

## ENCHANTING ARCHITECTURE THE ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE IN STOCKHOLM BY GIO PONTI

*Curated by Maria Sica*

*Introductory texts by Mario Cospito, Maria Sica and Salvatore Licitra*

*Texts by Antonello Alici, Giovanni Bellucci, Domitilla Dardi, Fulvio Irace, Adriana Rispoli and  
Fredrick Whitling*

*Photographs by Luciano Romano*

The first Italian Institute opened in Stockholm in 1941, as a result of a bilateral agreement between Italy and Sweden, its main purpose being the promotion of the Italian language. In 1954, the Institute acquired its actual status and became the Italian Cultural Institute in Sweden. In 1958, the headquarters moved from Linnégatan 5 to Gärdesgatan 14, where the institute is still located today.

2021 marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bilateral agreement that paved the way to an intense cultural and artistic exchange, a promise of mutual knowledge that we renew every day. On this occasion, the Institute decided to publish a book that aims to revisit these eighty years of exchange between Italy and Sweden and to pass them on to posterity.

“Enchanting Architecture” narrates the events that led to the construction of one of the most representative examples of Italian architecture abroad, the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm, designed by Gio Ponti with the engineer and industrialist Carlo Maurilio Lerici as its prime mover and main sponsor. At the heart of Ponti’s project is the idea of an architecture that opens to modernity, whose lighter forms are nevertheless tied to their specific functions.

Therefore, this book steams from the need to tell the story of a dialogue between Italian and Swedish culture, and, above all, the story of a building and its project by Gio Ponti, who initially collaborated with the Swedish architect **Ture Wennerholm**. The auditorium was designed in collaboration with Pier Luigi Nervi, whereas the enlargement of the entrance hall in the early Sixties was designed by Ferruccio Rossetti.

“Enchanting Architecture” begins with the introduction of the Italian Ambassador to Sweden, Mario Cospito, followed by a preface by the Director of the Institute Maria Sica and a text by Salvatore Licitra, curator of the Gio Ponti Archive in Milan. The chapters of the book are written by prominent researchers and scholars and aim to present and deeply analyse the project commissioning as well as the design and the construction of the building and its interiors.

All the texts are accompanied by historic pictures and reproductions of sketches, blueprints of the project and drawings, all coming from the Institute archive. Together with the reportage by Luciano Romano, which focused on the Institute’s architecture and interior design, they give an overview of the birth of the project and its evolution over the years.

“Enchanting Architecture” was commissioned by the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm and curated by the Institute director Maria Sica. It is published by Five Continents Editions, a prestigious publishing house specialized in art books. Texts are in English and Italian.

For further information, please visit the Institute homepage: [www.iicstocolma.esteri.it](http://www.iicstocolma.esteri.it)

For further information about the book, please visit the publisher’s homepage:  
[www.fivecontinentseditions.com](http://www.fivecontinentseditions.com)

### *The authors:*

**Fulvio Irace** is professor in the History of Architecture at Milan Politecnico. In **“The Scent of Italy in Stockholm”** he takes the reader on a journey through the different stages of the new building in Gärdesgatan, starting with Ture Wennerholm’s first project, later abandoned in favour of Gio Ponti’s. Ponti wanted to challenge the Swedish idea of Italy as a “rustic” and backward country and developed a project that gave a more modern image of his homeland.

**Domitilla Dardi**, Design Historian and art Curator at the Museum MAXXI in Rome, in **“Clear, Pure and Sunlit”**, analyses the topic of propaganda of the Italian style abroad. With the project of the Institute in Stockholm, Ponti aimed to export his personal style as much as a precise image of Italy. The institute represents the best possible synthesis of Ponti’s idea of modernity, that reached its peak during the Fifties. Thus, Ponti becomes an art director able to integrate architecture with interior design and art in a broader sense. The interiors of the Institute in Stockholm are the perfect example of this role taken up by Ponti and of his plan to export abroad an idea of “made in Italy” that himself had contributed to create when he worked for some major firms in the field of design, both as a designer and strategy advisor.

**Giovanni Bellucci**, professor in the History of Architecture at the Università Politecnica delle Marche in Ancona, focuses on Ponti’s building to examine the connections between the Italian and the Swedish architecture at that time, with the Institute as a meeting point of these two cultures. In **“A Swedish Attitude Towards Italian Architecture”**, Bellucci recollects the events and the bilateral relations that led to the construction of the Institute, emphasizing the influences of the Italian and of the Swedish approach, represented by Gio Ponti, Pier Luigi Nervi, Ferruccio Rossetti and Ture Wennerholm, with Carlo Maurilio Lerici as a link between the two cultures.

**Antonello Alici** is professor in the History of Architecture at the Università Politecnica delle Marche in Ancona. He analyses the cultural relations between Italy and Sweden from a broader perspective in his chapter **“The Journey to the North”**. Italy was for a long time a destination for artists coming from Northern Europe. The “grand tour” was a part of any artist’s education and the journey to Italy made possible to meet local artists and tie cultural bounds. Towards the end of the Eighteenth Century, a mutual interest started to grow from Italy towards the Nordic countries, which had begun to develop an original and autonomous culture. Alici revisits the crucial steps of this long cultural exchange, focusing on the magazines that witnessed it.

**Fredrick Whitling**, historian and researcher, devotes his **“Good Vibrations?”** to Carlo Maurilio Lerici. He illustrates his vision and his multidisciplinary interests, from science to humanities. Lerici was the prime mover of the Italian Cultural Institute in Stockholm, which was meant to tie closer bounds between Italy and Sweden. Lerici had a strong professional relation with Sweden and thanks to his financial support the construction of the Institute was made possible. Lerici himself invited Ponti to Stockholm and he was also the first one to get in contact with Ture Wennerholm. Therefore, his name is bound to the institute - which in fact bears his name, Istituto Italiano di Cultura C.M. Lerici - and the homonymous foundation, which still exists today and supports through scholarships the exchange of students and researchers in both science and humanities between Sweden and Italy.

Finally, in **“Loving art\_Art is light”**, art curator and critic **Adriana Rispoli** explains some recent art projects where the building of the institute becomes the expression of the osmosis between art and architecture, celebrating Ponti’s idea of “total art”. From 2018 to 2020, the Institute hosted a series of site-specific installations, where artists had to conceptualize the façade of the institute and integrate it in their works. Thus, past and modernity melt together and gave birth to *Relational* (2018) by Bianco-Valente; *TUTTO.Leonardo* (2019) by Mariangela Levita and *Power, Joy, Hmor, Resistance* (2020) by Monica Bonvicini.