



The Italian East African Pavilion, today commonly known as the Cubo d'Oro/Golden Cube, because of its covering of golden glass paste tiles, was designed by a group consisting of Mario Zanetti, Luigi Racheli and Paolo Zella Milillo, the winners of a national competition. Not a great deal is yet known about the building's three authors, all from Rome and fairly young at the time of the competition, aside from a few general facts.

The best-known of the three was Luigi Racheli (1912–95), particularly for his design work following the Golden Cube project. After graduating in Rome under Arnaldo Foschini, he served an apprenticeship in the studios of Concenio Petrucci and Gaetano Minnucci; thanks to his friendship with the latter, he was taken on by the EUR Building Department, where he remained until 1939, also collaborating on the realization of Minnucci's Uffici Finanziari e Avvocatura di Stato Headquarters. In 1939 he started his own professional practice, working on a wide range of different projects, from the urban scale to the architectural scale, but was also involved with industrial construction and installations for exhibitions and trade fairs. While the Mostra d'Oltremare was being built in Naples, Racheli also took part in the competition for the National Fascist Party tower, which was won by Venturino Ventura. Following the war, along with his industrial commissions came those for the Peroni company, for which he also worked on the new Miano complex in Naples, built between 1953 and 1955, and then those in Bari (1971) and Padua (1974). Aligning himself with the APAO group, Racheli's approach during the 1950s was clearly influenced by organicism, although he later returned to and reinterpreted Rationalist motifs. In the final phase of his career, he worked alongside his son Alberto Maria, who took over the professional practice in 1995, after his father's death.

The edifice known as the Golden Cube, was part of a sort of "exhibition within an exhibition" inside the huge complex of the Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare, devoted to Italian East Africa. It involved a group of structures situated to the south of Viale delle Palme, i.e. the continuation of the main east–west axis of the complex, which leads from the entrance to the Mediterranean Theater, behind which it then continues to the amusement park. The Golden Cube is situated on this avenue, designed to be a permanent pavilion, overlooking the wooden structures of seven temporary buildings, linked by overhead gangways and devoted to the different African provinces. Next to them was the indigenous village with a small lake surrounded by palms and euphorbia and a replica of Fasilides' Bath, a copy of the original castle in the Ethiopian city of Gondar.

The Golden Cube building was completed in 1940 – like the rest of the Mostra – having been the subject of a national competition, won by Mario Zanetti, Luigi Racheli and Paolo Zella Milillo. It took its name from the more or less cubic shape that distinguishes it, supported on reinforced concrete pillars alternated with glazed windows, giving the impression that the closed and compact volume of the pavilion is somehow detached from the ground. The four blind walls are covered with gilded tiles that form a geometrical pattern of horizontal and vertical lines and horizontally aligned pointed elements. The result is a pure and iconic shape, the surface shiny but not uniform, with raised decorations geared to achieving a particular chiaroscuro effect. The building contains a single space, the Salone dell'Impero, the walls of which were adorned with inscriptions and two frescoes by Giovanni Brancaccio, portraying Julius Caesar and Benito Mussolini; there was a large mosaic-covered globe in the middle of the floor. Thus the cube and the globe set up a dialogue in a fascinating play of opposing geometric shapes.

The entire area was badly bomb-damaged during World War II and all that remains of the entire group of edifices is the Golden Cube, the Coptic church and Fasilides' Bath with its lake. The rehabilitation of the area, as part of the post-war reconstruction of the Mostra during the 1950s, was carried out by Giulio de Luca, author of the Italian Work in Africa Pavilion. Further restoration work to the Golden Cube began in 1993, but the outer covering in particular is falling into decay, posing a complex conservation problem. Today, unlike its original situation, the building looks like an isolated work, lacking a specific purpose, yet somewhat mysterious and undeniably fascinating.



