, Adalberto Libera e Piero Bottoni in 1930 for the 4th Esposizione Triennale Internazionale delle Arti Decorative ed Industriali in Monza. The building is conceived as a prototype of a rationalist residence, inspired by the five points of Le Corbusier's architecture.

■ Giuseppe Terragni, protagonist of the Italian Rationalism

GiuseppeTerragni, proved to be very prolific in his hometown Como. His major works here include the pioneering residential building Novocomum (1927-1929), the Sant'Elia kindergarten (1936-1937), the Giuliani-Frigerio house (1939-1940) and, most of all, the Casa del Fascio (1932-1936).

■ The spreading of Rationalist architectural philosophy

Besides Como, rationalist architectures pop up all over the country, in larger cities as well as in smaller towns. In 1939, in Ivrea, Adriano Olivetti (1901-1960) commissions the complex of the Officine ICO (Ivrea, now UNESCO World Heritage site) to Figini and Pollini; in Milano, Giuseppe Pagano (1986-1945) builds the premises of the Bocconi University (1937-1940); in Florence, Giovanni Michelucci (1891-1990) wins the competition for the Santa Maria Novella station (1932-1934).

■ Relation with the Fascist regime

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the Italian Rationalist architecture established a relation with the technical and aesthetic experimentations of the European avant-gardes on the one side, and with the Fascist regime's need for self-representation on the other. The tumultuous relationship between Italian Rationalism and the Fascist regime survives for less than a decade, before their final separation after the collapse of the MIAR, during the mid-1930s, as the regime preferred to identify itself with the monumental buildings designed by Marcello Piacentini, (1881-1960), rather than the more "abstract" classicism of the Rationalist Movement.

■ After the Rationalist Movement

At the end of WW2, the leading figures of Rationalism, for the most part still very young at the time, followed different paths. Some of them did not survive the war, such as Pagano, who died in the Mauthausen concentration camp, and Terragni, weakened on a psychological plan by his experience at the battlefront. On the other side, many of the survivors, including Bottoni, Figini and Pollini, will be on the frontline in the reconstruction of a democratic Italian country.

Adapted from: *www.domusweb.it*

Casa del Fascio by Giuseppe Terragni, Como

1   **Read the text and answer the questions.**

   1. Who were the major interpreters of Italian Rationalist architecture?

   2. What great architects influenced Italian Rationalist architecture?

   3. What did the MIAR use to organize?

   4. What was the Casa Elettrica?

   5. What buildings did Giuseppe Terragni design in Como?

   6. What twofold attitude did the Italian Rationalist movement have in the 1920s and 1930s?

   7. How long did the relation between the Italian Rationalist movement and the Fascist regime last?

   8. What happened at the end of WW2?

2   **Complete the table with the missing information.**

	WHAT	WHO	WHERE
1.	Sant'Elia Kindergarten		
2.		Michelucci	
3.			Milano
4.	Officine ICO		

Officine ICO by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, Ivrea