

Piccinato was an enormously successful urban planner at international level and rightly described himself in one interview as the “father” of Italian urbanism. A designer, teacher, author of important disciplinary texts and a member of all the leading associations (MIAR, APAO, INU), he had an extraordinary career, still not yet adequately analyzed despite the many studies devoted to him.

Born in Legnago in 1899, he graduated in Architecture in Rome in 1923, and was recruited to the School of Architecture in Naples by Alberto Calza Bini in 1930. Here he coordinated the work for the Regulatory Plan approved in 1939, having previously been involved with urban planning with the Roman Urbanists Group in Rome, which he founded in 1926 with Gaetano Minnucci. The other city to which Piccinato devoted much of his design work was Padua, and he taught in Venice for a long time before returning to Rome. His teaching career also took him abroad, to Argentina, Turkey and Lebanon, to be precise, countries in which he also drew up several urban plans, as well as those developed in Israel, Macedonia and Algeria. His methodology consisted of creating satellite cities, tailored to the morphology of the areas and to the local context.

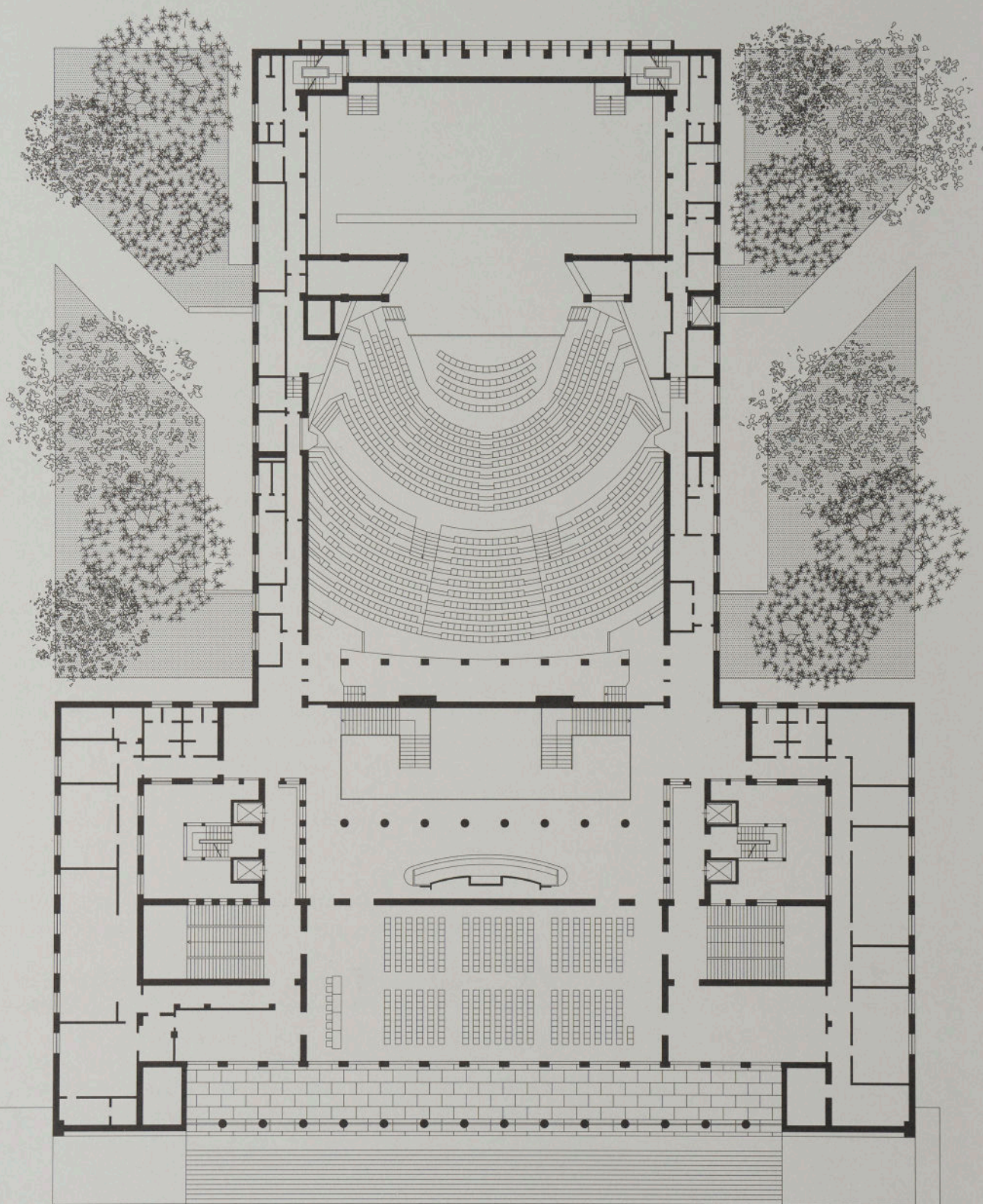
A not inconsiderable part of his career was spent on architectural design, perhaps partly overshadowed by his urban planning efforts. His work included the Mediterranean Theater in Naples – just one of several theaters he designed – the Colonial House, presented at the 5th Triennale di Milano in 1933 – in which he drew on different traditions while incorporating a modern spatiality – and his many projects for school buildings.

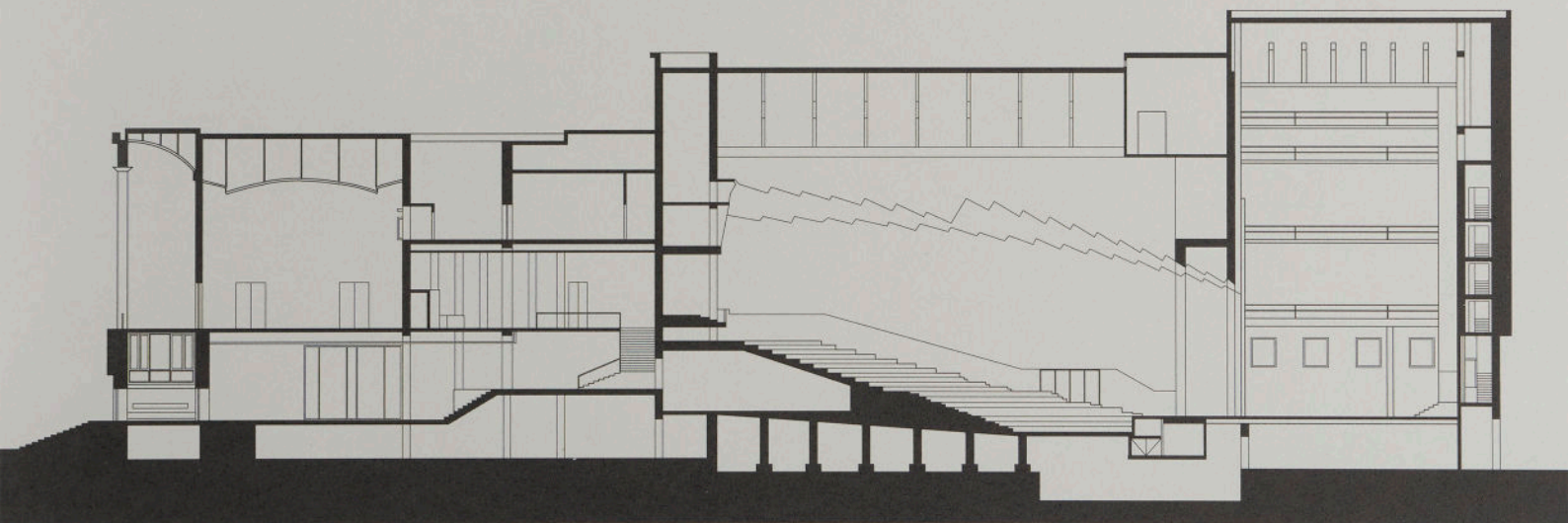
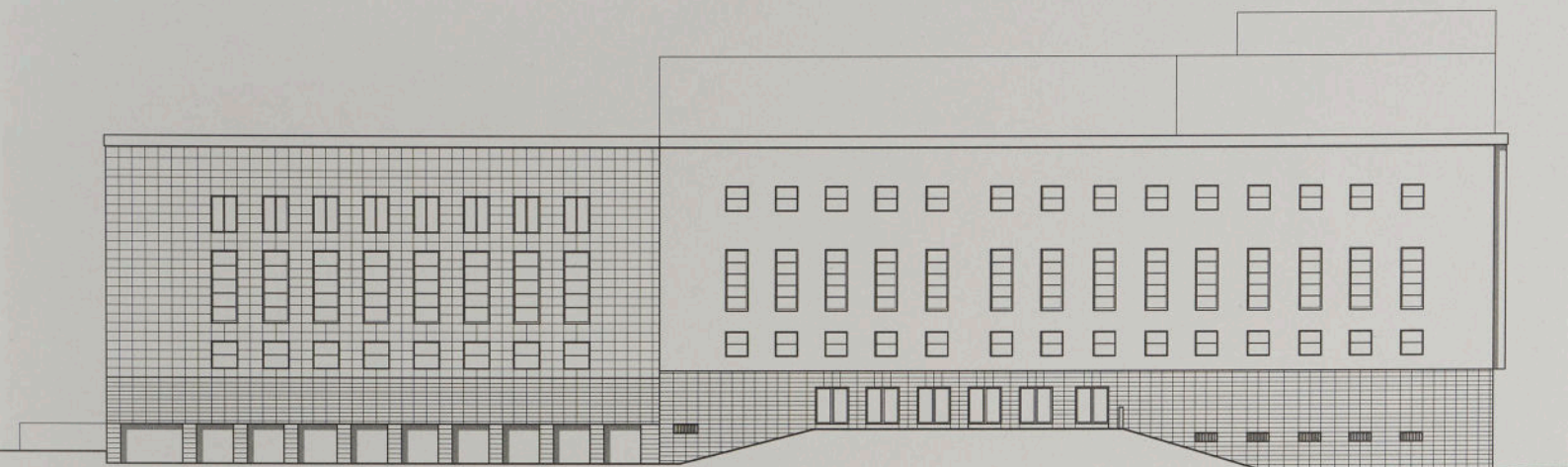
Piccinato, who lived through many different phases of Italian history, from the Fascist era to that of reconstruction, embodied the faith his generation had in the connection between theory and practice and in the possibility of regulating rapid urban expansion, especially during the boom years. Luckier than many others, his career should now serve as a yardstick against which to judge the destruction of territory that that particular culture found itself unable or incapable of avoiding.

A key element of the overall design of the Mostra d'Oltremare, the Mediterranean Theater is one of the fairground's most significant buildings – even in terms of size – as it brings the perspectival view of the entrance to a close and breaks up the main east–west axis, constituted of Piazza dell'Impero and Viale delle Palme. This also accounts for the fact that the T-shaped plan was actually made up of two blocks laid perpendicular to each other and having different functions. The Palazzo dell'Arte, designed by Nino Barillà, Vincenzo Gentile, Filippo Mellia and Giuseppe Sambito, is on the main front, while the body of the Mediterranean Theater, designed by Luigi Piccinato, sits on the Viale delle Palme side.

Built between 1939 and 1940, the Palazzo dell'Arte boasts a monumental façade, precisely because it is the main visual backdrop. The base of the building is clad in green serpentine marble, accessed by steps, and contains a portico connected to the atrium of the building, which serves as a vestibule for the theater and for its other functions. The elevation's dominant feature is, however, the loggia on the upper floor with its fourteen slender and white-stuccoed columns and gilded capitals, set against a 300-square-meter fresco by Alberto Chiancone and Pietro Barillà. The chiaroscuro effect is enhanced by the contrast between the white travertine of the cladding and the shadows against which the columns stand out. The loggia is accessible from the Salone Italia, 30 meters long and 10 meters high, designed by Luigi Piccinato and embellished with a wooden stuccoed false ceiling, a choir loft gilded by the Palermo-born painter Alberto Bevilacqua, and Venini chandeliers designed by Gio Ponti. The unity of the arts seen in so much Fascist architecture shows a perfect example here.

The war-damaged block containing the theater was rebuilt by Piccinato in 1952, and its layout altered. The first version allowed for a stage in direct contact with the audience, with two swiveling platforms and a partition between the stalls and the gallery above. The gallery was done away with in the post-war project and the flexibility of the stage and the auditorium increased. The rear elevation of the building, towards Viale delle Palme, was also altered, retaining the travertine cladding on the basement fascia alone. The view of the edifice from the entrance to the Mostra has now been altered by the loss of the portico between Piazzale Roma, the first space after the entrance, and Piazzale dell'Impero. These perceptual balances had been carefully calculated by Canino and his collaborators, among whom were Stefania Filo Speciale and Piccinato, who drew up the garden plan with Carlo Cocchia, which was key to the urban layout. Nevertheless, the building still retains an incontrovertible centrality within the fairground complex and its harmonious proportions and design lend it an almost hieratic air.





North elevation
Longitudinal section

0 5 10

