

# Minimum Documentation Fiche

composed by national/regional working party of  
Docomomo, Italy

## 01 Picture of building



Depicted item: View of the Palace's courtyard  
source: Palazzo Abatellis Archive  
date:

## 1 Identity of building

1.1 current name of building	Sicily's Regional Gallery, Abatellis Palace
1.2 variant or former name	Palermo's historic city centre
1.3 number & name of street	4, via Alloro
1.4 town	Palermo
1.5 province/state	Sicily
1.6 zip code	90133
1.7 country	Italy
1.8 national grid reference	38° 7' 0.332" N    13° 22' 15.877" E
1.9 classification/typology	Museum
1.10 protection status & date	

## 2 History of building

2.1 original brief/purpose	Sicily's National Gallery
2.2 dates: commission/completion	1953-1954
2.3 architectural and other designers	Carlo Scarpa
2.4 others associated with building	
2.5 significant alterations with dates	
2.6 current use	Museum
2.7 current condition	good

## 3 Description

### 3.1 *General description*

The exhibition design of the Sicily's Regional Gallery is carried out by Carlo Scarpa between the summer of 1953 and the summer of 1954. (The museum opens to the public on the 23rd of June 1954)

The building, an extraordinary example of architecture designed at the end of the 15th century by Matteo Carnalivari, was heavily damaged in the 1943 bombings, and reconstructed immediately after the war by Mario Guiotto and Armando Dillon.

However the structural and architectural restoration work of the building wasn't finished and Giorgio Vigni, the Monuments and Fine Arts Office director, seduced by the layout that only a few months before Carlo Scarpa and Roberto Calandra had designed in Messina for the exhibition on Antonello da Messina and Sicily's 15th century, decided to commission the project for the museum centre from Scarpa. The restoration work of Scarpa is not limited to the exhibition design project but, in collaboration with Vigni, defines the museological criteria and the choice of the pieces to be exhibited.

### 3.2 *Construction*

In a few months, and with almost total commitment, Scarpa, helped by Vigni and his assistant Carandente, comes to a new design strategy: completing the works, choosing and positioning the art works, deciding the exhibition itinerary. Once the courtyard is paved, the openings on the facades are reordered, painted in one colour applied in different shades; Scarpa designs the new window frames with light protection voiles, and reconstructs stylistically the small courtyard stair. Definitely modern, the stair with hexagonal steps carved in Carini's stone, lays on a metallic open structure, without any handrail, linking the Capitol's room to the landing of the exterior staircase. Except for the bases used in the Crosse's room (already designed for the exposition on Antonello da Messina and Sicily's XVth century), Scarpa designs every exposition device.

The extreme rigour marking the choice of the individual art works responds to a precise exhibitiv intent: a few very carefully selected pieces, within a continuous narrative itinerary, in a spatial continuum where each object finds its own dimension.

### 3.3 *Context*

The new Abatellis Palace gallery is located in Palermo's historic city centre, on Via Alloro in the old area of the Kalsa, a few hundred meters from the fourteenth-century Palazzo Chiaramonte on the piano della Marina.

## 4 Evaluation

### 4.1 *Technical*

There are no technical and technological innovations in the project and, when Scarpa was involved, the architectural system, as a whole, had already been defined. The museum's arrangement demonstrates the absolute mastery of the materials and techniques used by Carlo Scarpa. The extraordinary ability of Scarpa shows not only in the spatial organization of the works within the rooms, but also in the choice of materials, design, plasters and stucco. With the exception of the wooden windows frames, made by the carpenter Anfodillo in Venice and then carried to Palermo, of the glass lamps made by Venini and of the stucco laid by Eugenio De Luigi, the implementation of all works is committed to Sicilian workers to whom Scarpa explains step by step each technical phase during its realization.

### 4.2 *Social*

High value. It's one of the most important museological realizations of the twentieth-century. The extremely rigorous design, the careful selection of the works and the charm of the Carnilivari's architecture, offer to the visitor, scholar or simple tourist, an only one path.

### 4.3 *Cultural & aesthetic*

High value. The project by Carlo Scarpa for the new Abatellis Palace gallery, winner in 1962 of the national In/Arch prize for the preservation and development of the architectural heritage, becomes a reference for Italian museography, and a crucial moment within Scarpa's artistic evolution. In 1967 Walter Gropius will define it as «the best museum location I have ever come across in my life».

### 4.4 *Historical*

High value. This is the first museum designed by Carlo Scarpa after many designs for temporary exhibitions. Palazzo Abatellis contains all aspects of Scarpa's poetic proving the plurality of knowledge, interests and suggestion of the Venetian master. The deep knowledge of art history and the extraordinary ability to read through every work of art, allow Scarpa to go beyond the simple disposal of the works within a space, creating a perfect balance between container and content.

The exhibition of the great fresco of the Triumph of Death, the artworks supports and the spatial arrangement of the works situated in Laurana's room, the room dedicated to the masterpieces of Antonello da Messina, are a direct evidence of the inexhaustible inventiveness of Scarpa. Thanks to the praiseworthy realization of the Museum of Palazzo Abatellis, Scarpa would be involved in the arrangement of Castelvecchio museum in Verona.

### 4.5 *General assessment*

The incredible rigor that characterizes each design choice, the absolute mastery in the design of every single detail, the relationship between the space and the works of art, the careful choice of different materials, make Palazzo Abatellis an absolute masterpiece of contemporary architecture.

## 5 Documentation

### 5.1 Principal references

MAZZARIOL G., *Opere di Carlo Scarpa*, in «L'architettura. Cronache e Storia» n. 3, settembre-ottobre 1955, pp. 354-359;  
POLANO S., *Carlo Scarpa: palazzo Abatellis. La Galleria della Sicilia, Palermo 1953-54*, Milano 1989;  
MORELLO P., *Carlo Scarpa. L'allestimento della Galleria di Palazzo Abatellis, 1953-54*, in «Domus», n. 708, settembre 1989, pp. 81-87;  
MORELLO P., *Palazzo Abatellis. Il maragma del Maestro Portulano da Matteo Carnilivari a Carlo Scarpa*, Treviso 1989;  
BELTRAMINI G., K. W. FORSTER, MARINI P., *Carla Scarpa. Mostre e musei 1944-1976. Case e paesaggi 1972-1978*, Milano 2000, pp. 126-135;  
BELTRAMINI G., ZANNIER I a cura di, *Carlo Scarpa. Atlante delle architetture*, Venezia 2006, pp. 84-95;

### 5.2 visual material attached

fig. 1 View of the Palace's courtyard (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
fig. 2 Study for the artworks placement (in «L'architettura. Cronache e Storia» n. 3, settembre-ottobre 1955, pp. 354-359;)  
fig. 3 Study for the placement of the *Triumph of death* fresco (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
fig. 4 Study for the support of Laurana's Madonna (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
fig. 5 Carini stone staircase (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
fig. 6 Detail of the hexagonal steps of the Carini stone staircase (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
fig. 7 View of the Gagini and Laurana room (Giuseppe Iannello, 2014)  
fig. 8 Antonello da Messina's room wooden panelling (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
figg. 9-10 Detail of the support for the "three saint's panels" by Antonello da Messina (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)  
fig. 11 View of the crosses' room (Archive Palazzo Abatellis)  
fig. 12 view of the Mabuse triptych's room (Palazzo Abatellis Archive)

### 5.3 Rapporteur/date

Matteo Iannello, February 2015

## 6 Fiche report examination by ISC/R

name of examining ISC member: date of examination:

approval:

working party/ref. n°: NAI ref. n°:

comments:



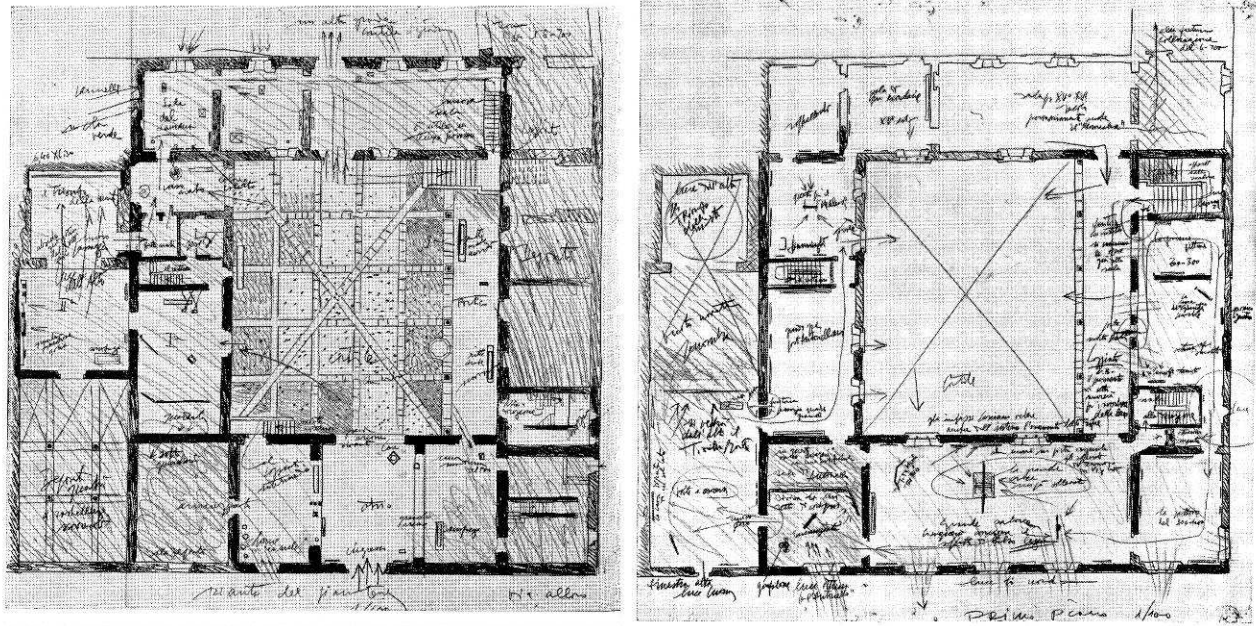


Fig. 2 Study for the artworks placement

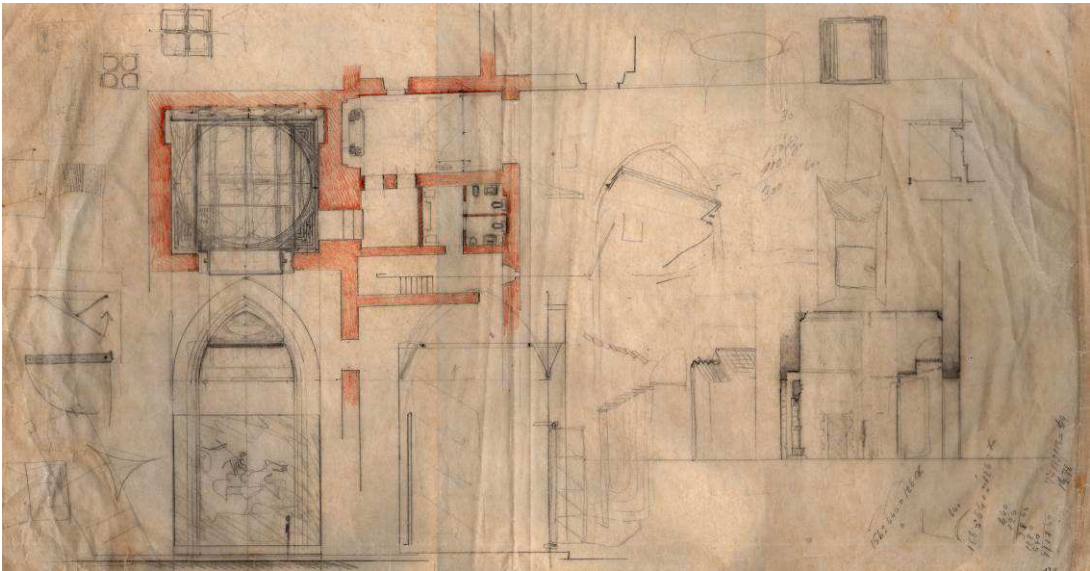


Fig. 3 Study for the placement of the *Triumph of death* fresco

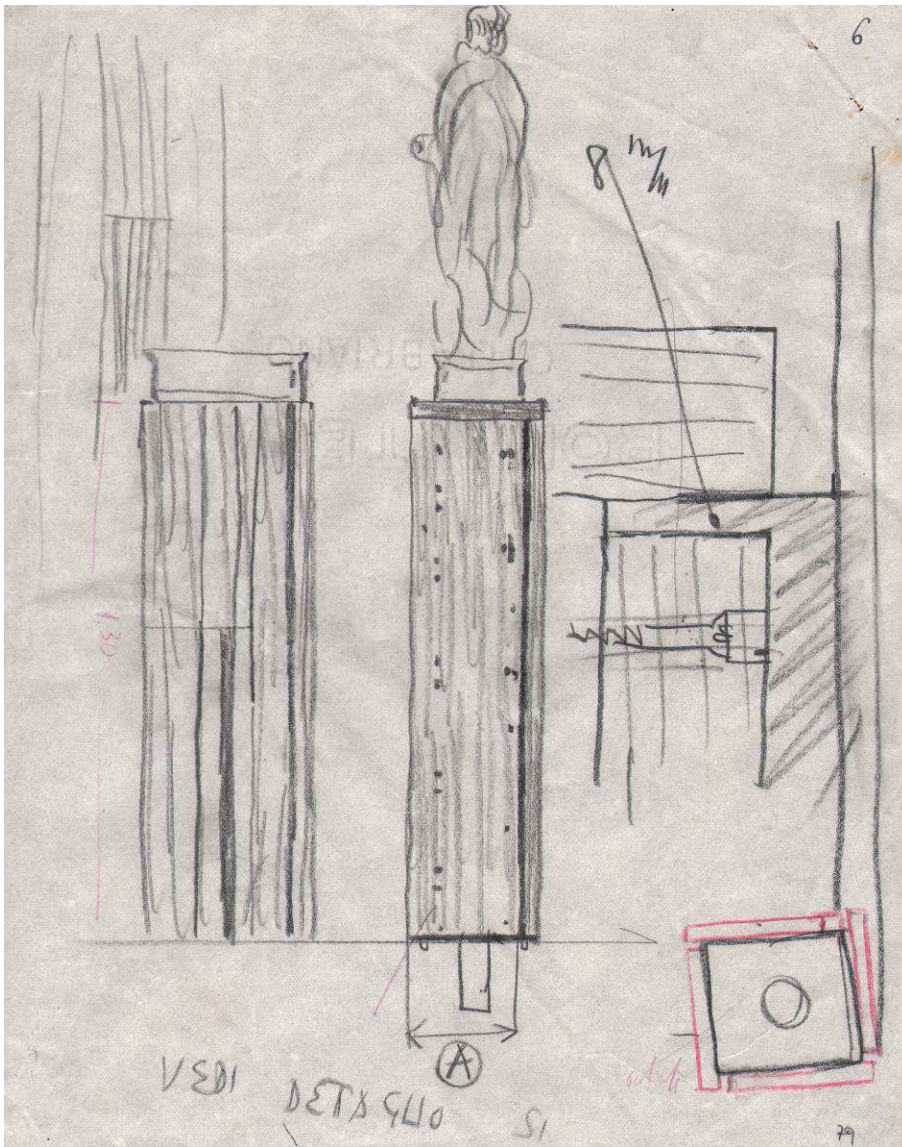


Fig. 4 Study for the support of Laurana's Madonna





Fig. 5 Detail of the hexagonal steps of the Carini stone staircase



Fig. 6 Detail of the hexagonal steps of the Carini stone staircase



Fig. 7 View of the Gagini and Laurana room (2014)



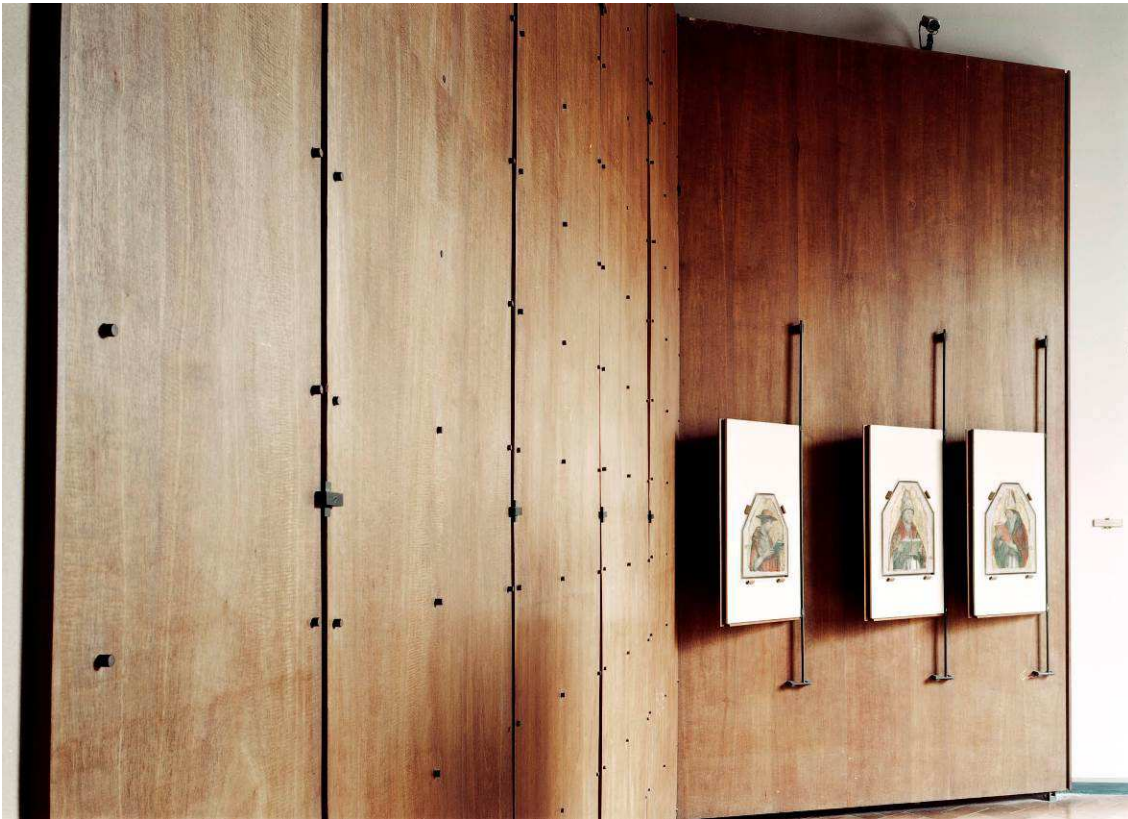


Fig. 8 Antonello da Messina's room wooden panelling



Figg. 9-10 Detail of the support for the "three saint's panels" by Antonello da Messina



Fig. 11 View of the crosses' room



Fig. 12 view of the Mabuse triptych's room