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Commemoration – Prof. Marco Frascari (1945–2013)

The architectural community mourns the loss of the great storyteller, architect, author and educator, Marco Frascari, who passed away on 2 June 2013 in Ottawa, Canada, after a prolonged illness. He was 68. A son of Mantua, Marco absorbed the rich traditions of life, art, architecture and the humanist traditions in North Italy, studying at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Venice, and completing a *Dottore in Architettura* at the *Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia* (IUAV). He practiced professionally in Venice and taught at IUAV before moving to the United States, where he was awarded a Master of Science in Architecture at the University of Cincinnati and a PhD in Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. As Professor, Marco held positions at the University of Pennsylvania, Georgia Tech, and the Washington-Alexandria Architectural Center (WAAC) of Virginia Tech, where he founded the PhD program in Architectural Representation. Since 2005, he had been Director of Carleton University's Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism.

Marco was a visiting professor at University of Nottingham sometime in 2005 when I taught there, and that was my first encounter with him in person. Knowing his penchant for food, we hosted a feast in his honour at our modest house that I was renovating myself. Marco showed me the fine art of Venetian plastering technique. My wife, a superb cook, prepared many rare oriental dishes and Marco not only identified all the dishes and the ingredients, but he always had a marvellous story to tell. More interestingly the stories usually had something to do with Mantua, such as the story of how the Lotus flower ended up in the River Mincio. Of his stories, Paul Emmons, a former student and later colleague at WAAC once remarked: "... if you checked, they'd always be true!" Such was his manner with students, he would teach via parables rather than instruct, and the lessons learnt with a sense of wonderment always penetrated deeper and lasted a lifetime. A genuinely generous teacher, Marco celebrated architecture's capacity with dreams and the imagination, with the visual possibilities of a gestated mind coming to life in palpable vivacity, in colour and outline. He was an unconventional scholar who loved to interpret the written word but who equally loved to observe and interpret his acuity through drawing. He worked in his adopted Anglophone domain largely through translations of the esoteric depths of humanist learning entrenched in the Veneto and much of North Italy, publishing in little known journals, and non-mainstream press. One of my early

Marco Frascari, Washington-Alexandria Architectural Center (WAAC) of Virginia Tech, sometime between 2000 and 2005 (photographer unknown)

encounters with Marco was via his book *Monsters of Architecture*, published by the independent press of Rowman and Littlefield. Provocatively titled, this would be a hallmark of his work, where curious observation is transformed into many aphoristic moments of poetic enlightenment through fertile encounters of the inhabited world's richest and deepest cultures. The strength of his material surfaced and the "Tell Tale Detail" became a popular essay that was widely read, re-read, translated, listed as required reading in classes and further disseminated on a global scale. Channelling *De Vita Beata* the dialogue of Seneca the Younger, Marco promulgated a happy architecture in his teaching, his writing and his person.

I drove Marco to Lincoln, UK, in 2005 for his first visit – he wanted to see the cathedral and the resting place of Robert Grosseteste. My last personal encounter with Marco sadly was an evening also in Lincoln, not long ago, where I wanted to pick his brain on a musing I was investigating about prints, or in Italian, *stampe*. True to form, the stories of Diana of Mantua, the Italian engraver and publisher and the first woman allowed to sell work under her feminine identification, would surface and not only pepper the stories but pivot the lesson that Marco would give. I had to travel to Australia, and could not stay in Lincoln where Marco was a keynote speaker at a conference, and as he wished me well on my travels, of course we conversed about the many friends that Marco has in these parts, where I now find myself writing his obituary. May you rest in peace, Professor Marco Frascari, my dear friend and teacher – you have made architectural encounters so much richer for so many around the world.

Raymond Quek