

Statement
on
Threats to the Preservation of the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence, Italy

Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee

Issue

The Artemio Franchi stadium in Florence, designed by Pier Luigi Nervi, is an outstanding example of 20th century architecture. The Artemio Franchi's most distinctive elements are its helical staircases, cantilevered canopy, and the tall slender Marathon tower that overlooks the sports field. Completed in 1931, the stadium is a landmark in the history of modern architecture, distinctive for its creative use of concrete. Artemio Franchi was enormously influential on the design of other modern stadiums worldwide as well. The new owner of the soccer team A.C.F. Fiorentina insists that a major renovation is necessary to continue playing there. The issue is how to protect the building while reimagining a future for it.

Background

In 2019, A.C.F. Fiorentina was bought by Rocco B. Commisso, the chairman of Mediacom. When he purchased the team, Commisso indicated that he was concerned about the condition of the city-owned Artemio Franchi stadium, which certainly lacks some of the amenities of stadiums used by other top European soccer teams, such as seats located in close proximity to the playing field. Interestingly, the stadium was originally designed to be standing room only, and the seats were added in a later renovation. As well, the stadium is only partly covered, exposing fans to inclement weather. Many contemporary stadiums contain ancillary spaces with stores, gyms, restaurants and other activities that help teams to improve their bottom line; Artemio Franchi has none of these features.

In May 2020, a committee of experts unanimously certified that Artemio Franchi stadium was culturally and historically significant, bringing it under Italy's strict conservation laws. In September 2020, however, the Italian government passed a decree that streamlined procedures for public works. This decree contained an article allowing sports facilities to make modifications, up to and including reconstruction, in order to improve a structure's efficiency and bring it up to "international standards of security, health, and public safety." If Culture Ministry officials identify specific elements of a sports facility worthy of preservation, these can be removed and conserved elsewhere or reproduced, even at a different scale. While the law supports preservation, it no longer weds the act of conservation to the historic resource itself. Many fear that this law may be a first step in dismantling Italy's strict, and widely celebrated, conservation laws.

In November 2020, Mr. Commisso's management team wrote to the Cultural Ministry to ask officials to verify whether there were elements of the stadium that would require preservation.

Recommendation

While there are a number of historically significant stadiums that have not been treated well by recent renovations - both Soldiers' Field in Chicago and Yankee Stadium in New York City come immediately to mind -- the conservation and adaptation of Artemi Franchi is an important and worthy goal. Simply building a new stadium and vacating Artemi Franchi, on the one hand, leaves unresolved the future of the stadium itself, and addresses none of the conservation issues. On the other hand, an unsympathetic intervention focused solely on revenue enhancement could easily result in a repeat of the unfortunate examples in Chicago and New York. The Getty Conservation Institute's *Conservation Principles for Concrete of Cultural Significance* (2020) examines historically appropriate repairs to modern concrete structures, and provides many successful examples of analogous projects that safely and sensitively extended the life of modern concrete structures. A careful intervention that accommodates new demands while retaining the character defining features of Artemi Franchi is most desirable, given the stadium's international significance. Further, it is consistent with the long Italian conservation tradition of careful, controlled adaptation.

SAH joins with The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and other international organizations, in calling for the conservation and careful adaptation of Artemi Franchi.

Adopted 8 January 2021
Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA;
Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms.
Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.