

“NERI&HU INTERPRETS CARLO SCARPA’S RICH ARCHITECTURE OF THRESHOLDS AT MAXXI, ROME”

*stir world*; FEB 2022

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## Neri&Hu interprets Carlo Scarpa’s rich architecture of thresholds at MAXXI, Rome

*Traversing Thresholds*, an exhibition by the Chinese practice at MAXXI museum, presents six installations that discover a world of crossing, of pause and space.

by Zohra Khan | Published on : Feb 03, 2022

In an ongoing exhibition at the **MAXXI** museum in **Rome**, **Shanghai**-based studio **Neri&Hu** investigates a key architectural feature from the oeuvre of famed **Italian architect**, Carlo Scarpa. Exploring Scarpa’s vision of the threshold – an in-between, ambiguous space that allows a physical mediation between two contrasting physical environments – architects Lyndon Neri and Rossana Hu reinterpret its diverse architectural experiences in the form of six key **installations** within the showcase. Titled *Traversing Thresholds*, the exhibition is the fourth edition from MAXXI’s curatorial program ‘Studio Visit’ in which practitioners from the field of architecture and design are invited to create a dialogue with the work of one or more luminaries from the museum’s permanent architectural collection. Curated by MAXXI Design Curator, Domitilla Dardi, the **exhibition** is the result of a collaboration between MAXXI and Italian design brand Alcantara.



The exhibition looks into the archival work of master Italian architect, Carlo Scarpa  
*Image: Simone Bossi*

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Scarpa’s obsessive eye for detail and multifaceted approach to compositions often found roots in oriental themes. This influence goes back to his travels to the East, particularly his trysts from Japan in later career that intrigued him to experiment and find new meanings in the play of space and void. Scale, accessibility and intimacy were conditions his architectural repertoire reveal heavily invested in. The founders of Neri&Hu believe that the Chinese notion of “jian”, which means “a gap” or “a pause”, has a profound presence in their own practice. The plurality of experiences that evoke as a result of the meeting of two dichotomous spaces is a recurring thread in their works.



Neri&Hu presents six multi-scale threshold installations that investigate the architecture of Carlo Scarpa

*Image: Simone Bossi*

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Each threshold is described as a ‘moment’ within the showcase

*Image: Simone Bossi*

With an aim to deconstruct the architecture of thresholds – a metaphor for crossing, pause and reflection – the studio’s spatial installations examine materiality, voyeurism, and the flow of circulation. The meticulously crafted exhibits uphold a similar attention to craft, detail and tactility that Scarpa, the master Italian craftsman was known for.

**Lyndon Neri** and **Rossana Hu** walk STIR through the driving idea of the exhibition. The following text also features edited excerpts from the interview.

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## The threshold as a moment

*"We referred to the thresholds as moments because we wanted to emphasise the interaction between the visitor and each constructed threshold. From the very early stages of the design concept phase, we were interested in creating "moments of encounter" between visitors and the architectural insertions, as well as between the visitors themselves. Each threshold is designed in such a way so as to reveal a certain gaze, a particular way of inhabiting or interacting with architecture. In these curated moments, some are highlighting a moment of introspection and solitude, while others are encouraging social interaction, voyeurism and communal gatherings. The thresholds provide the stage and backdrop for supporting a spectrum of social interactions."*



*Pivot Plane* – a threshold moment where a door is expressed as a simple pivoting plane, composed within the wall  
Image: Simone Bossi

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*Eroded Corner* is designed as the most enclosed and introverted threshold within the exhibition  
*Image: Courtesy of MAXXI & Alcantara*

The first installation titled *Pivot Plane* reveals a pivot door seamlessly attached to a wall like “a piece of tessellation”. As per Neri&Hu, Scarpa often employed an interlocking language using the door portal element to deliberately counteract an otherwise intimate and celebratory moment. The second work – *Eroded Corner*– plays with the notion of “disrupting the reading of an object by dematerialising and eroding corners”. Featuring an enclosed casing wrapped interiorly in pleated blue wall panels, subtracted walls and corners from the massing evoke a spatial tension between the solid and the void. The

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*Inserted Landscape* alludes to a forum-like space

*Image: Simone Bossi*

## Scarpa’s approach to the threshold, a state of pure possibilities

*“During our extensive research into Scarpa’s work through the visual materials of the MAXXI archive, we were at first very overwhelmed by the scope of his work. Scarpa really embodies the interdisciplinary spirit Neri&Hu strives for in our own work and he had an amazing ability to blur the boundaries between architecture, landscape and **interior design**. Not only did he design spaces, but he treated every element the hand could touch as an opportunity for design innovation. We arrived at thresholds as a topic of study because we were looking for an approach in his practice that spanned across his works in domestic interiors, architecture and landscape. What inspired us was that Scarpa took*

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*very conventional thresholds – a door, a wall opening, a window aperture or a landscape platform, and transformed them into rich, spatial experiences. Doorways were not seen as simple portals but as part of a wall tessellation. Windows and apertures are employed to dematerialise corners and make us question certain readings of objecthood and space. The way in which Scarpa oriented and manipulated primitive geometry and axis also created unexpected moments of spatial friction to heighten a certain sense of discovery. His approach to creating thresholds, was perhaps intuitive and not very rationalised, it pervades a lot of his work and only represents one part of Scarpa’s architectural experimentation in his legacy.”*



*Slit Window* pays homage to Carlo Scarpa’s use of elongated windows and openings in architecture  
Image: Courtesy of MAXXI & Alcantara

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*Off Axis* offers an unexpected vantage point to the other thresholds

*Image: Simone Bossi*



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*Floating Datum* takes inspiration from the horizontal datum, a recurring element in Scarpa’s works  
Image: Courtesy of MAXXI & Alcantara

Scarpa’s use of gaps and elongated slit openings - the duality of these apertures in framing views and opening slots of illumination - are visualised in the fourth threshold named *Slit Window*. The intermediate space within this composition features a few reproductions of the master designer’s **architectural drawings**.

Elsewhere, the remaining two installations confront Scarpa’s use of layered portals and rotated geometries, and his expression of infusing ambivalence in transient spaces. *Off Axis* aims to convey visual depth and intrigue with an interactive millwork whereas a sense of shelter and a unique visual axis takes centrestage in *Floating Datum*.

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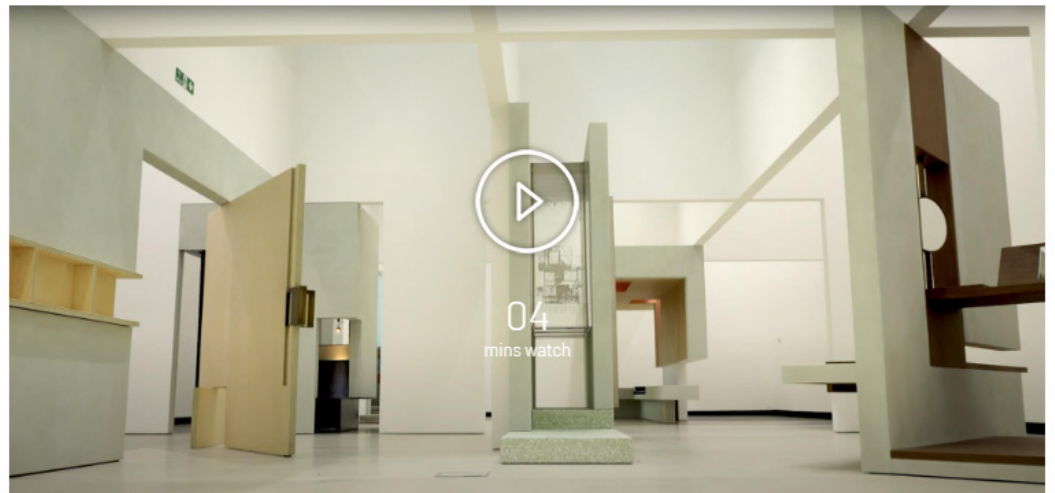
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## The threshold as a collective

*“One of the biggest reasons we didn’t focus only on one project [of Carlo Scarpa] is that we felt the idea of threshold is best understood when taken as a collective. However, we do have a favourite project [of Carlo Scarpa], and it’s probably Castelvecchio in Verona, **Italy**. It’s a threshold in terms of the briefing of history and modernity; a stitching of the past and present and future— something we deal with often at Neri&Hu and still cannot get close to Scarpa’s master interpretation of the subject.”*



A video walkthrough of the exhibition

*Video: Courtesy of MAXXI & Alcantara*

*Neri&Hu’s ‘Traversing Thresholds’ is on view at the National Museum of XXI Century Arts (MAXXI) in Rome, Italy, till March 13, 2022.*