

INHABITING THE FUTURE VISIONS FROM THE 17TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION

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DEBATE

Dying from Beauty

Giovanni Attili, Giacomo-Maria Salerno

City to Dust, realized by Lorian Beijaert e Arna Mačić from Amsterdam's Studio LA in collaboration with designer Baukje Trenning, is among the installations of the 17. International Architecture Exhibition one of those who deeper interacts with the venue where it takes place. A terrazzo flooring recreates the map of Venice, forcing visitors to cross it and to experience the consequences of each of their steps, which constantly breaks away parts of the artwork. Through this interactive project, Studio LA succeeds in materializing in front of the eyes of the visitors and beneath their feet the extractive process through which the city of Venice is daily consumed by millions of tourists, endangering its survival as a real city both in a social, cultural and material way.

Everyone who walks over the installation, making it crumble into dust, is then forced to recognize his own role, as a Biennale and Venice visitor, in the constant unfolding of one of the major challenges that many cities are facing worldwide, that of overtourism and its related colonial economy.

Promised Land

Annalisa Metta

The prevailing sensation, when visiting the 17. Biennale of Architecture in Venice, is a constant sense of contrition. There is no palingenesis, neither any imagination, rather a subtle and sharp punitive spirit towards we humans that have not been able to protect ourselves from what we have desired, feeling astonished in front of our own catastrophes and failures. Above all, there is a disarmament of the project, which seems unable to offer configurative scenarios. The recurring focus on places of extreme nature, from oceans to polar continents, on planetary geographical narratives, and on raw materials, such as soil, water, snow, outside of any design hypotheses, supports this reading. Nature seems the worldly messiah of the Anthropocene to which entrusting the responsibility of finding solutions, due that design give up to. Among the few exceptions, the Israeli pavilion recalls the duty of the project and demonstrates, through the problematic story of the construction of the promised land, the operability of the landscape and that it is always a matter of design, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

A Great Many Other Bodies

Cristina Bianchetti

"To preserve itself the body needs a great many other bodies." That's not the answer to the question *How will we live together?* by Hashim Sarkis curator of the 17th International Architecture Exhibition. It is a famous statement in a masterpiece of Western culture: *Ethics* by Baruch Spinoza,

published in 1677. It is difficult not to think about it reasoning around this Biennale Architettura so poor of architecture and so populated with animals, technical, human bodies. How will we live together? How we share the space occupied by other bodies, human and not-human? And even more radical: will we still leave together? Together with whom? Will we reinvent new form and spaces of co-existence? This paper questions the «many other bodies» of the Biennale in the belief that this can say something more general about the Architecture's contemporary conditions and the tensions that run through it, as well as on this 17. Exposure and the criticism it has had.

Ars Natura Bifrons. A Few Considerations on the Biennale of Hashim Sarkis

Orazio Carpenzano

The input provided by the curator of this Biennale is to seek solutions that will allow us all to live better together: human beings, animals, plants, minerals, perhaps even reflecting on what we are reluctant to touch and which, as Don DeLillo noted, often appears to be the very fabric of our salvation.

The architecture that can be observed outside and inside the pavilions in Venice confesses a desire to use everything, every content offered by the arts and sciences, to create space extended toward research. In this explorative territory we can trace transitory but necessary maps for defining spaces in which to experiment with ingenuity, in which to seek out proposals that can help us overcome the devastation induced by the predatory relationship toward other living entities and the biosphere.

The pandemic has exalted the importance of space, dragging into ruin so many spatialities, above all those constructed in the past, to confine us within the *pleasures of the people*.

This Biennale indicates the need to rethink these spaces because we must break up a world that we still perceive as linked to places and visions that no longer exist. We must do this quickly, not only to rediscover new forms, words and practices, but also to initiate a change of direction awaited by our planet, and which appears of such interest to new generations.

There are many problems to be faced, and one that frames all of them: the crisis of Western thinking, resulting from its inability to imagine new ways of living together within the habitat that includes us all. We architects must return to working with space, in the broadest sense of the term, to comprehend what can redefine it and how to reform it, above by acquiring tools for connecting what was once disconnected and for disconnecting what was once improperly connected.

Waiting for the Milk of Dreams

Sara Marini

This article is about the imaginative power of projects and their few traces in the exhibition *How will we live together?* curated by Hashim Sarkis. Drawing on key words

and design principles that hark back to the architecture of the early 20th century, the exhibition seeks to give substance to an alliance between architecture itself and the most recent scientific-technological research, forgetting the magical world, that is, to what extent and in what ways form and figure can build communities and hopes. By separating science from myth, architecture is orphaned of its twin pillars. While the exhibited architectural models trace evolutions or repetitions of large common dwellings or primitive huts, some narratives built on paper or through the unexpected return of the tool of painting keep the dreamlike stream of architecture alive: a promised path in the manifesto-text of the next Venice International Art Exhibition.

A New Spatial Contract?

Luca Molinari

The title selected by Hashim Sarkis for this Biennale is charged with prophetic meaning. It responds to the pressure of a mounting anti-urban sentiment that, during the months of the lockdown, appears to have passed through the minds of many experts and commentators who rang the death knell of the future destiny of our cities.

At the end of the third wave, and in the wake of the largest vaccination campaign in history, it appears that the most pessimistic reflections on our metropolises have rapidly faded, while the title *How will we live together?* maintains its urgency in asking how we wish to imagine the places we will inhabit in the coming decades. The question launched by the curator and the widespread call for a new generation of authors to propose visions, has instead had a destabilising effect on the traditional and reassuring formula, strongly focused during many recent editions on the relationship between curator-demiurge and a recounting of the state-of-the-art in the world of contemporary architecture.

The structure in five thematic sections, organised according to a scalar structure from the infinitely immense to the microscopic, has produced projects and installations the majority of which are interesting for their fragility and problematic nature. It is also a Biennale that appears to clash violently with many of the more professionally defined choices of previous editions.

Back to the Future. The Vision of Lina Bo Bardi

Maria Argenti

The awarding of the Golden Lion in memory of Lina Bo Bardi is an occasion for a reflection on the relationship between architecture and diverse cultural identities, between tradition and progress, between identity and togetherness. All at a time when the global pandemic crisis appears to mark a true and proper turning point in history.

Lina quickly understood the critical questions of her era. For this she insisted, her cries falling on deaf ears, on the social dimension of the architect's labours, pursuing an approach that integrated environmental questions.

She contested both the investment in uncontrolled, banal and inhuman development, and the past-thinking ideal of postmodern movements. She worked with a diverse concept of modernity, which was visionary without being paranoid, bound to history without being rooted

in the past, common without being banal, founded on the possibility to accept tradition and diversity, combining identity with hybridization.

Refuting the cult of purity, she proposed a dynamic idea of identity, rooted in the keyword together. Coordinating was not simply a question of connecting, but understanding the underlying unity of everything.

Her lesson offers us a key to formulating a hypothesis for a sustainable future. The re-examination of her work challenges us to learn, also from indigenous cultures, another way of "designing" the future. Not to repeat what has already been done. But a different way of imagining, with an intelligence we have lost, new projects for a new world.

The 17th Biennale and Its Lions. Disputes Between the Recent Past and an Immediate Future

Luis Rojo de Castro

The 17th Biennale of Architecture granted a Golden Lion to three distinguished architects in recognition of their works and legacies: The Italian Brazilian Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992), the Italian Vittorio Gregotti (1927-2020) and the Spanish Rafael Moneo (1937).

If we naturally interpret it as an intentional choice, the three "Lions" portray a complex panorama. But, more significant, it might question the fundamental demand launched by the 17th Biennale: to involve architecture, as a technical support and a political and social instrument, in the construction of our time characterized by global political conflicts and the pressing threats of climate change.

The 17th Biennale exhibits a controversy between the recent past and the immediate future. But it is also a reminder of the environmental warning that signals a turning point, which at best is taking place or, at worst, has already occurred. And consequently, like other media, techniques or disciplines, architecture must choose between the disciplinary discourses of the late XX Century or its integration within an expanded scenario. The "spatial contracts" that ought to be established between institutions and citizens, humans and ecosystems, or the new digital technology and the "old" natural world that occupy the pavilions of the Giardini and the Arsenal put to a test the instrumental condition of architecture, its necessary reorientation to face our current dilemmas. And they call for the transformation of the productive and technical systems as well as of the new conceptual frameworks necessary to put into practice a rebalanced relationship between nature and culture, or between environmentalism and technological dependence.

Will Architecture Save Us?

Filippo Lambertucci

Michele De Lucchi, with the AMDL Circle group, presents in the Venezia pavilion, the Education Stations project as part of a broader program, the Earth Stations, with which for some time he has been investigating buildings destined to overcome conventional types and functions in view of a different future for human interactions. The entire Earth Stations program entrusts a central role to architectural form, not only as a synthesis of technical and comfort factors, but also as an emblem

of a role that is given back to architecture in reformulating the buildings in which humanity represents itself. These are “active architectures” which act as catalysts for the activities of a humanity characterized by movement on a global dimension; at the same time, they are highly symbolic figures, who return to explore the meaning and need for a monument. The AMDL Circle proposal has an admittedly visionary dimension, which recalls, even in certain formal analogies, the experience of the Glaserne Kette movement, which flourished a century ago in similar conditions of cultural crisis and fueled by similar intentions of radical re-foundation. In a Biennale characterized by the prevalence of performative and procedural proposals, the Education Stations bring the question of the form and quality of space back to the center of the discussion.

Chapeau Lina Ghotmeh

Fabrizio Toppetti

The building examined, now universally known as the Stone Garden and located in Beirut, was designed by Lina Ghotmeh. This project already boasts a notable critical fortune; it has been written about in various reviews with a wide distribution, Italy included, even before its success in Venice. The model encountered along the itinerary through the Corderie was impossible to miss. It was the first clue that confirmed the fact of being in an exhibition of architecture. And this gave rise to some contrasting feelings.

It was in 2011 that Lina Ghotmeh was commissioned by her friend, the photographer and director Fouad el-Khoury, to design a residential complex annexed to a foundation dedicated to art. The project matured slowly and certainly, decanting and favoured by the passing of time. The result is surprising. *Tout se tient*: the earth and the sky, the body and space, context and memories, nature and artifice, matter and forms. The building reveals a particular attitude, anything but didascalical, of the *mise-en-scène* of a rich imagination, from the craggy formations of Pigeon's Rock to the city's bombed-out buildings, without emphasis and without being overwhelmed. Everything is transposed into a sculptural, osmotic and welcoming plasticism, conquering, without too much effort, an adherent beauty, sited and suitable, in which the fact of being made well is anything but secondary.

The Metaphors of Water

Francesco Defilippis

Among the natural elements, water is the one that most represents the idea of circularity, transformation, regeneration. This is the reason why it is full of meanings linked to life and death.

Nowadays, water is associated on the one hand with the exhaustion of resources, as a precious and no longer unlimited necessity, on the other with the vulnerability and fragility of our planet, as an element capable of causing destruction following ongoing climate change. At the same time, water is a resource to be protected and a danger to be protected from.

The installation of the Danish Pavilion at the 17. International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale,

entitled *Con-nect-ed-ness*, takes on these aspects and condenses them into the theme of “circularity” staged through water, the perception of its static and dynamic forms and its sound. The message that the curator and designers intend to instill is that of the “inter-connection” in space and time between human actions, of their reciprocity and interdependence. And the water that flows, evaporates, percolates, gushes and that the visitors drink inside the pavilion is the perfect metaphor.

Maison Fibre or: How the Arachne Robot Weaves the Home of the Future

Tullia Iori

Maison Fibre is the result of a decade of experiments conducted at the University of Stuttgart by a multidisciplinary team that was recently funded by a generous German grant. Within the Cluster of Excellence IntCDC, Achim Menges and Jan Knippers are leading researchers in computer science and robotics, materials technology, architecture and structural engineering towards a new way of digital and automated building. The house on display in the Arsenal is the elemental assembly of square panels: the innovation lies in the fact that each panel has been woven by a robot, using translucent glass fibers reinforced by black carbon fibers. The panels are structurally optimized on the weight parameter (thus minimal consumption of materials, which are still very expensive). The research program dreams of replacing glass and carbon fibers with new natural or mineral, strong, durable fibers that teams of agile and precise robots can weave directly on site, like new Arachne. Will this really be the future of construction? Perhaps not, but research in the field of robotics, materials and digital design applied to construction will make enormous progress thanks to the work of these scholars.

Precision vs Approximation. The US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2021

Sergio Pone

The *American Framing* operation could be seen as a lesson in architecture.

A lesson that, like all good lessons, does not pretend to dictate precise rules but attempts to investigate a possible path forward. By simply telling the story of American homes, this event is not presented directly as a model; it does not claim the need to build all the houses of the world with a balloon frame; nor does it intend to exalt the technological power of the American colossus. It presents us with a point of view, new and diverse for us, according to which a building with an “imperfect” enclosure and constructed using a method that elevates approximation to an objective, can generate “wellbeing.” It suggests that we must reduce the gap we have created between homes and their inhabitants: users must be restored to the heart of choices and, for their part, builders and designers must favour this process of re-appropriation. We must reduce complexity to render processes more accessible, we must manage to control the race toward excellent performance which is often useless in common construction. What is more, blessed by our climate, the wellbeing of the “inhabitant,” and not the “user,” can often be achieved through imperfect “performance.”