

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good received rave reviews from countless international media outlets. Attached is a small sampling of coverage. The header on each page includes a clickable link to online sources.

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



U.S. Pavilion
13th International
Architecture
Exhibition
la Biennale
di Venezia
Aug 29 - Nov 25, 2012



**INSTITUTE
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DESIGN**

from the Biennale jury:
Special Mention
FOR NATIONAL PARTICIPATION

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Projects Without Architects Steal the Show



Iwan Baan

A cinder-block installation at the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale is inspired by a community of squatters in Caracas, Venezuela. [More Photos »](#)

By MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

Published: September 11, 2012

VENICE — Save for a few projects and pavilions, probably the less said, the better, about “Common Ground,” the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, organized by the fine British architect David Chipperfield.

With a sea change (partly generational, mostly philosophical) overtaking architecture, and attention turning from glamorous buildings and celebrated designers to broader issues like urbanism, public space, social responsibility and collaboration, “[Common Ground](#)” is well intended but, alas, a missed opportunity.

Its organizers nod toward some fresh agenda, with the biennale’s president, Paolo Baratta, writing in the exhibition catalog about architects emerging “from the crisis of identity they are going through,” and rediscovering “the irrevocable relationship between architecture, space and town planning.” Mr. Chipperfield notes that architects, once again, are paying more attention to cities, which are “created in collaboration with every citizen.”

But the urbanist gloss notwithstanding, the show mostly just glides over issues like public housing and health (there’s a paper-thin section on social housing), the environment, informal settlements, economic decline and protest. It pays almost no attention to the developing world, to designers from Africa or China, and precious little to female architects, aside

You might partly describe the “Common Ground” title as a bid to imply some curatorial shift from architecture’s makers to users, but in the event that shift often becomes just another excuse for the usual hagiography. So there is a room devoted to press clippings about Herzog & de Meuron’s [still-unbuilt Hamburg concert hall](#), as if to imply that the compelling but contentious and increasingly costly project has evolved in some collaborative and organic fashion, via news media coverage and public interaction.

A gallery devised by Norman Foster and others celebrating Mr. Foster’s iconic [HSBC Bank building in Hong Kong](#), a nearly 30-year-old office tower, presents drawings, photographs and videos about the architecture’s reception and afterlife. It includes remarkable images of hundreds of Filipino women, domestic workers, who, in the absence of adequate public space at street level in Hong Kong, take over the bank’s covered underbelly and the surrounding financial district on Sundays. That’s fascinating stuff, and a rare glimpse here at real-world, spontaneous urbanism, but the whole display remains nonetheless a self-advertisement for the architect, by other means.

The exhibition still positions architects as producers of surplus value through aesthetic quality, less so as players at the decision-making table, organizing cities and communities. Cautious, dated, with too many cooks (Mr. Chipperfield farmed out many sections to friends like Mr. Foster), the show suggests above all an uncertainty about how to unpack, evaluate, present and tame the messy, multilayered social, political, economic and architectural processes that go into making good buildings and places today

Biennales by their nature are sprawling, skin-deep omnibus festivals, contrived above all for tourism and congenitally awkward as a medium for architecture. But the tone of ambivalence here, with one foot in the past and the other gingerly testing the new, makes for uneven stagecraft and is certainly not as complex and elegant as [Mr. Chipperfield’s own architecture](#)

As for gems in the rubble: Anupama Kundoo, the Indian architect, has constructed a full-size model of part of her two-story Wall House in southern India.

Crimson Architectural Historians, from the Netherlands, explore the devolution of the once-progressive concept of “new towns,” from postwar experiments in healthy cities devised by architects for the common good to gated communities and commercial developments for the few.

And Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée, led by Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu, presents a collectivist, bottom-up enterprise to enlist residents and municipal authorities in neighborhood improvements and urban agriculture in Colombes, outside Paris.

Having lived in Berlin for years, I was grateful for a meditation by Thomas Kupke, Philipp Oswalt and others on the closing of the Tempelhof Airport, one of the glories of 1930s design, a relic of postwar glamour and civilized travel. The recent takeover of that windswept former airfield by citizens, who sometimes use it as a park, is proof that the thirst for public space has no limit, but as Mr. Foster is quoted saying about the airport’s demise, an architectural landmark was recklessly sacrificed “on the altar of commercial development.”

Elsewhere, a proposal in the exhibition by Jean Nouvel and Mia Hagg to remake a blighted tangle of highways spanning the water in the Slussen area of Stockholm envisions a diverse and lively series of pedestrian-friendly public spaces. The city has rejected the idea in favor of another proposal. I was glad to see the Nouvel-Hagg plan laid out here.

The show’s coup de théâtre is by Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner of Urban-Think Tank, in concert with Justin McGuirk, the architecture critic for The Guardian newspaper in London, and the intrepid architectural photographer Iwan Baan. Their subject is the well-known but endlessly fascinating Torre de David in Caracas, an unfinished 45-story ruin from the early 1990s, built (as it happens, by a relative of Mr. Brillembourg’s, now dead) to be a bank headquarters, abandoned when a financial crisis hit Venezuela in 1993, and lately appropriated by squatters who have improvised apartments, shops, bodegas and gyms on 20-odd floors and who have in essence created a vertical slum.

Lacking elevators, exterior windows and walls, the building has electricity and a system of plumbing in which tenants take turns hauling water and manning tanks. Mr. Baan’s photographs show the place thrumming. The tower is a rebuke to the authorities in oil-rich Venezuela, who continue to

make empty promises about providing adequate housing for millions of poor and dispossessed residents of the sprawling slums that ring the city. (Those promises are repeated in the official Venezuelan pavilion here.) Meanwhile, the ramshackle ingenuity of tenants becomes a model for the cinder-block installation in the Arsenale, which includes a restaurant as community center, serving not-bad arepas and beer.

Among national pavilions, each organized independently, Spain, Russia, Germany, Israel, Japan, Britain and a few others have generated some buzz, but the United States deserves the last word.



Every city is a fixer-upper, as one architect puts it in a video running at the pavilion: that’s the American message. “Spontaneous Interventions” is the title of the presentation, which highlights 124 small-scale, often anonymous, mostly collaborative projects to improve cities. They range from pop-up book-shares in disused phone booths to plug-in street furniture for food cart patrons; from portable playgrounds and guerrilla gardens that hijack newspaper-vending boxes for ready-made planters, to flea markets on abandoned lots

Organized by Cathy Lang Ho, Ned Cramer and David van der Leer for the Institute for Urban Design, along with Michael Sorkin, the institute’s chairman, and Anne Guiney, the show may not be the first but it is the latest and one of the most panoramic surveys of this sort of insurgent, unplanned, provisional, do-it-yourself micro-cultural citizen activism.

That many of the projects here skirt authority and don’t involve architects suggests not that architects aren’t important or that cities don’t depend on top-down plans. It suggests that cities and architects still have a ways to go to catch up with an increasingly restless public’s appetite for better design and better living.

And that the public isn’t waiting.

Les bâtisseurs au temps des catastrophes

La Biennale de Venise célèbre cette architecture qui s'emploie à construire sur les décombres

Architecture

Venise (Italie)
Envoyé spécial

Venise célèbre la vertu des catastrophes. Plusieurs fois par jour en été, Vénitien et touristes voient passer sur le canal de la Giudecca d'immenses paquebots à peine moins hauts que la campanile de Saint Marc et dont les occupants peuvent contempler la ville comme une maquette minuscule. Venise, patrie adoptive de Palladio – le constructeur de San Giorgio Maggiore – perdit alors son échelle et le sens que l'histoire persiste à lui donner. Cela n'a pas troublé les fêtes de la Biennale d'architecture, pas plus que la tour de 253 mètres de haut que le couturier Pierre Cardin voudrait se donner le plaisir de construire à une portée de canon de la ville.

Le jour même de l'inauguration de la Mostra d'architecture, le 29 août, qui a élevé ce cadeau piégé en « événement collatéral », Cardin, soutenu par la mairie, en vantait les vertus à Marghera, le port de Venise où les paquebots attendent leur tour de manège. Pas de problème quant au design années 1950 de la tour : profil de cendrier évasé, la sobriété en moins. Le hic, c'est l'échelle, et le sentiment que la chose est issue d'un de ces vieux instituts de projets chinois qui faisaient naguère le bonheur des maires mégalomanes.

La Biennale 2012, treizième du genre, s'avère riche de ces catastrophes architecturales, comme elle

l'est de grandes projets qui tournent au désastre, de cataclysmes qui viennent anéantir les espoirs mis dans le monde urbain. Étonnant paradoxe sur ce site désormais double. Ici l'absolue beauté de l'ancien arsenal, longue aventure constructive sans équivalent dans l'histoire des ports par sa durée (près d'un millénaire), son ampleur, son harmonie. Et là, la floraison constructive des Giardini, où les plus grands maîtres d'œuvre (de Gio Ponti à Carlo Scarpa, d'Alvar Aalto à Sverre Fehn) furent invités à abriter leurs cousins peintres et sculpteurs jusqu'à cette année de 1980 où l'architecture trouva l'occasion de se célébrer elle-même, première grand-messe postmoderne du monde contemporain : beaucoup pensent que cette première Mostra d'architecture fut aussi la dernière du monde moderne et la première du monde futur.

Sœur d'infortune

Comment le commissaire de cette 13^e Biennale, David Chipperfield, en est-il venu à flirter avec le thème de la catastrophe ? C'est qu'il s'y connaît pour avoir restauré le Neues Museum de Berlin, rare élément survivant des bombardements dans cette capitale qui n'en finit pas d'expier la guerre par l'érection d'une profusion de monuments.

Il y a d'abord les débâcles financières. La palme revient à Hambourg, sœur d'infortune de Berlin, largement antanée en 1943 par les bombardements alliés. Le projet de la Philharmonie de l'Elbe



Le pavillon nippon, qui expose à Venise des projets d'habitation dans la zone sinistrée de Fukushima, a remporté un Lion d'or spécial. (M. ASA-CESINAG)

somptueuse salle de 2150 sièges, conçue pour HafenCity, projet de réaménagement du vieux port, par les Suisses Jacques Herzog et Pierre de Meuron. Le projet, d'une beauté fatale – on peut d'ores et déjà en voir la structure achevée – devait être terminé en 2010 pour un coût de 77 millions d'euros.

En 2011, l'ouverture fut repoussée à 2013, alors que son budget passait le cap des 476 millions, puis à 2014 ou 2015, mettant à rude épreuve les nerfs des financiers publics et privés, qui se consolent à y a peu en évoquant le coût d'un Airbus A380 standard (environ 300 millions d'euros). Herzog et Meuron ont choisi de présenter l'histoire sans fin de ce fabuleux vaisseau fantôme à travers les comptes rendus de la pres-

se allemande. Courageux, disent les uns ; cynique pensent d'autres.

En 2002, au sortir de l'horreur du 11-Septembre, le pavillon des États-Unis avait fait sensation en transposant Ground Zero (le site du World Trade Center) sur le sol vénitien. Dix ans plus tard, il renoue avec le succès (mention spéciale du jury), en trouvant un véritable sens au thème de cette biennale – *common ground* –, à travers la déclinaison de 120 interventions spontanées conduites par les habitants, autant de réponses à des motifs d'inquiétude partagés, dans un espace ravagé. Une dédication de la catastrophe à l'échelle de l'individu, petites catastrophes vécues sans mort d'homme immédiate dont la violence fait pourtant boule de neige.

La tragédie, désormais révélée et amplifiée par les médias est ainsi devenue un protagoniste essentiel du monde urbain. Le Japon en fait l'expérience régulière. 1995 : tremblement de terre de Kôbé 1996 : le thème de la Biennale, « l'architecture comme sismographe », donne un sujet en or au pavillon japonais, spectaculairement mis en scène et qui recevra l'inestimable Lion d'or.

Indestructible

Réplique en 2011 où le séisme, plus encore que celui de Kôbé, a mobilisé les imaginations. Un an plus tard, réplique également à Venise où le pavillon japonais obtient le Lion d'or pour la meilleure participation nationale.

Si l'accident de la centrale de

Fukushima reste l'instant le plus médiatisé de la catastrophe, la zone ravagée par la vague s'étend sur plus de 200 kilomètres de long et pour la population, le drame, avant d'être nucléaire, est urbain et quotidien.

Toyoto Ito, auteur de l'indestructible médiatique de Sendai a travaillé avec trois autres personnalités majeures de la nouvelle architecture, Kumiko Inui, Sou Fujimoto et Akihisa Hirata, pour réfléchir aux possibilités de revenir et d'habiter sur cette terre meurtrie. L'esthétique n'est pas absente, mais on est loin des poses affectées par tant d'autres architectes pour trouver leur place sur l'espace supposé partagé du monde ■

FRÉDÉRIC EDELMANN



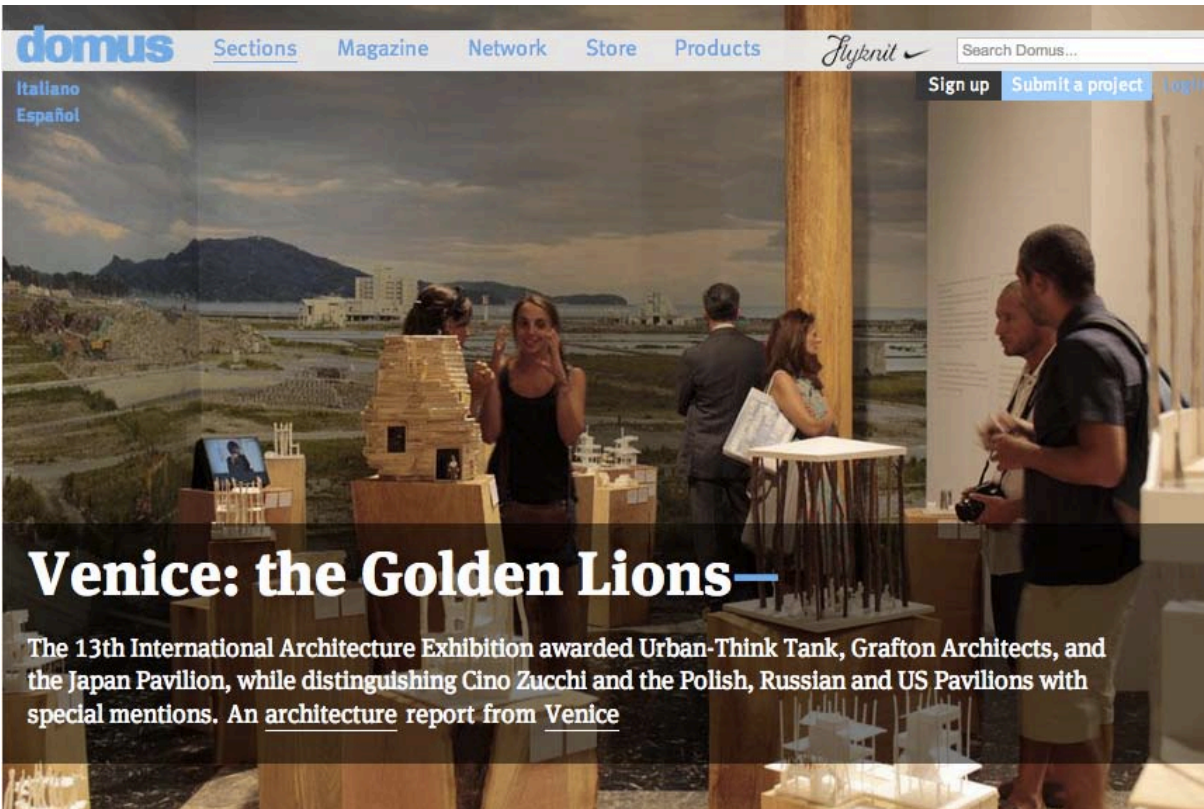
Video report featuring interview with U.S. Pavilion commissioner Cathy Lang Ho.

To view the video, click here.

The screenshot shows the Monocle website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Monocle logo (M) and letters A, B, C, D, E. On the right, there are links for 'Basket (0)', 'Sign in', and 'On air now 24 The Review'. Below this is a 'Listen live' button and a link to 'Browse archive shows with Timeshift'. A search bar is also present with the text 'Enter keywords here'. The main content area features a 'NEWS REPORT' section titled 'Architecture Biennale - Part two'. Below the title is a video player showing a person in a gallery. To the right of the video player, there is a short text description: 'For our second film reporting from the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, Hugo Macdonald headed to the giardini to explore conceptual thought and artistic interpretations at the national pavilions.' The video player controls show a play button, a progress bar, and a timestamp of 01:15 / 08:05.

SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good





The jury of the 13th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale — comprised of Wiel Arets (President, Netherlands), Kristin Feireiss (Germany), Robert A.M. Stern (USA), Benedetta Tagliabue (Italy) and Alan Yentob (Great Britain) — has decided to confer the awards as follows:

Golden Lion for Best National Participation to Japan

Architecture possible here? Home-for-All. Naoya Hatakeyama; Kumiko Inui; Sou Fujimoto; Akihisa Hirata (Pavilion at Giardini)

Commissioner: Toyo Ito

Deputy Commissioners: Atsuko Sato, Tae Mori

Motivations of the International Jury: The Golden Lion for the Best National Participation, which captures the spirit of *Common Ground*, is awarded to the Japanese Pavilion in which leading international architect [Toyo Ito](#) collaborated with younger architects and with the local community to address in a practical and imaginative way the design of a new centre for a region devastated by a national disaster. The presentation and the storytelling in the Pavilion are exceptional and highly accessible to a broad audience. The jury was impressed with the humanity of this project.

Golden Lion for the Best Project of the *Common Ground* Exhibition to Urban-Think Tank

Torre David / Gran Horizonte, 2012. Alfredo Brillembourg, Hubert Klumpner and Justin McGuirk (exhibit at Corderie, Arsenale)

Motivations of the International Jury: The Golden Lion for the Best Project embodying the theme of *Common Ground* goes to [Urban-Think Tank](#) and to the people of Caracas and their families who created a new community and a home out of an abandoned and unfinished building. The jury praised the architects for recognizing the power of this transformational project. An informal community created a new home and a new identity by occupying Torre David and did so with flair and conviction. This initiative can be seen as an inspirational model acknowledging the strength of informal societies.

Section
[Architecture, News](#)

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[Venice](#)

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



↑ On top: Golden Lion for Best National Participation to Japan for its Architecture possible here? Home-for-All. Above: Golden Lion for the Best Project of the Common Ground Exhibition to Urban-Think Tank for its Torre David / Gran Horizonte. 13th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia

Silver Lion for a promising practice of the International Exhibition
Common Ground to Grafton Architects

Common Ground, 2012. Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara (Ireland, exhibit at Central Pavilion, Giardini)

Motivations of the International Jury: The Silver Lion is awarded to [Grafton Architects](#) as a promising and emerging practice. For their impressive presentation of a new University campus in Lima, connecting to the ideas of Paulo Mendes da Rocha. The jury believes that the conceptual and spatial qualities of this installation demonstrate the considerable potential of this architectural practice in reimagining the urban landscape.

Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement to Álvaro Siza Vieira
Awarded by the Board of la Biennale di Venezia, chaired by Paolo Baratta, under director David Chipperfield's proposal.

The Jury has also decided to assign four Special Mentions:

Poland

Making the walls quake as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers. Katarzyna Krakowiak (Pavilion at Giardini).

Commissioner: Hanna Wróblewska

Curator: Michal Libera

Motivations of the International Jury: Special mention goes to Poland for *Making the walls quake as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers.* This brave and bold installation reminds the visitor to listen as well as to look... And to feel the sound of the *Common Ground*.



← Toyo Ito, Golden Lion for Best National Participation to Japan. On the left minister Cancellieri, on the right the Biennale's president Baratta. Photo Francesco Galli (courtesy la Biennale di Venezia)

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



United States of America

Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good. Pavilion at Giardini.

Commissioner/Curator: Cathy Lang Ho

Curators: Ned Cramer, David van der Leer

Deputy Curators: Paola Antonelli, Anne Guiney, Zoe Ryan, Michael Sorkin

Motivations of the International Jury: Special mention goes to the United States of America for *Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good*. This interactive installation impressed the Jury with its celebration of the power of individuals to change society in small but effective ways. The unpretentiously simple presentation was a delight.

Russia

i-city. AREP; SPEECH Tchoban/Kuznetsov; David Chipperfield Architects; Valode&Pistre; Mohsen Mostafavi; OMA; SANAA; Herzog& de Meuron; Stefano Boeri architetti; Project MEGANOM; MDP/Michel Desvigne paysagiste; BERNASKONI architecture bureau (Pavilion at Giardini).

Commissioner: Grigory Revzin.

Curator: Sergei Tchoban.

Deputy Curators: Sergey Kuznetsov, Valeria Kashirina.

Motivations of the International Jury: Special mention goes to Russia for *i-city*. The *i-city* takes a dialectic approach to Russia's past, present and future and in the process turns us all into digital spies. The jury was drawn into this magical mystery tour and beguiled by its visual presentation.



↑ Silver Lion for a promising practice of the International Exhibition *Common Ground* to Grafton Architects

Cino Zucchi

Copycat. Empatia e invidia come generator di forma, 2012 (Milan, Italy, exhibit at Corderie, Arsenale).

Motivations of the International Jury: Special mention goes to Cino Zucchi for an installation which "aims to evoke a complex network of relationships that shape our physical environment". The jury believes that this serves as an exemplary reminder of the all-embracing theme of the *Common Ground* Exhibition.



↑ Golden Lion for the Best Project of the *Common Ground* Exhibition to Urban-Think Tank for its *Torre David / Gran Horizonte*.

SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good



† Special Mention to the United States of America for its *Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good*. 13th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia



† Special Mention to the United States of America for its *Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good*. 13th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia

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DI ARCHITETTURA
DI VENEZIA

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ARCHITECTURE

Biennale: Short Stories

Chronicles from Venice, published on Abitare 526, present a selection of national pavilions at Giardini and the Central Pavilion. Here we report them; on the magazine, questions and answers to important visitors and the critical texts by Abitare's editors, also.

posted by abitare

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posted by abitare

#1 ANGOLA | BEYOND ENTROPY



Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good





The overcrowded conurbations of Luanda are the subject of a research project aimed at finding solutions to the problems of urban and infrastructure redevelopment in African cities. In the interstitial spaces of a continuously and rapidly evolving territory, "Beyond Entropy Angola" envisages the planting of a particular tree, *Arundo donax*, to filter dirty water and produce bio-mass. Garden, infrastructure and shared space.
 [Curators Stefano Rabolli Pansera, Paula Nascimento]

#2 ISRAEL | AIRCRAFT CARRIER



^ photo by Florian Holzherr

The Middle East Crisis of 1973: the economic influence of the United States on Israel - a political strategy to destroy the Soviet alternative - had a permanent effect on the social development of the country, bringing with it widespread consumerism. In "Aircraft Carrier" the phenomena recorded become a thematic infrastructure through which to interpret the influence of American ideas on Israeli architecture. On sale at the "Merchandising Shop" objects which, on the floor above, become elements of a critical space.
 [Curators Eerez Ella, Milana Gitzin Adiram, Dan Handel]

#3 GRAFTON ARCHITECTS + PAULO MENDES DA ROCHA



A successful case, at this Biennale, of "induced common ground": for Grafton, an earlier commission in Latin America (UTEC university campus in Lima) becomes a working dialogue with the Brazilian master Paulo Mendes da Rocha on nature-landscape-construction; on architecture, large spaces and horizons; on the study of the free section. The encounter between them also translates into the material evidence of the large models displayed which compare, at various scales, the new UTEC project and the Serra Dourada Stadium (Goiânia, 1973) by Mendes da Rocha.

#4 USA | SPONTANEOUS INTERVENTIONS



^ photo by Elena Pirazzoli

A set of good design practices, from cycle paths to low-energy architecture and smart materials. Although not particularly innovative, the US Pavilion does excel in terms of its low energy consumption: by pulling down the counter-weighted banners the actions needed for each project are revealed, printed on the walls. The dominant theme of each action (accessibility, community, economy, sustainability or pleasure) is reproduced on the panel.
 [Curators Ned Cramer, David van der Leer; Curatori aggiunti Paola Antonelli, Anne Guiney, Zoe Ryan, Michael Sorkin]

#5 BRASILE | CONVIVÊNCIA



The caption accompanying Lucio Costa's plan, originally conceived for the 1964 Milan Triennale, is: "The same people who rest in hammocks can, whenever necessary, build a new capital in three years". In the same space Marcio Kogan creates a large volume full of quiet interiors filmed in various parts of Brazil, seen by spying through holes in the wall. The two designs effectively describe the common ground holding together a country that saw exceptional growth in the past 60 years, an apparent inertia which, well orchestrated, generated Brasilia.
 [Curator Lauro Cavalcanti]



#6 NETHERLANDS | RE-SET



The architecture of Gerrit Rietveld for the Dutch Pavilion returns to prominence thanks to the work of Petra Blaisse. The curtain of Inside Outside is a slowly moving swish of lightweight materials making barely perceptible sounds and revealing the potential of the space, the magic of the light and the quality of the material that makes up this modern architectural gem. [Curator Ole Bouman]

#7 SERBIA | JEDAN : STO / 100



^ courtesy of team of authors

The inside of the pavilion is taken up entirely by a table measuring 22x5 metres, a large white expanse spreading out before visitors' look and reacting when touched by emitting sounds that echo through the space. By denying and inverting the scale, the interpretation of the object is modified and the perception of the space amplified. A tabula rasa on which the common ground is "feeling". [Commissioner and curator Igor Maric]



Siwonn Uélex / David Chipperfield / Urban-Think Tank / Francis Alÿs / Trinka / François Azamoung / Nossinger / Olafur Eliasson / Yrjö Kukkapuro / Enrique Martínez / Raarten Van den Spode
Foad Dighan / Marti Güel / Erik Veselá / Fabio Paronetti / Marc Brétillet / Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg / Sisset Toalaa

The Ground beneath our Feet

Scanning the Architecture Biennale

DAM N°35 magazine / VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE



At Common Ground, this year's Venice Biennale, the fundamental question "what is architecture?" concerns the biennale's director, David Chipperfield, as much as it does Toyo Ito (Japanese Pavilion) and the urban activists (USA Pavilion), according to Anna Sansom. With the big name architects now having cause to take a good close look at the hardships brought by disaster, of both the natural and economic varieties, there has been a decided upturn in the quality of their responses. Architecture is being rethought, with the needs of local people and sustainability taking precedence over individuality and egotism.

ANNA SANSON

What is the 'common ground' of shared ideas that form the basis of architectural culture today? This is the question raised by David Chipperfield, the director of the 13th International Architecture Exhibition, Common Ground, at the Biennale di Venezia. The biennale takes place during a time of soul-searching, partly in response to the financial crisis, which has led to budget cuts, cancellations of projects and redundancies, as well as to a loss of faith in institutions. As the British architect says, "You have the feeling that the climate is changing economically and that maybe we should reflect on where architecture is and what its purpose and role is, and maybe put more emphasis on community and social ideas and shared ideas, intellectually and physically". Although Chipperfield's career has benefited from big-time commissions (the renovation of the Neues Museum in Berlin; the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai; Dolce & Gabbana stores worldwide...), he emphasises the need for architecture to renew its civic responsibility.

The previous two editions – curated by Kazuyo Sejima in 2010 and Aareon Steyke, director of the Cincinnati Art Museum, in 2008 – were experimental and multi-disciplinary. Chipperfield's edition takes a more traditional and conservative approach, including exhibits by established practices such as Zaha Hadid, Herzog & de Meuron, Norman Foster

DAVID CHIPPERFIELD
Director of the 13th International
Architecture Exhibition,
La Biennale di Venezia
Photo © Inigo Vanhousa

DANNY'S3 magazine / VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE



and Jean Nouvel. "We don't discover any new, young architects in this biennale", observes the Swiss architect Philippe Bohm. "It's traditionalising, and a confirmation of quality architecture, but there's less invention and no risk." In response to such criticism, Chipperfield asserts that "this is not a [TV] talent show, I'm not trying to indicate who will be the next stars." He then makes a football analogy regarding his decision to feature today's leading architects in the Arsenal and the central pavilion. "These people are primary players; they are the ones scoring the goals and influencing the game."

However, starchitects outdoing each other for fan-cy commissions seems passé. While admitting that Haidt is "not my cup of tea", Chipperfield hopes his colleagues can put their egos aside in order to move architecture forward. "It's the common ground within our profession that we can all talk more openly to each other instead of I don't like her work, I do like his work." Why not say, "I respect what that person is trying to do." Secondly, once you can accept that kind of openness, maybe it's easier to talk outside the profession and have more tools to explain to the community at large what we're trying to do."

THE ARCHITECTURE MEETING AT THE DISASTER SITE, 2011 (1)

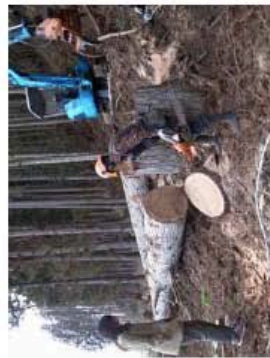
Photo © Japan Foundation

TOYO ITO (2)

Photo © Japan Foundation

STUDY MODEL FOR THE JAPANESE PAVILION, 2011 (3)

Photo © Japan Foundation



On display are dozens of scale models made during the seven-month-long research period prior to final design, which feature recycled trees for columns as a key component. The pavilion also includes photographs taken before and after the disaster, by Hatakeyama, a native of Rikuzentakata who lost his house and his mother in the tsunami. To find out what kind of building was needed, Ito and his team met with Mikiko Sugawara from the local community, who introduced them to the residents and helped them find a suitable site. "In Rikuzentakata, people used to have a very strong feeling of being part of a community," says Ito, "but now people who once lived close to each other are in temporary housing and living far apart. So we wanted to create a place where they can meet, eat together, talk together and spend time together."

The shock of the earthquake and its aftermath caused Ito to reconsider the responsibilities of his profession and the importance of sustainable architecture. As he explains, "before the earthquake, I would talk to students and other young architects and ask them a very simple question: 'What is architecture for?' But after the earthquake, you could no longer just say, 'Look, I made some beautiful architecture, look at how great it is.' Because now there are people who are really unfortunate and living in temporary housing, I needed to get away from architecture as we know it, and start to get in touch once again with real architecture. I think it is the right moment to rethink architecture."

Ito first visited the disaster area at the end of March 2011 in order to inspect Sendai Mechatraque, which he wanted to repair "as soon as possible." Seeing the damage inspired him to design a community centre in Sendai. The centre in Rikuzentakata is the third to be created but the only one for which Ito requested the collaboration of Imai, Fujimoto and Hirata. "The theme was to go beyond individualism", says Ito. "Last century, identity and individualism were strongly appreciated and respected. But at times it could turn into egotism. So this time we had three people building just one thing. It's not something that could be turned into 'I made this.' Initially, there were a few stumbling blocks. "We didn't know how to collaborate because we had different, competing ideas", admits Fujimoto. "Then, gradually, as we had more contact with local people and understood their lifestyles and once the site was determined, we began sharing the situation together and it became smoother."

Asked about how he felt when Ito asked him to become involved, Fujimoto replies: "Honestly, I didn't

know what kind of architecture we could make for the disaster area. I was so embarrassed and not very sure. It was a big challenge, and a case of rethinking the fundamental part of architecture – what is architecture? And redefining architecture and reconsidering how to make architecture – big questions. Fujimoto describes how the two-story community centre relates to the lifestyle of the local residents, offering flexibility through multiple small, cosy spaces that are slightly divided yet interconnected. There is a sense of pride as the centre approaches completion. "Now the columns are finished, and people look up and say, 'wow, this is something strange but it is special and fitting for this area.'"

THE JAPANESE PAVILION
Photo © Japan Foundation



DAMN°35 magazine / VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE



US PAVILION

Praised by the jury for "its celebration of the power of individuals to change society in small but effective ways", the pavilion installation won a Special Mention. 'Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good', features 124 grassroots initiatives selected from 450 open-call submissions. The projects are presented as banners hanging from scaffolding. The descriptions, such as 'guerrilla gardening' and 'guerrilla bike lanes', appear on the front, while coloured barcodes about the level of information, accessibility, community, economy, sustainability, and pleasure appear on the back. As a visitor pulls a banner down, a pulley lifts a counterweight that indicates the problem, and the solution is revealed. But some felt that too many projects were included. "It's aggressive through the richness of its content", complains Jasper Sharp, commissioner of the Austrian Pavilion at next June's Venice Art Biennale. "It almost wants to be a museum exhibition that you could visit for two or three hours. Maybe this is also the intention – to flood and overwhelm you with information."

Nonetheless, the pavilion compellingly conveys the upswing in urban activism that Ned Cramer, the co-curator, situates in reaction to the financial crisis. "There are thousands of unemployed architects, and municipalities around the country are dramatically scaling back on services and infrastructural development", he says. "Citizen activists are seizing the opportunity to solve problems in their own communities. It's most definitely the architectural equivalent of Occupy Wall Street. You can very clearly trace a

line of desire between the intent of the architects in this show, the participants in Occupy Wall Street, and even the Arab Spring protestors and those in Tahrir Square. Here you have people who are being very scrappy, accomplishing things with no budget, often breaking the law to attain goals for their communities." Cathy Lang Ho, the pavilion's commissioner, echoes these views. "What we're really commending here are the people who have managed to get their project funded somehow, get people behind them, and find a team to work with them. There is a heightened desire to be a good citizen. The power really is in the street." ◀

'Common Ground', the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, runs until 25 November 2012.
www.labiennale.org

THE US PAVILION
 Photo: Sigrid Derryfiersano

SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good



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"Silver" for the US Pavilion in Venice

by Karen Wong, Deputy Director, tagged with 2012 Olympics, David Chipperfield, Golden Lion, Toyo Ito, Home for All, Spontaneous Interventions, Venice Architecture Biennale, US Pavilion, Ken Mori, Jenny Liang



Cover Image: "Spontaneous Interventions," 2012. Exhibition view: US Pavilion, 13th Venice Architecture Biennale

Featured Post



FEATURED BLOG POST
IDEAS CITY: Istanbul—
Amanda Burden's Keynote
BY KAREN WONG, DEPUTY
DIRECTOR



As the London 2012 Olympics came to a close, the tamer 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by English architect David Chipperfield, opened in late August. The various national pavilions jostled each other for the Golden Lion—the award for the presentation that best exemplifies the theme of "Common Ground."

The coveted prize was awarded to the Japanese, led by cult hero Toyo Ito (who still, shockingly, lacks a Pritzker Prize). His poignant exhibition, "Home for All," explores the way forward for architecture in the regions devastated by the tsunami.

In a break with tradition, the jury cited three additional pavilions, Poland, Russia, and the United States, for a "Special Mention."

The state of built architecture in the US could use a jolt (or better yet, a Bolt). Innovative, daring, risky, game changing—sadly, these attributes are not in our lexicon. So the irony is not lost that the commended exhibition, entitled "Spontaneous Interventions," in the US Pavilion draws inspiration from the bottom up, applying DIY, guerilla, informal tactics for urban revitalization.



"Spontaneous Interventions," 2012. Exhibition view: US Pavilion, 13th Venice Architecture Biennale

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



Led by commissioner Cathy Lang Ho and her two co-curators David van der Leer and Ned Cramer, the team selected 124 projects that embodied the "lighter, quicker, cheaper" ethos — a rebellion against the decadence and malfeasance of the new century and a survivalist reaction to the lack of resources post-financial crisis of 2008. In the same spirit of lighter, quicker, cheaper, the exhibition designers, Freecell and M-A-D, did a lot with a little. Each project was described on a vinyl banner that hung from the ceiling, creating a festival feeling. When you pulled the banner down like a window shade, a corresponding block on the pavilion's walls lifted and revealed a one-word tactic that was deployed. The floor became a massive infographic that wasn't as legible, but I appreciated the gesture of having to look up, down, and to the side (no wonder I still have neck cramps).



Ken Mori and Jenny Liang, *SignChair* from "Post Furniture," 2012. Installation view: "Spontaneous Interventions," US Pavilion, 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2012

There are too many excellent projects to list but if I had to single out one intervention, I would tap Los Angeles-based Ken Mori and Jenny Liang's "Post Furniture." With *SignBench* and *SignChair*, they transform traffic signposts into seating for pedestrians as well as drivers, ambitiously suggesting they leave their cars and take a seat on the street to relish the cityscape.

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"Spontaneous Interventions" is a brave and timely exhibition. As our presidential election nears, it's essential to be reminded that the citizen-led movement instigating urban change is flourishing.

Postscript:

Shout outs to the following exhibitors who were also 2011 Festival of Ideas for the New City partners: Art in Odd Places, Center for Urban Pedagogy, Civic Center/Candy Chang, Molly Dilworth, DoTank, Futurefarmers, Ghana Think Tank (Creative Time), Hester Street Collaborative, Natalie Jeremijenko, Eve Mosher, No Longer Empty, Nuit Blanche New York (NBNY), Olek, OurGoods, and Rockwell Group.



Ken Mori and Jenny Liang, *SignChair* from "Post Furniture," 2012. Installation view: "Spontaneous Interventions," US Pavilion, 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2012

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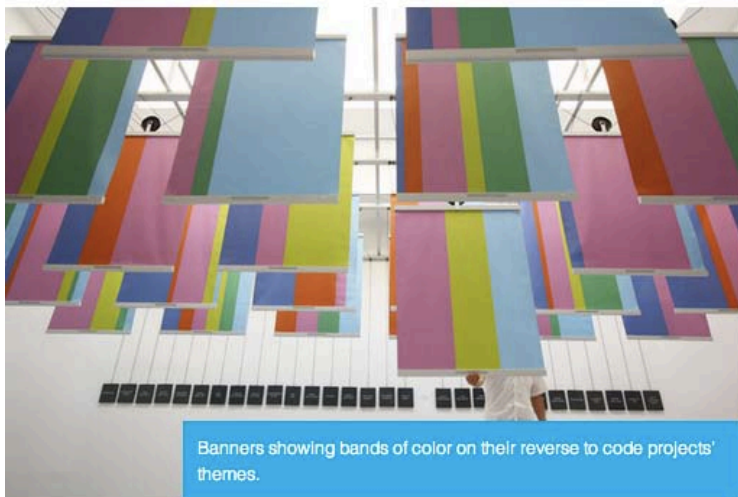
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124 Ways to Change a City: Spontaneous Interventions at the Venice Biennale

Posted to [General](#) on September 17th, 2012 by [Lee Ann Custer](#)

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You could say that public space successfully took over gallery space at the Venice Biennale this year. The U.S. Pavilion at the 13th International Architecture Exhibition received a special mention from the Biennale Jury for *Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good*—an exhibition made up not of high-end architectural projects, but of 124 urban interventions, the selected results of an open call for submissions. Collectively, the selection represents a budding, nation-wide movement of citizens taking it upon themselves to propose solutions for problematic urban situations, creating new opportunities and amenities for the public.

The exhibition, which will run through November 25, is the first ever in a U.S. pavilion to receive the honor. Helmed by commissioner and curator Cathy Lang Ho, *Spontaneous Interventions* was organized by the Institute of Urban Design, along with co-curators Ned Cramer and [David van der Leer](#), who is also one of the curators of the Lab.

My own acquaintance with *Spontaneous Interventions* began last spring over tea with Lang Ho at a café on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Over the course of our two-and-a-half-hour conversation, her notes, lists, diagrams, and renderings won out against our coffee cups for real estate at our tiny table. (I went on to contribute to the exhibition myself, writing texts that would be used to explain each intervention to the viewer.)

I caught up with Lang Ho again more recently to discuss the exhibition in the wake of its recent recognition. She recalled the application process for the pavilion with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. "The RFP asked, 'Why does this theme represent the country and the profession at this moment?'" As she explained, the theme they chose at the time seemed completely representative of the United States in that cultural and economic moment. "It was spring one year ago," she said. "It was the depths of the recession. Only institutions and schools were generating work. Firms were in a holding pattern. What we did have were these minor acts by citizens."

"The RFP asked, 'Why does this theme represent the country and the profession at this moment?'" As she explained, the theme they chose at the time seemed completely representative of the United States in that cultural and economic moment.

For Lang Ho, the open call, which yielded 450 submissions total, was in keeping with the "do-it-yourself" spirit of the exhibition because it allowed citizens from a variety of disciplines—not just architects and designers—to have their work on view. "It's a way to say, 'Here's your chance to be in the Biennale,' a traditionally a rarefied stage. Some of the people doing the projects never dreamed they'd be in the Biennale," said Lang Ho.

The projects, which fill the 4,000-square-foot permanent American pavilion, and are displayed on banners that hang from the ceiling, include outdoor living rooms, pop-up markets, temporary architecture, navigation apps, and crowd-sourced city planning initiatives. There are ephemeral art interventions that bypass public regulations (Ed Woodham's *Art in Odd Places*); a community forum to rethink residual urban spaces (Manuel Ávila's *Crown Heights Participatory Urbanism*); guerilla gardening (COMMONstudio's *Greenaid Seedbomb Vending Machine*); and even a project that repurposes phone booths as a communal libraries (Department of Urban Betterment's *Phone Booth Book Share*).

"We purposefully looked for a range of projects," said Lang Ho, and added that they "all call for a way of enhancing participation, fairness, and our right to the city. Citizenship used to be tied to place, but it also encapsulated a desire to eliminate waste and garbage. Good citizenship, you could say, is about not being wasteful. You could also say that it's about not wasting opportunities."

I asked Lang Ho if she felt any commonalities, or "common ground" (the overall theme of this year's Biennale) has emerged from the chosen projects. Her response: "Citizenship, equity, protest, and participation." She pointed out that they "all call for a way of enhancing participation, fairness, and our right to the city."

The exhibition's [website](#), which allows users to view all 124 projects and sort them by topic (information, community, pleasure, etc.) with a color-coded bar, reflects the organization and design of the exhibition. Lang Ho and the curators intend the site to have a life beyond Venice. According to Lang Ho, "We would like this to be an archive that grows over time, because these interventions don't stop." Adds van der Leer, "I hope that this website will be used by people to make their itinerary for their next trip. So you go to a city, say, San Diego, and see if there are any interventions happening there."



The entrance to the U.S. Pavilion, with Interboro's "outdoor living room" in the foreground.

With an "outdoor living room" component designed by Interboro in front of the pavilion, and a simple banner display system created by Freecell with pulleys and ropes, *Spontaneous Interventions* follows the example of many of the interventions in its commitment to community space, crowdsourcing, and easily replicable design. In order to sort the projects, the curators decided to create a color-coding system to illustrate which issues each project addresses: information (dark blue); accessibility (orange); community (pink); economy (light green); sustainability (dark green); and pleasure (light blue). Each intervention then has its own bar code with bands of color for the issues it deals with, the bands being proportional to the amount of emphasis the project places on that particular theme.

David van der Leer notes that the banners offer "a way to re-identify the United States through this project." "The banners can help guide you through the show," he says. "They provide a new visual representation for the United States." By a wide margin, community (pink) was the category most cited by interventionists as their main concern. "To me it shows there are some really, really engaged people, enthusiastic to make their environments better," says van der Leer.



Banners showing a few of the urban Interventions.

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It's also possible, as Lang Ho told me, that the exhibition itself may continue on after the Biennale is over, traveling to one or more additional venues in various locales. "We're looking into opportunities in New York and San Francisco," said Lang Ho. "London has also asked. It's very exciting!" It looks like *Spontaneous Interventions*, which brought so much of the world within gallery walls, is going back out into the world itself.

Images: courtesy M-A-D (banners) and Interboro (pavilion entrance)

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original content

US pavilion at the venice architecture biennale

first image
'spontaneous interventions: design actions for the common good' curated and commissioned by cathy lang ho, USA pavilion, venice architecture biennale
image © designboom

venice 2012 architecture biennale: day three – live!

titled 'spontaneous interventions: design actions for the common good,' the united states pavilion at the [2012 venice architecture biennale](#) is curated and commissioned by [cathy lang ho](#) with help from [david van der leer](#) and ned cramer. our economic situation is allowing a new found burst of creativity from the common citizen, shifting the role of the protagonist from the select few to the common masses. the installation investigates the future of the archetypal american city through a series of smaller-scale projects realized by individuals - rather than the economically capable elite - that intervene in the urban context.

sausalito-based design studio [M-A-D](#) has developed a graphic system of colors resembling a bar code, where the size of each strip represents the prevalence of a specific category in relation to the represented project: information (blue), accessibility (orange), community (pink), economy (light green), sustainability (dark green) and pleasure (blue). printed on suspended banners from an open scaffolding developed by [freecell](#), each of the 124 projects hangs from a cable in an almost festival-like atmosphere where visitors can pull them down for a closer inspection, while a black square acting as a counterweight along the wall suggests a solution to the problem. every banner showcases an urban intervention which could range from guerrilla pathways to larger structures, all realized by the public on either a paid or volunteer basis. the projects address a range of issues, from functional improvements to existing infrastructure to the creation of new structures, all modifying space within diverse urban fabrics.



freecell created a lively system of banners suspended from an open scaffold, evoking a festival atmosphere. the banners may be pulled down for a closer look, triggering the movement of counterweights that are in-scribed with suggested actions to solve urban problems.
image © designboom

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



an integrated infographic diagram on the floor, also developed by M-A-D, provides a historical timeline of the american city and urban activism, while a video directed by kelly loudenberg shows a series of clips featuring participants sharing their hopes and dreams for the future of the city, asked to speak as if they were running for an election.

the entrance courtyard or 'commonplace' designed by new york studio interboro borrowed from the venetian elevated sidewalks to design the meeting and workshop space, with a collection of portable blocks that can be arranged into any configuration.



image courtesy of freecell

'in researching projects for the exhibition, we found hundreds of examples even before we issued an open call in january, which itself yielded over 450 compelling self-initiated urban improvements. we narrowed our choice to 124—the maximum number we could fit in the 4,000-square-foot permanent american pavilion in the giardini, the public gardens of venice—though we wish we could have included many more. we were expansive in our consideration of what qualifies as a 'spontaneous intervention', including projects that encroach on the territory of art and graffiti, well aware that some acts are more about self-expression than tactics for long-term change. our goal was to find a diversity of original projects that transform public urban space to better serve the common good, seeking those that would add up to a useful archive of actionable strategies that could be replicated in other cities facing similar problems.'

cathy lang ho

'the notion of the "common good" is mutable and subjective, to be sure—what's good for some might not be for others—but in selecting projects we adhered to the idea of what is beneficial to the most people with respect to everyday needs. new bike lanes in NYC might irk drivers; guerrilla gardeners might be annoying squatters to property owners; culture-jamming billboard pranks might be classifiable as vandalism; and all of these acts might be gentrification by another name. but we believe that the positive impacts of our featured examples of hands-on city-making far outweigh the negative.'

continues cathy lang ho

'more appropriate than considering these works with respect to how they address the "common good" is how they address the "commons," the space and resources we share, harkening to the originary political conception of the "common wealth," or public wealth, and how it should be administered. the commons have been under assault for centuries, but intensely so since the dawn of industrialism with the extreme privatization and pillaging of land and natural resources combined with the sad mismanagement by our entrusted public entities of our public spaces, parks, infrastructure, schools, and other shared assets. the word "commons" suggests medieval laws involving free-grazing animals and the right to forage in forests, but we can't forget that it remains central to our everyday lives, from the water running through our taps to the streets that get us where we need to go. with the commons so threatened, so in disrepair, is it any wonder that "commoners" feel compelled to step in? spontaneous interventions embody innumerable ways of rethinking our collective well-being, both physical and emotional.'

cathy lang ho concludes.

commissioner and curator cathy lang ho is an independent architecture critic and editor based in NY. she is a contributing editor to architect magazine and founding editor-in-chief of the architect's newspaper. she has published hundreds of articles in publications worldwide, and is a board member of the institute for urban design.

curated by:

cathy lang ho (commissioner and curator), david van der leer, and ned cramer (co-curators)

curatorial advisors:

michael sorokin, anne guiney, paola antonelli, zoe ryan, and erik adigard.

project managers:

gordon douglas and mimi zeiger

organizers:

institute for urban design, on behalf of the bureau of educational and cultural affairs (ECA) of the U.S. department of tate

collaborators:

freecell (exhibition design), M-A-D (communication and exhibition design),

interboro partners (courtyard installation)

team: gordon douglas & mimi zeiger (project managers), justin allen, mina chow, brendan crain,

giulia cugnasca, lee ann custer,

alex fortney (web programming), andreas jonathan, sarah kantrowitz, katherine koh, kelly

loudenberg (film), alexandra sutherland-brown,

alexandra tell, samantha topol, julia van den hout, toni griffin / j. max bond center

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

NEWS:

Projects for the People at the U.S. Pavilion in Venice

The American pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale will document design for public spaces.

By Fred A. Bernstein

July 18, 2012



Photo courtesy of Envelope a+d
Leasing an empty site from the city, San Francisco firm Envelope a+d's *Proxy* redeveloped two large lots to become a kind of urban living room, with food stands, a temporary art gallery, a beer garden, and an area for food trucks.

With a little more than a month before the opening of the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, firms around the world are finalizing contributions to the massive show, a grab bag of architecture and architecture-related exhibitions that will run from August 27 through November 25. As usual, there will be an "official" exhibition, this time curated by the British starchitect David Chipperfield, with the title *Common Ground*, and 55 separate national displays (with Angola, Kosovo, Kuwait, and Peru joining 51 returning countries).



Photo courtesy of Architecture for Humanity Chicago
Fresh Moves Mobile Market is a one-aisle grocery store built in a retrofitted Chicago Transit Authority bus purchased for \$1. Architecture for Humanity partnered with the Chicago nonprofit Food Desert Action to design the bus, which brings fresh produce to the 500,000 Chicago residents living in food deserts. *Fresh Moves'* website lists its hourly schedule, and not only sells produce but offers classes on cooking and healthy diets.

Many of those national displays are government-supported, but in the U.S., the majority of funding must be raised privately. Cathy Lang Ho, the freelance writer and editor who is serving as U.S. commissioner, said it's both a disadvantage that the government isn't more forthcoming (the State Department puts up a bare \$100,000), but also an advantage, since she had free rein to create an exhibition without Washington's imprimatur.

What she has chosen to do with that freedom is display 124 architect-initiated projects that in most cases lack clients or budgets of more than a few hundred dollars. Grouped under the headline *Spontaneous Interventions*, they include guerrilla bike lanes, spray-painted at night; a pavilion in San Francisco where visitors eat soup while waiting for soil samples from their yards to be tested; and a mobile produce market meant to serve urban "food deserts." While all the projects had to have been previously realized, few of them are buildings, and some are apps and websites.

Given economic conditions in the United States, "a show about high-end architecture for a very small group of people would not be the right thing right now," says Ho. "the projects are about asserting democracy—which is what's happening in architecture and design right now."

To choose the projects, from among 450 entries, Ho worked with the Institute for Urban Design and a group of advisors led by the Institute's board chair (and longtime *Record* contributor) Michael Sorkin. The projects will be shown on banners, which visitors will be asked to unfurl. With everyone at the Biennale "on information overload, it was important for the exhibition to be strong experientially," Ho says. Freecell, a Brooklyn studio, designed the installation of the banners, and Interboro, a Brooklyn firm known for its P.S.1/MoMA Young Architect's Program installation last year, designed a lounge outside the neoclassical U.S. pavilion. Is this the Grand Canal or Grand Army Plaza?

Many American architects will also be represented under the *Common Ground* umbrella. Chipperfield, who was appointed only last December 27, announced a theme that, like all good Biennale themes, can mean almost anything participants want it to mean. *Common Ground*, he has said, reference both new models for shared space, and "the ideas we all share about architecture." Chipperfield tapped 63 people (including architects as well as horticulturalist Piet Oudouff and photographer Thomas Struth) to help curate the show. Kenneth Frampton, the Columbia University architectural theorist, will present work by Steven Holl, Patkau Architects, Rick Joy, Shim/Sutcliffe, and Stanley Saitowitz. Peter Eisenman, also tapped by Chipperfield, is working with students at Yale to adapt Piranesi's Campo Marzio drawing into a digital 3-D model. And Tod Williams and Billie Tsien sent empty wooden boxes to 35 people, asking them to fill the containers with "things that inspired them," Tsien says. (Eisenman received one of the boxes and is filling it with a grid.)

Among the national pavilions, standouts are likely to include Portugal's display, with works by its two Pritzker Prize winners, Alvaro Siza and Eduardo Soto de Moura, and Japan's, where commissioner Toyo Ito will present works by up-and-comers, such as Sou Fujimoto and Kimiko Inui.

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good





ARCHITETTURA SPONTANEA

TESTO SUSANNA LEGRENZI
ILLUSTRAZIONI TOM JAY

IL PAVIGLIONE USA METTE IN MOSTRA

124 PRATICHE DI "AZIONISMO" METROPOLITANO.

LABORATORI OPEN SOURCE CHE HANNO SFORNATO NEGLI ULTIMI ANNI

UN'IDEA DI CITTÀ ALTERNATIVA



ART IN 300 PLACES

UN IPERSOLE, UN PARADOSSO, UNA SFIDA.

DOVE FALLISCONO I GRANDI PIANI URBANISTICI

A VINCERE SONO I MICRO PROGETTI.

E LA QUALITÀ URBANA NE COLLA



PARKLETS

"Abbiamo rotto con nuove labes. Esavamo rooveri ad andare in
 reonore". A Dallas, promemore om. Texas omi perromoliani, dal
 2010 Andrew Howard, consulente IT, e Jason Roberts, pianificatore trasporti,
 sono Better Block, una piattaforma di urban guerrilla per la riqualificazione
 provvisoria di aree "critiche". Il manuale d'uso prevede tempi di azione brevi
 (max 24 ore) e regole semplici. Roba del tipo: "Begli un posto, crea una
 squadra, occupa iugod vuoti, costruisci ritovi Pop-Up, pompa le tracce del
 tuo ipod, dai alla gente un motivo per restare (albo, libri, scaccia), costruisci
 un'artista, un designer, un architetto...". Il risultato, raggiunto di volta in
 volta, è un alipeto mobile: una compomatura di "se fosse" da contrarre e
 condividere per strada con tattiche sovverive e fare consenso. Da Dallas a
 Memphis, St. Louis, New York, Boston, il virus "Howard + Roberts" è stato
 di quelli a contagio veloce. Il messaggio, del resto, è molto chiaro: nella
 grande partita delle "città del futuro", l'ultima rivoluzione americana parte
 dal basso. In un cenno a Archilias, goodbye. A fare luce sul fenomeno, dal
 29 agosto al 25 novembre, è ora una mostra - Spontaneous Interventions:
 Design Actions for the Common Good - promossa dal Padiglione Stati Uniti
 per la Biennale Biennale di Architettura di Venezia. A raccontarlo, accanto a
 Better Block, di anno 144 pratiche di "solonismo" metropolitano. Leboratori
 open source che, con regole più o meno ottose, hanno sfornato negli
 ultimi anni un'idea di città alternativa, animata da paletti plesia progettati

come ostel di incontro tra cofondi di automobili parcheggiate (memorable
 quello di Erik Otto per la Plaza Gallery di SF), plate cidiabili "aperture"
 dai nulla, reti di condonazioni di architetture temporanee, aree verdi giord
 come un palmo di mano, equitate di ripanazione urbana disposte a litare
 municipale fissurati. Non mancano grandi festival-off come Art + Old
 Place che ogni ottobre trasforma le rive newyorchesi dell' Hudson in una
 topografia vitale dei luoghi in abbandono. E gestit milimili come il poetico
 Red Swing Project: legno, corde, vernice rossa per una, mille abelene appese,
 nel cuore della notte, dove meno te lo aspetta, da Austin, Texas, al Tamili
 Nach, nell' India meridionale. "Spontaneous Interventions" è uno dei risultati
 del clima di studio pubblico sociale" spingo, da New York, Cathy Lang Ho,
 commentario esplicito su mandato dell' Institute for Urban Design di New
 York. "Sulla scia della crisi finanziaria, in tutti gli Stati Uniti ci sono sempre
 più persone disposte a prendere l'iniziativa per arginare il declino delle città,
 senza restare in attesa di autorizzazioni o del censo fide della pubblica
 amministrazione. I progetti raccolti in mostra sono la risposta ai problemi
 che la gente vede intorno a sé: risposte informali, certo. Ma anche una valida



FRESH MOVES MOBILE MARKET

alternativa ai tradizionali approcci top-down". È il caso di Fresh Moves Mobile Market, un esperimento promosso a Chicago da Architecture for Humanity in collaborazione con Food Design Action. Fresh Moves Mobile Market è un negozio mobile di prodotti bio locali, pasta, broccoli, cavolfiori, carciofi. A guidarlo sono i vecchi bus della Chicago Transit Authority. Investimento basso e ritorno, la base affittata per la gestione di questi mini-market distribuiti in zone a basso reddito al 350mila abitanti che vivono nei quartieri

alimentari della zona più importante sud-est degli Stati Uniti. Oltre al capitale Winfrey, Steve Casey, senza esperienza nell'industria, ha commentato: "Dalle nostre parti, il profumo di fritto è così spesso che è possibile sentirlo con le nostre chiavi". Non molto tempo fa ha aggiunto: "Per lo visto un cagno degli huskies è da me la spina e stato invece un archibetto, Douglas Burkhart, aka Knowledge AFD, audace in un esperimento di umanità, cantata al CCA. "Tecnizzatore di un'idea di urbanistica flessibile, Burkhart ha preso in affitto un'intera area in abbandono nel cuore federale di San Francisco, Hayes Valley, convertendola in un hub urbano. "Il progetto è un esperimento di recupero" spiega. "Una vetrina senza una strada, una sorta d'improvvisazione urbana che potrebbe trovare casa in altre città. Il lotto è



KEO SWING PROJECT

Non tutte le pratiche partecipative in materia hanno risultati sul terreno della concretezza. A New Orleans, per esempio, Rob Walker ed Ellen Saxton hanno dato vita a un nuovo progetto di riqualificazione urbana al confine della fiction: Hypothetical Development Organization. Come procedere? "Per prima cosa dobbiamo avere un bene comune in comune, le più improbabili. Quando un proprietario in futuro, probabilmente inventabile. Poi dobbiamo avere un compromesso di un rendering tutto un nostro immaginario, realizzabile, infine, del business pubblicitario da affiggere in prossimità dell'area". La raccolta fondi del fante-studio - nello spazio del tempo - è avvenuta su Kickstarter.com, la celebre piattaforma di crowdfunding. Capitale iniziale: 4.397 dollari, donati da 60 sostenitori generosi.

Al momento, Hypothetical Development Organization ha sfornato una ventina di progetti di riconversione. Se si potesse scegliere, il suggerimento è un palco al Theatre Square. Inutile chiedere l'indirizzo. Parigi, 1968. Base Lunare Clavin, March County, in Kentucky? Questo edificio può essere riconvertito ovunque tu voglia andare" affermano Walker & Saxton, lasciando pensare che la città del futuro, in fondo, non è poi così lontana da quella che portiamo nell'anima, prima che sulle strade. ■

ARCHITECT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

Exhibitions

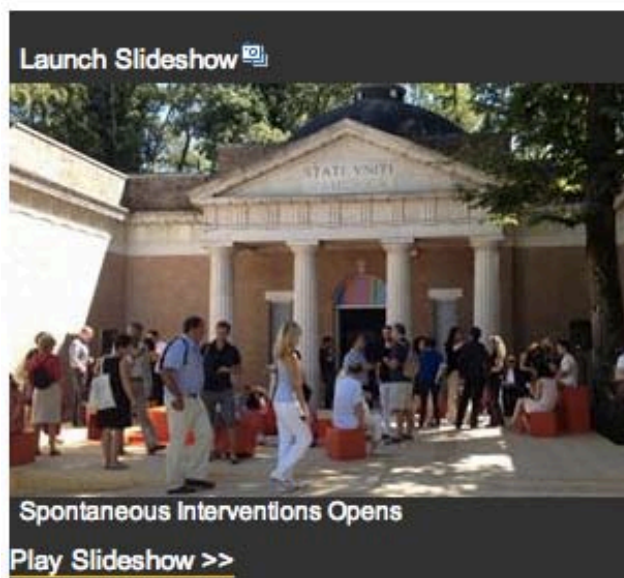
VENICE BIENNALE

Posted on: August 27, 2012 | From: ARCHITECT 2012

U.S. Pavilion Opens to the Public Wednesday

A first look at the "Spontaneous Interventions" exhibition in the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

By Katie Gerfen



The 13th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale doesn't officially open until Wednesday, but here is a sneak peek at the now-completed exhibition at the U.S. Pavilion, which opened for previews this morning. This year's exhibition, "Spontaneous Interventions," was spearheaded by commissioner Cathy Lang Ho and co-curated by Guggenheim Museum assistant curator of architecture and urban studies David van der Leer and ARCHITECT's editor-in-chief Ned Cramer, Assoc. AIA. The exhibition designers have transformed the permanent U.S. Pavilion, designed by Delano & Aldrich, into a hall of flags, with banners hanging from the ceiling that highlight each of the 124 projects highlighted in the show. The courtyard in front of the pavilion is the site of "Commonplace," an installation by Interboro Partners, that will host formal programming

throughout the Biennale's three-month run.

SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good



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Preview the Venice Architecture Biennale's U.S. Pavilion, An Exercise in Democratic Design

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Interboro Partners

A rendering of the U.S. Pavilion's outdoor pavilion in Venice, enjoyed by visitors of all ages

by Janelle Zara

Published: August 21, 2012



An abstract rendering of the U.S. Pavilion/ Courtesy Freecell

In light of several factors — an ailing global economy and the United States' less-than-stellar reputation with the rest of the world, for starters — the U.S. Pavilion at the **Venice Architecture Biennale** this year (opening August 29) has taken a decidedly different approach than in years past. Called "Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good," it eschews the model of exhibiting a handful of grandiose, starchitect-designed wonders, and has instead opted for a more democratic presentation: 124 projects by self-empowered citizens whom you've likely never heard of, who take it upon themselves to

alter their built environment to serve their communities' immediate needs. It was only fitting, then, that the Pavilion's layout would try to follow suit.

This year's design, a collaborative effort between commissioner and curator **Cathy Lang Ho**, Brooklyn-based architectural firm **Freecell**, and Berkeley, California-based graphic designers **MAD**, aims to actively engage its viewers by taking a similarly democratic tone. A kinetic installation of 124 banners, each bearing an image and description of the urban architectural projects being presented, hangs from the ceiling of the galleries. In the empowering spirit of the exhibition, viewers are meant to reach up, pull them down, and interact with them on their own level.

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



"We're asking the participants to do something, to change something about this gallery," Freecell designer **John Hartmann** told **ARTINFO**.

"In our minds, historic halls and castles always hung these flags out of reach. The point of the exhibition is that so many people invent or alter the urbanscape with their hands, without sponsorship." As Ho requested, the walls of the four galleries of the American Pavilion will be free of clutter — the exhibition takes place mainly on the ceiling and on the ground. Below, a MAD-designed graphic timeline lines the floor:

In 1792, the U.S. dollar was introduced; 1852 marks the birth of the modern elevator. The graphic marks milestones in civil rights, mechanical inventions, politics, transportation, and communication that fueled the rise of the American city.

Outside, as a welcome respite from the text-heavy, conceptually weighty exhibition, Brooklyn's **Interboro** architects will provide *Commonplace*, an outdoor living room for viewers to rest their weary heels. Playing on the Biennale's "Common Ground" theme, Interboro designed a raised, outdoor living room (a concept they're familiar with, having installed a similar hip outdoor hangout for **MoMA PS1**'s 2011 Warm-Up courtyard) that riffs on the idea of the '70s conversation pit — as well as Venice's annual high tides.

In Venice each year, the water rises, and city's solution is to install a simple system of metal tables with wooden planks that citizens cross without getting their feet wet, according to Interboro principal **Tobias Arnborst**. "We saw that system and thought it was a really easy way to create a platform," he told **ARTINFO**, and so the firm borrowed that infrastructure for the show. They'll fill the pit it forms with retro-orange cubes, firm enough for sitting, but light enough for architecturally-inclined children to use as building blocks (see the image above). At the end of the exhibition, the city plans to pack up all the parts and put them to their own use, giving the blocks to the Italian children in Venice's playgrounds.

The Venice Architectural Biennale runs from August 29 through November 25.



FORUM

Field Report: Reflections on the Venice Architecture Biennale 2012

by Rosalie Genevro and Gregory Wessner
September 19th, 2012 • no comments

architecture, design disciplines, elsewhere, exhibition, field report, Freecell, Institute for Urban Design, Interboro, Venice



The Venice Architecture Biennale is the largest event of its kind in the world. It consists of one International Exhibition and dozens of smaller shows organized by country, in addition to many related lectures and events over its three-month run.

Every two years, the Biennale appoints a Director whose task is to articulate a chosen theme in the 300-meter-long Corderie dell'Arsenale, a former rope production hall for the Venetian navy originally built in 1303. In 2008, Aaron Betsky presented “[Out There: Architecture Beyond Building](#).” In 2010, Kazuyo Sejima selected projects to interpret the theme of “[People Meet in Architecture](#)” (read a UO review of the 2010 biennale [here](#)). This year, architect David Chipperfield explores the theme of “[Common Ground](#)” by inviting a range of architects to reflect on “continuity, context, and memory” in the discipline of architecture.

For the national exhibitions, each participating country has its own governmental mechanisms for selecting a curatorial team to represent its national state of architectural discourse and output. 29 countries, including the USA, present their shows in national pavilions in the Giardini, a 19th century network of gardens. Many other countries put on shows in other venues throughout Venice. This year, the United States pavilion was organized by the Institute for Urban Design (IFUD), which presented an exhibition called “[Spontaneous Interventions: Designing for the Common Good](#)” that features self-initiated, often improvised design work in the public interest, much of which — projects like [Amphibious Architecture](#) or the [Field Guide to Phytoremediation](#) — will be familiar to UO readers.

The 2012 Biennale opened in late August and runs until November 25th. Our colleagues **Rosalie Genevro**, Executive Director of the Architectural League, and **Gregory Wessner**, the League’s special projects director, visited the Biennale in its opening week, and began to discuss with each other their reactions and favorite moments. Their conversation began in the forecourt of the U.S. Pavilion in Venice and continued a week later, back in New York. Read an excerpt below, which touches on the cyclical preoccupations of architectural discourse, the discipline’s ability to address urgent challenges, and design’s role in responding to the shifting priorities of government.

Gregory Wessner: I have to admit that my reaction to *Common Ground*, David Chipperfield’s exhibition in the Arsenale, was influenced by recently visiting, for the first time, the Neues Museum in Berlin that David Chipperfield Architects designed. I thought it was an amazing building, and I was particularly impressed by how deferential the design was: it engages in a genuinely respectful dialogue with what remains of the original 1859 building, with the history and meaning of the site, and certainly with the long list of consultants and others who worked with him. That spirit of collaboration, cooperation, and exchange informs his curatorial point of view in *Common Ground*, for better or worse. And I thought the show worked best in those installations that captured that sense of collaboration and recognized that architecture is not an end in and of itself. Rather, it is the frame in which human life — whether the everyday or the sacred — plays out.

Urban Think Tank’s installation on the [Torre David](#) in Caracas, for instance, comes to mind. That installation blew me away: the photos by Iwan Baan, the video, the café. And its subject is astonishing. On one hand, you could criticize the living conditions and the economic system that forced residents into this extreme living situation. But on the other hand, it’s hard not to admire the sheer resourcefulness and ingenuity with which people have occupied and completed the building. I don’t know if it’s a challenge to architecture exactly, but it’s a powerful reminder that humans have an immense capacity for adaptation. No architect was necessary for Torre David’s residents to figure out what they needed to create homes and a community. It is a fully functioning, vertical neighborhood and no architect was involved.



This installation by Urban Think Tank with Justin McGuirk and Iwan Baan, which was awarded the Golden Lion for the international competition, presents the story of Torre David, an abandoned 45-story office tower in Caracas that is currently the improvised home of a community of more than 750 families, living in an extra-legal and tenuous occupation that some have called a vertical slum. | Photos courtesy of Urban Think Tank

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



Rosalie Genevro: The remarkable thing about the Torre David for me is the utter matter-of-factness with which it seems that people inhabit the building and simply carry on the activities of their daily life and make homes for themselves, even if they have to walk up 11 stories or 22 stories. I agree with your observation about the emphasis on architecture as a frame for daily life, which was particularly striking seeing the exhibition in a city like Venice. Venice is such an unbelievably beautiful ensemble, but, of course, not all of it was designed or built by architects. It was built by builders, by the actions of people working to create an environment for themselves to live in. What's interesting about the concept for Chipperfield's show is its apparent modesty: the desire to re-interpret architecture as the setting for life, rather than as individual monumental works.

GW: So if the Torre David is about the everyday, then the installation about the *Ruta del Peregrino* is about architecture as the frame for the sacred and spiritual. In this project, you have really talented architects making individual gestures along a pilgrimage route in Mexico, but they're modest interventions in the service of the pilgrimage, rather than for the glorification of the architect.

RG: Right, they didn't create the pilgrimage; they reinforce the experience of it. Another installation that I haven't seen anybody remark on, but which I found rather moving, was about Luigi Snozzi. Snozzi is an architect who has had a decades-long involvement with one small Italian-Swiss town, Monte Carasso, and has made it his life's work to intensify, repair, and solidify the structure of the town. And he doesn't do it by making faux historic buildings; he inserts buildings where they're needed for particular purposes in a very contemporary style and they're beautifully designed. His work is particularly interesting at a time when architecture is so global because he has been willing to be so committed to a particular place – and a small place at that – and has played such a significant role in defining the nature of that place.

GW: It seems as though we liked this architecture exhibition best when architecture wasn't its primary subject.

RG: I think the reason both of us found parts of this Biennale satisfying is that it was not simply about architecture for architecture's sake. I love architecture, you love architecture, people who love architecture love architecture. It's incredibly important, but it is not a thing in and of itself; it exists to serve the purpose of life somehow.

GW: The problem, of course, is not with the architecture but with architecture culture and the people who shape architecture culture, including us. It's a problem with the way we talk about and present buildings, whether through exhibitions, magazines, or books, with the way architects present their buildings in lectures. Aren't we often at fault for all failing to acknowledge the larger life of a building beyond its role as an aesthetic object?

RG: I think architecture culture is cyclical; the discipline has gone through periods of being more or less self-involved. Any discipline needs to have a sense of itself in order to nurture, stimulate, and provoke its own practitioners. But this can become an issue when the balance gets skewed, when the thing produced – the work of art, the work of architecture – becomes isolated by the overemphasis on its meaning within the discipline itself, and thus its meaning in the larger world is ignored.

GW: The installations and projects in the show fell loosely into two interpretations of the theme of "common ground." One is what we've been talking about: architecture as the product of dialogue and collaboration; the "coincidence of forces" that Chipperfield talks about in his introduction. The other is how and from where architects draw influences and inspiration, the "common ground" they share among themselves. If I had a criticism of the show, it would be that this second category of projects tended to be a little too hermetic, a little too navel-gazing.

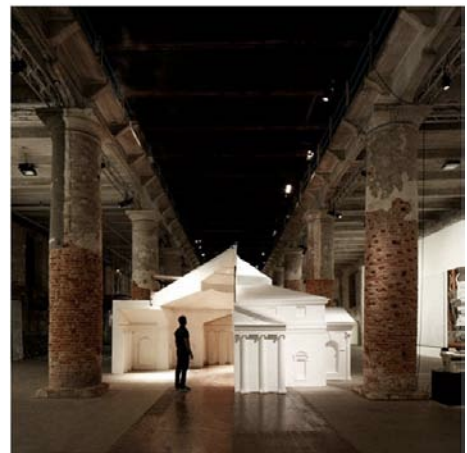
RG: There were some beautiful installations that exemplified that second interpretation of the theme, but I would agree that they were ultimately less satisfying than the ones that placed architecture within a larger context.



This installation by Urban Think Tank with Justin McQuirk and Luan Rasm, which was awarded the Golden Lion for the international competition, presents the story of Torre David, an abandoned 45-story office tower in Caracas that is currently the improvised home of a community of more than 750 families, living in an extra-legal and tenuous occupation that some have called a vertical slum. | Photos courtesy of Urban Think Tank



Pilgrin Rasm, State of Jalisco, Mexico | Photo courtesy of Delakamp-Architects



FAT's contribution to the International Exhibition was entitled the Museum of Copying. According to FAT Director Ram Jacsó, "copying is both fundamental to how architecture develops and something that threatens its foundational belief in originality." | Photos by Dawson

RG: There were some beautiful installations that exemplified that second interpretation of the theme, but I would agree that they were ultimately less satisfying than the ones that placed architecture within a larger context.

Even though I had a lot of positive reactions to individual projects and installations in this show, I'm not sure how the overall exhibition reads to people outside of architecture. It certainly didn't map out any new territory. It's not a polemical show, or, if it is, it's a very quiet polemic. Chipperfield's instincts were to have it be about modesty and collectivity. But he didn't shake some of the old habits, like inviting superstars or inviting people who would take it as an opportunity to focus exclusively on presenting their own work. This show was definitely not a radical break.

GW: I suppose the exhibition does partially reinforce the current interest within architecture in activism, participatory design, tactical urbanism, and so on. But then there were certain installations that were really just holdovers from times past celebrating the "genius architect."

RG: I do think too that there is currently a lot of confusion in the profession; we're in a period of transition as architects try to figure out what the practice of architecture is right now or what the architect's place in society is. It's ironic that the Golden Lion went to the Urban Think Tank installation about the Torre David, because the architects in that situation didn't act as designers, they were observers and documentarians.

So what did you think of the American pavilion?

GW: I liked it. I thought one of the best things about it was that all its parts worked really well together: Freecell's exhibition design, Interboro's installation in the forecourt, M-A-D's timeline. All of the design choices worked in support of the content, which is something you can't say about many of the national pavilions, where the exhibit design often completely obscured the subject of the exhibition.

I think if I were critical about anything — and this is me at my most cynical — I might question whether the kinds of projects in the show have real capacity to effect the kind of change urgently needed today. I wonder whether some of the projects, while admirable, can really take on the big challenges we have to deal with regarding the economy, energy, and the environment.

RG: So, then, a question for you: Is confronting our problems in a large way something that can be done through architecture? Because one way to interpret the projects in *Spontaneous Interventions* is as strategies people have found to affect their immediate physical environment, strategies that can make them feel like they are able to have some kind of impact. It's not about large-scale change. It's about the immediate world around you.

GW: Yeah, this could be an outlet born out of the frustration people have with government's failure to deal with big questions and issues. People want to feel like they're doing something, even if the intervention is small — like, for example, transforming a parking space into a garden.

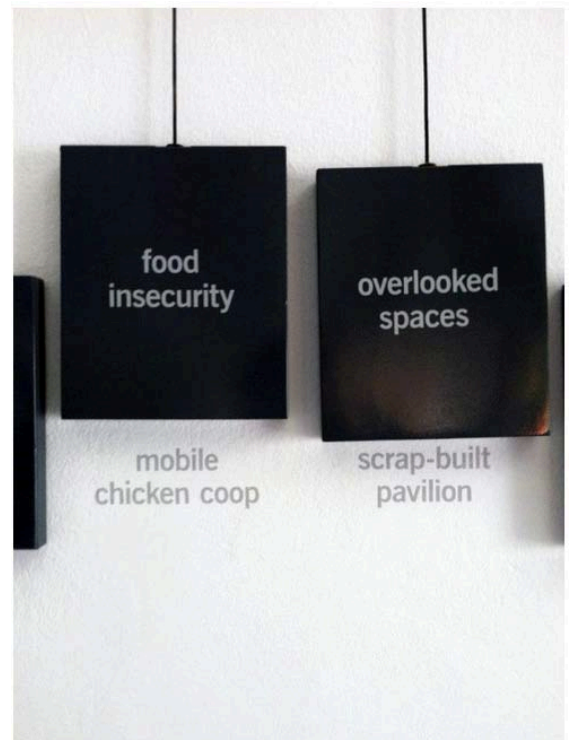
But I also don't want projects like these to absolve government of its responsibilities. In saying this, I fully recognize that the curators of the show were not trying to make that point. In fact, Cathy Ho, the exhibition commissioner and curator, says as much in an essay in the August issue of *Architect* magazine: the "micro urban moments," she writes, "can't replace the effectiveness and reach of top-down planning." I think it's great that citizens and designers are taking the initiative to make positive change in their communities. At the same time, however, and now more than ever, we have to fight for the belief that government has a legitimate role to play, that we don't all have to go out and initiate these activities. There are some things that we shouldn't or can't take care of as individuals. I'm not criticizing any of the projects in the show. I think they're all legitimate efforts, and I'm sure some are effecting real change in their communities. But they shouldn't be a substitute for the role of government fulfilling its responsibilities.

RG: I think it's interesting to think about this collection of work in contrast to the OMA installation, which focused on strong works of architecture by unsung individuals working as government architects in the post-war period of optimism in the '50s and '60s.

GW: On the subject of government, we were talking earlier about U.S. support for architecture abroad, or the lack of it relative to other countries.



Freecell's exhibition design for *Spontaneous Interventions* displayed the 124 projects selected by IFUD in an interactive pulley system that directly linked each project to the urban challenge it addresses | Photo by Gregory Wessner



Spontaneous Interventions, pulley system close-up | Photo by Gregory Wessner

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



RG: It is amazing to be at the Biennale and to look at all the national pavilions. Of course nobody puts a dollar sign on the door of how much the different governments contributed to their pavilion, but one presumes that in most cases the support was generous, whereas the support the State Department provides to the U.S. Pavilion is probably only a quarter or an eighth of what is actually required to mount the show. I also thought about this coming back to the United States and going through the unbelievably poorly designed, poorly thought out customs area at the airport. It's so embarrassing to come through the American customs and passport area, especially in contrast to the foreign airports you have just been through. It can't be good for the workers who are working there, it's bad for the citizens returning, it's bad for foreign visitors coming in. It is completely puzzling why the U.S. doesn't use the power of architecture to create a better image of itself, at home and abroad.

GW: I suppose the thinking is that these are concerns better left to the free market. If you're going to present an exhibition at the Venice Biennale, then let private funds make it happen. And if the market isn't going to support you through donations, then you shouldn't be there. But why doesn't American exceptionalism extend to architecture? Why don't we have the kind of support that other countries are providing to let us present the United States in the best possible light?

RG: When you think about the turn of the 19th into the 20th century, when customs duties were one of the biggest sources of income for the federal government and so customs houses up and down the East Coast were splendid buildings that kind of fit their significance in national life, and now, in the era of intense global travel and business, we don't pay attention to that anymore. It's kind of astonishing.

*In over 20 years as the executive director of the Architectural League of New York, **Rosalie Genevro** has pursued the League's mission – to nurture excellence and engagement in architecture, design and urbanism – through consistent innovation in the content and format of live events, exhibitions and publications (both in print and online). She has conceived and developed projects that have mobilized the expertise of the League's international network of architects and designers towards applied projects in the public interest, including Vacant Lots, New Schools for New York, Envisioning East New York, Ten Shades of Green, Worldview Cities and Urban Omnibus.*

***Gregory Wessner** is the Special Projects Director of the Architectural League. A curator and editor, he has organized numerous exhibitions, including New New York: Fast Forward, Studio as Muse: Herzog & de Meuron's Design for the New Parrish Art Museum, 13:100: Thirteen New York Architects Design for Ordos, and, most recently, The City We Imagined/The City We Made: New New York 2001-2010 and Toward the Sentient City (as project director with curator Mark Shepard). Publications include 125 Years: The Architectural League of New York and Travel Reports from the Deborah J. Norden Fund.*



At a gathering outside the U.S. Pavilion, participants sat amongst an installation created by Interboro, for which the firm borrowed standard-issue items from Venice – like the temporary, elevated sidewalks called “passarelle” that Venetians use to navigate Venice during aqua alta – and recombined them to transform the Pavilion’s courtyard into an “outdoor living room.” | Photo by Gregory Wessner

NEXT AMERICAN CITY

DAILY

Breaking New, Common Ground at the Venice Architecture Biennale

Venice | 09/14/2012 1:23pm |
TRACY METZ | NEXT AMERICAN CITY



Designed by San Francisco art and design studio Rebar, Bubbleware modules can be reconfigured and adapted for all kinds of collaborations on a city street. Credit: Rebar

The deepening economic crisis is forcing architects, at least in the Western world, to re-examine fundamental issues such as what to build (if at all), where and for whom. Under the curatorship of English architect David Chipperfield, the theme of this year's Architecture Biennale in Venice is "common ground."

"Never before has the Biennale had such a strong social thrust; never before was it such a mea culpa on the part of the profession. All good architects sincerely believe they are contributing to society," said Chipperfield at the opening press conference. "But society is mistrustful. It sees them as self-promoting, autobiographical animals."

Architect Lord Norman Foster's spectacular installation in the Arsenale, the thematic section of the biennale, is all about people; the buildings are the décor for a shared experience. At a heart-stopping pace, images flash around the four walls, images of people sharing experiences that range from the ecstatic to the traumatic: A pilgrimage, a goal in the stadium, a charge by the riot police. Meanwhile the names of hundreds of architects from all ages and places — from Roman Baroque builder Borromini to America's postwar skyscraper designer Gordon Bunshaft, from Harvard's Josep Lluís Sert to visionary Buckminster Fuller — swirl in a white-on-black graphic projection under our feet.

"Impatient capital is running the world and architecture has become a slave to it," remarked urbanist Rahul Mehrotra of Harvard's GSD in a panel discussion. At the moment there is not much capital around, impatient or otherwise. The Biennale shows how in many places ordinary citizens are now bypassing professional architects and planners and are taking the lead in shaping their own environment.

Paradoxically, as the quantity of the production goes down, the quality of the presentation goes up. Sleep-inducing models and axonometrics have made way for moving images, soundscapes, sculptures and social media. The **American pavilion**, with a show entitled "Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good" and themed to highlight DIY attempts to solve urban problems and create amenities for the public, is particularly successful in this respect. The work paid off — the innovative dabble into tactical urbanism was rewarded by a special mention from the Biennale's international jury.



Designers Carey Clouse and Zachary Lamb, collectively known as Crookedworks, made mobile urban chicken coops out of supermarket carts. Credit: Crookedworks

The designers of the exhibition relied on similarly clever strategies — Freecell's banners, M-A-D's timelines and Interboro's outdoor mini-auditorium — to make the 124 (!) projects attractive and accessible. Why so many? I asked David van der Leer, who together with Cathy Lang Ho and Ned Cramer co-curated the pavilion. "We want to show that this is a movement", he said.

And a movement it is. All 124 are examples of 'micro-urbanism' — Aurash Khawarзад's **chair bombing**, Evan Gant and Alex Tee's **DIY bikelanes** that project as a light that travels with you as you bike on a dark street, Carey Clouse and Zachary Lamb's **supermarket cart chicken coops**, Dorothee Imbert's and Paula Meijerink's **small gardens on paved parking lots** — heartening things that anyone can do if you band together and get your hands dirty.

As with any form of backlash, there is a danger that the baby will be thrown out with the bathwater. Daniel Burnham, designer of the grand Plan for Chicago in 1909, is famous for his injunction, "Make no small plans." Is there, among the urban beehives and the guerrilla bike lanes, still room for big thoughts and ambitious world-changing ideas?

There is. And there is room for beauty and for poetry, too. Alvaro Siza wraps a space of red walls around three trees in the Giardini. The Polish pavilion shows how to make do with what is already there by creating a sound installation in the bare gray interior of its pavilion. And the Dutch have hung a moving curtain by Petra Blaisse in their pavilion — no answer to the tough economic and financial choices of the moment, but an ephemeral reflection on the experience of space. As if to say: Let's not forget that this, too, is what architecture is about.

Tracy Metz (www.tracymetz.com) is an American-born journalist and critic based in Amsterdam. She writes for the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* and is an international correspondent for *Architectural Record*. She was a Loeb Fellow '07 at Harvard's GSD.

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



A Sneak Peek of the Venice Biennale U.S. Pavilion

by Meghan Edwards | Tuesday, August 28, 2012



#whOWNSpace, Quilian Riano/DSGN AGNC New York City. Image courtesy Quilian Riano.

 [VIEW THE SLIDESHOW](#)

For the **U.S. Pavilion** at the **13th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia**, the Institute for Urban Design targeted architects, designers, planners, and artists aiming to bring positive change to their localities. From over 450 submissions, commissioner-curator Cathy Lang Ho culled the 124 urban interventions deemed most effective for "Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good," on view to the public in Venice from August 29 to November 25.

The pavilion's theme stems from a compelling trend identified by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs: individuals are initiating urban projects that improve their neighborhoods and cities by way of amenities, comfort, functionality, inclusiveness, safety, and sustainability. The results include parks, urban farms, bike lines, pop-up markets, architectural installations, and more.

This year is the first that the U.S. Pavilion will feature an installation instead of a more conventional exhibition of projects. Brooklyn-based studio **Freecell** provides a banner system identifying the 124 projects' tactics for improvement, while the pavilion's graphics are by **M-A-D**. A video installation by filmmaker **Kelly Loudenberg** zooms in on select participants as they speak about the future of the American city.

Look out for an "outdoor living room" by Brooklyn-based **Interboro** that will host a lively series of events over the biennale's next three months, while **Rockwell Group's "Imagination Playground"** will be installed as part of "A Better World," a collateral Biennale event in the **Serra dei Giardini**, where it will become a permanent part of that garden.

The overall theme of the Biennale, conceived by director David Chipperfield, is "Common Ground." Accordingly, in the two gallery spaces of the central pavilion, watch for Olafur Eliasson's **Little Sun**, a solar-powered lamp that targets the 1.6 billion people worldwide who live off the electrical grid. And New York-based Louise Braverman will present the 3D installation **"Kigutu in Formation"** as part of the Traces of Centuries and Future Steps event at **Palazzo Bembo**.

discolé^{MR}

Projetos

SPONTANEOUS INTERVENTIONS - U.S. Pavilion

Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good. Interview with David van der Leer, Co-Curator of the U.S. Pavilion (with Cathy Lang Ho and Ned Cramer).

Texto de Cheryl Wing-Zi Wong | Publicado em 13/09/2012



Architectural exhibitions are often elaborate and perplexing visual experiences, burdened by models, boards, diagrams, maps, drawings and renderings galore—a sensory overload of TOO MUCH INFORMATION. Naturally, this year's Biennale is no different. The American Pavilion follows suit... Yet, although showcasing a staggering total of 124 projects, its exhibition design is smart and simple. Embedded into the design is the desire to allow viewers to control their own information consumption.

Projects are exhibited on banners suspended from the ceiling, which can be pulled down for closer viewing. You have the choice to explore the minutiae of singular projects, or to just glance through the banners collectively. When you enter the pavilion, you see only an expanse of uninspired rainbow graphics on rows of banners; but if you do twirl around the space, you will discover the projects on the other side of the banners.

Whether you spend three minutes or three hours perusing the banners inside the pavilion, you will always be discharged to the lounge area at the entryway—an outdoor communal space composed of a series of spongy blocks waiting to be assembled into makeshift stages for presentations and discussions that are part of the pavilion's public programming.

Noteworthy as a prominent theme among national pavilions this year is the desire to focus on local projects and local designers/artists. In this case, the curatorial team implemented an open call for urban intervention projects carried out in the United States.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID VAN DER LEER

Interview with David van der Leer, Co-Curator of the U.S. Pavilion (with Cathy Lang Ho and Ned Cramer)

+ CURATION

CWZW - Discolé: You work within the Guggenheim, an institutional framework, Cathy is more of an independent critic, etc... How did the curatorial team's different backgrounds shape the initial concepts for the pavilion and the subsequent selection of projects?

DVDL: It's a different but nice theme to work with and in. Cathy and I have known each other for several years, and we've often hung out in a more social setting, although we always run into each other at architecture events. Cathy realized that she wanted to submit for the Biennale some time last year, and asked us to jump in on it.

We do all come from very different backgrounds. Cathy, I don't think, has made shows before. I have, and Ned has a little bit, and still the two of them have a ton of experience in publishing. I think we're all learning from each other and from the project. In many ways, it's a very complex show that we've created. What we've done is made a selection of 124 participants, selected out of a larger submission of around 430 projects.

CWZW - Discolé: Did you think that, during the selection process, you confronted any conflict due to the different institutions (or lack of) that the members of the curatorial team were working in?

DVDL: Well, actually, how we made our selection was even more complicated. We sat down with our full advisory committee on this: Paola Antonelli, Anne Guiney, Zoe Ryan, Michael Sorkin. We usually all sat down together as a group and went through things together, having reviewed things before, and then discussed what was interesting and not. It's a really fascinating process, because some people find things interesting that you don't... We all sat down together a few times, and we would all make our selections and talk through them. In the end, I thought it was a very fluid, nice process—because it was a good group of people. I think we all had a good experience overall.

In terms of me working for a larger institution, yes, it's always different, of course—For

Me, it's usually nice to work for a bigger institution. It's good to have the back-up of a museum.

CWZW - Discolé: Talk about the idea of the "open call"... The texts pose the projects as critiques of the contemporary city. What's your "critique of the contemporary city"?

DVDL: We wanted to make sure that there were really projects in the mix as we would have not found otherwise, and unless you have an endless budget and endless time, there's not really another way to do it effectively, because it means you need to start traveling around the country and meeting tons of people. Sadly, this was not possible with time nor money, so I think that the open call was actually a democratic and effective way of getting projects in. There was a lot of enthusiasm, and I think that many people heard about it by word-of-mouth, from across the country. In the end, they're basically from all over the country—many places on the two coasts, and of course from places in between. For me, at least, it was an introduction to a lot of places I'd never been to, but now which I know have many interesting things going on.

In terms of the second part of the question, these projects became a lens for us to look at the American City—fascinating, because you all think you know a little about the American city, but for me as an outsider, my knowledge was limited. We're using these projects to look at developments in American cities over the past 200 years. This is one framework that we're adding to the show, which will appear as a large timeline on the floor. To me, this is an amazing element in the show. I think the American city deserves a lot more attention, from policy-makers, planners, architects, but also from normal citizens. This timeline shows this too, and I think it will be helpful for classrooms afterward. The second part of the show is interesting. The timeline looks at the past and the present of the American City, but what we're also doing is [filmed] interviews with around 30 participants in the show, and asking them to submit statements. They will be shown as the center of the show. We asked them: Can you think about what you've been doing in your city, as an architect, a citizen, a city planner, and project this forward—what do you think is the future of the American city? A lot of them said, "This is a question about Utopia..." They became very beautiful statements, about what the potentials are, what the challenges are. Some were more poetic, some more activist. How we recorded them was similar to these video messages of Obama, of the Queen of England... So, they're always a little stately. [We asked] People to portray themselves as the new government official, or architect of your city, or whatever, and to make these stately messages. It's beautiful, because they're sitting in these rooms, with the Met behind them or a globe next to them, and they're giving these statements, and it seems so real, and yet is so funny to see.

In coming from Europe, for me, the situation here is slightly different from other places. Some of the interventions (as found in the show) can be found in various places in the world, but the context of course makes them stand out, or more relevant. What I see with many of these interventions is that people are actually very ambitious and very passionate about actively changing their city, which is slightly different from European conditions that I've seen... There are many amazing things happening in Europe, but I've been impressed with the enthusiasm with which many of these projects have been made. The belief to really make change is beautiful.

CWZW - Discolé: There are projects that operate more on a conceptual level and projects that operate on a more tangible, "pragmatic" level. Conceptual projects, conceptual architecture, is often critically viewed as frivolous. How do you gauge the "efficacy" of projects? Do you gauge efficacy on what is really implemented or evidenced?

DVDL: We realized that we liked them more practical, but that it was good to stir up conversation. All of these projects in this show have been executed already, they're not conceptual in the sense that they only live in the brain or live in just a set of drawings, but all have been active in urban space. Even for the ones that are more abstract, or living more on the art side of things, it's important to realize that those also can help... There's a project taking place in Raleigh, and this project started as a critique of people not walking in the city. This young designer began a campaign around the city trying to direct people how to walk. It was, basically in some sense, a public art project, but it got taken over by the city after a few days. And so, it was incorporated into the city policy... even things that may seem initially more ephemeral can be helpful and mean something on a much broader level.

+ EXHIBITION

CWZW - Discolé: Can you talk a little bit about Spontaneous Interventions being less of a "conventional exhibition" and more of a spatial intervention within the pavilion? Architecture biennales/exhibitions tend to gravitate towards lots of information on boards, sensory overload, which can be one-sided, only accessible to architects or people in the field. How do you feel about this?

DVDL: A very relevant frustration for architecture curators like myself. It's difficult to make compelling architecture shows. What we've done in this case is worked physically with the architecture of the pavilion. It's a slightly pompous building, it wants to be much more than it really is, so it is has this structure with wings and then these columns. In the end, it's small for what it wants to be, which is fascinating. It feels slightly off, which is also a nice thing to play with. 124 projects could have ended up as endless drawings on the wall, which is what usually happens in these kinds of shows. What we've created for this show with FreeCell—the architects of the show—as well as with Erik Adigard in San Francisco, our graphic designer, is a layout that is based on 124 banners hanging in the space that you can pull down. These banners are nice, because of course, you expect to see projects immediately when you walk into the pavilion, but instead you don't see anything at all. We've color-coded the panels in the front, so it almost feels like you're in a medieval castle with its colored flags. When you pull the banners down, you see the photos, stats and details of the projects. So all this information is all included in the show, but in a much more appealing way because of the exhibition design.

And then about the timeline I'd mentioned before—timelines can be dreadful things— but Eric Adigard made this amazing floorscape that becomes a labyrinthian timeline that takes control of the different decades of American planning. In the central space— I hope it will be as humorous as we're building it now— we're asking people to deliver these stately messages of what the American future will be like. It's quite large-scale, so when you open the front door, you will see [projections of] peoples' mouths, nose, and part of their eyes, delivering these stately messages. You see these faces in the context of the flags and such, so

I think that in terms of exhibition design, it's quite something, it's quite exciting. So in this show, there is also a lot of information... I probably come from the same family of thought as you. If you want to, you can spend hours in the show, reading everything and seeing everything— but if you skim through it, I think it's a very compelling system too.

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

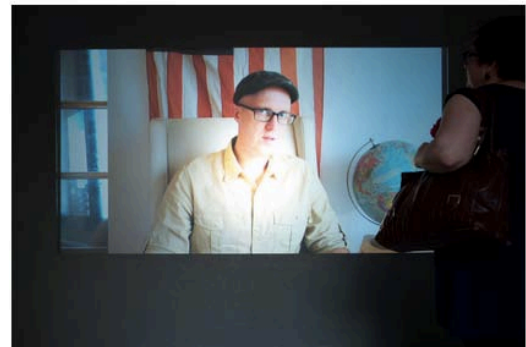


+ ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE

CWZW - Discolè: David Chipperfield says that “the ambition of *Common Ground* is to reassert the existence of an architectural culture”... What does this “culture of architecture” mean to you, how do you place architecture as its own exclusive discipline? How has architecture evolved to be more multidisciplinary?

DVDL: I actually think that our project goes beyond architectural culture—it incorporates artists, it incorporates designers, and also everyday citizens. It has an engagement in public space that can come from so many different angles.

Architecture as exclusive is problematic— I think architecture needs to be incredibly inclusive, much more than it is right now and learn much more from other disciplines. Architects need to learn that it's not just about trying to do everything yourself, as taught in school, but in some cases there are people who can do things much better because they're specialized in other things. I think the key thing about architecture is also collaboration.



SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good





Michelle Obama e il padiglione degli Stati Uniti alla Biennale di Venezia

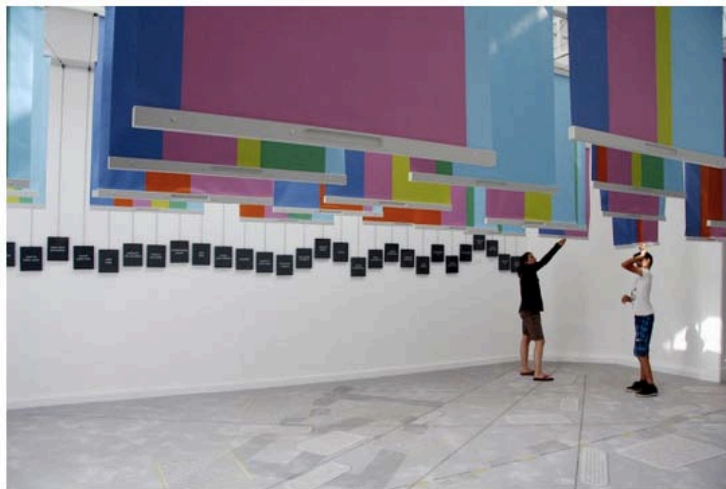
05 SETTEMBRE 2012 - ARCHITETTURA, ATTUALITÀ, BIENNALE DI ARCHITETTURA 2012

Pin it Mi piace 13



Ieri sera **Michelle Obama** è salita sul palco della convention democratica che dà il via alla campagna elettorale per le prossime elezioni presidenziali. La **first lady** gode di una grande popolarità e un legame particolare con la gente. E l'intervento era rivolto proprio all'elettorato più comune che in questi 4 anni di presidenza sembra essersi scollato da **Obama**, anche a causa delle difficoltà dovute alla **crisi economica**.

Ma questi anni problematici, uniti al celebre **"Yes we can"** targato **Obama**, sembrano essere tra i propulsori del lavoro portato alla Biennale di Architettura di Venezia del Padiglione Stati Uniti che si è meritato una **Menzione d'onore** della giuria. **SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good** è il tema attorno a cui sono stati raccolti 124 progetti e interventi nati spontaneamente in questi anni da semplici cittadini per migliorare le proprie città.



Da piccoli **giardini pubblici** a **fattorie comunitarie**, dalle **piste ciclabili** ad attente **mappature degli spazi inutilizzati**: il lavoro del padiglione statunitense evidenzia una tendenza molto interessante che vede proprio le persone comuni proporre e realizzare miglioramenti effettivi sulla **bellezza**, la **funzionalità** e la **sicurezza** delle città dove vivono, in alternativa ai tradizionali metodi governativi in materia urbanistica.

L'ottimo **allestimento** racconta questa vasta documentazione con **chiarezza e originalità**, così come riesce a farlo il sito di riferimento www.spontaneousinterventions.org.

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Una fotografia della società statunitense dopo il tracollo finanziario che mostra **dedizione sociale e politica**, attraverso un **attivismo** per certi versi inedito, fatto di **intraprendenza, abilità** e una dose di **ingenuità** che riafferma la progettazione come pratica per la **soluzione dei problemi reali e quotidiani**.

MUX



SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good



Radio interview featuring Cathy Lang Ho, David van der Leer, Mike Lydon, and others on tactical urbanism as a growing movement.

SpontaneousInterventions: design actions for the common good

The screenshot shows the website for Calgary's independent radio 90.9 fm. The main content area is titled 'space + place' and features a section for '#16: bubble-up interventions'. The page includes a navigation menu on the left, a 'station news' section on the right, and a 'featured friend' section for Yoga Shala. The '#16: bubble-up interventions' section includes a description of the show, a list of topics (beats, cultural, jazz, metal, mixed, news/spoken, roots), and social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, and a '+1' button.

Thanks to Plaistow Cube, James Yeates, Marco Raaphorst, Dexter Britain and Discount Fireworks for the music.

Find and follow:

[The Area](#) - @areayyc

[Tactical Urbanism](#) - @MikeLydon

[MLA - Jardin de Metis](#)

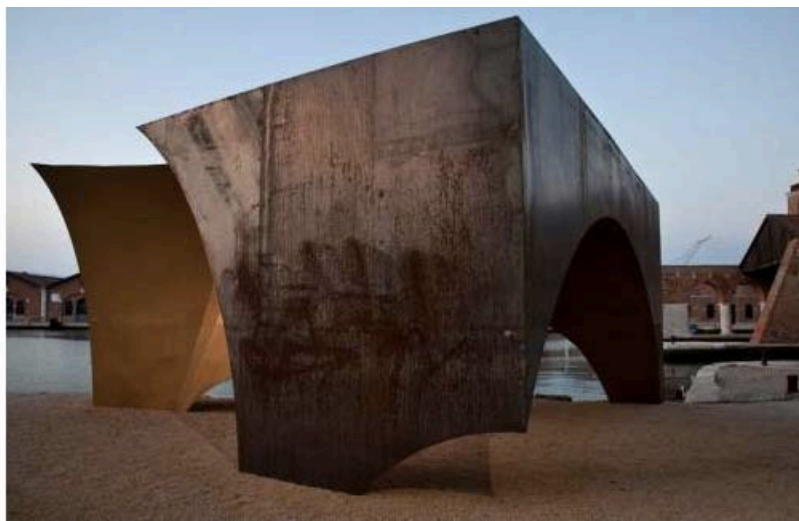
[SpontaneousInterventions](#) - @S_Interventions

This block contains an audio player for the '#16: bubble up interventions' episode. It features a description of the show: 'This show explores urban interventions bubbling from the bottom-up. We cover the SpontaneousInterventions exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale, what's behind the publication Tactical Urbanism, The Area in Calgary, and a Jardins de Metis submission. These are part of a growing movement turning temporary, pop-up and tactical into good design for the community.' Below the text is a progress bar with a play/pause button and a timestamp of 00:19:09.

.com exibart

Biennale Architettura Terreni un po' troppo comuni

Tutto sommato una Biennale promossa, con un bel po' di cose buone da vedere. E che soddisfa l'implicita richiesta del presidente Baratta di avere una mostra in dialogo con la società e con i progettisti. Utile per tamponare l'attuale pensiero debole dell'architettura. Ma i "Common grounds" sconfinano a volte in "common friends", a rischio noia. Lasciando indietro i Paesi emergenti, poca Sudamerica, quasi niente Far East, Africa e Australia. [di Pippo Ciorra]



13 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Venezia, 2012. Aires Mateus

Le sorprese, per quel che riguarda la Biennale di Architettura n.13, sono cominciate subito, al tempo della nomina del curatore. Era la fine del 2011 e la scelta di David Chipperfield da parte di Paolo Baratta destò qualche sorpresa nel mondo degli addetti ai lavori. A colpire erano soprattutto alcuni ricorsi. Chipperfield, come la curatrice del 2010 Kazuyo Sejima, è un architetto famoso e praticante, con poca o nessuna esperienza nel campo delle mostre. Il secondo indizio interessante è che si tratta di un progettista inglese, proveniente dallo stesso ristretto gruppo di amici dal quale provengono anche i curatori di altre due biennali recenti, Richard Burdett, studioso di fenomeni urbani e autore della fortunata biennale "sulle città" del 2006, e Dejan Sudjic, bravissimo direttore del Design Museum di Londra e curatore di una biennale piuttosto opaca nel 2002.

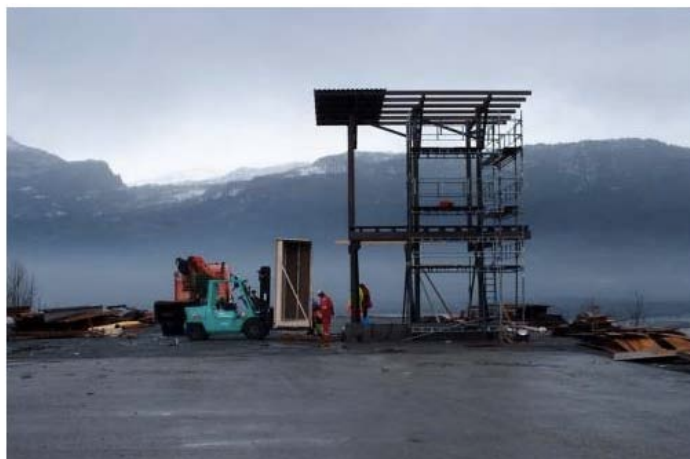
Strane coincidenze insomma, che lasciano intendere che per il presidente della Biennale in questo momento di conclamata *debolezza* della ricerca architettonica, la soluzione può essere rivolgersi direttamente ai progettisti e richiamarli alla loro responsabilità verso la società (*People Meet in Architecture*) e verso i colleghi (*Common Ground*). E di confidare nel pragmatismo professionale britannico come unica cultura capace di trasformare tutto questo in un dispositivo espositivo semplice e di successo.

Come ha risposto Chipperfield all'appello di Baratta? All'inizio in modo apparentemente un po' confuso, vale a dire scegliendo un titolo molto allineato alla richiesta di assunzione di responsabilità proposta dalla Biennale - *Common Ground* - ma lasciando poi ai numerosi invitati l'assoluta libertà d'interpretarlo a modo loro. Ai due estremi del "terreno comune" si sono inevitabilmente polarizzate due categorie di architetti molto distanti: da un lato i progettisti che per *comune* intendono quel terreno definito da istanze politiche, urgenze ecologiche, sperimentazioni (auto)costruttive ed esercizi di partecipazione nel quale architettura e società cercano di incontrarsi; dall'altro i designers che vogliono invece rimarcare l'esistenza di un retroterra disciplinare comune, un *repertorio* fatto di maestri, immagini, fondamenti e saperi ai quali rimanere ancorati per tenere vivo il discorso architettonico in una fase di crisi acuta della professione (*no money left, baby*) e della ricerca espressiva (le abbiamo più o meno provate tutte, no?).



13 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Venezia, 2012. Jo Noero

Crede che all'inizio il curatore e la stessa Biennale abbiano un po' investito su questa ambiguità, che consente alla mostra un raggio d'azione (e un potenziale di consenso) molto ampio. Poi lentamente Chipperfield ha reso chiaro che la sua versione del *Common Ground* è quella più disciplinare, nella quale agli architetti invitati è richiesto di rivelare origini, riferimenti e affinità. Il dispositivo scelto dal curatore e dal suo infaticabile team (Kieran Long, Jaffer Kolb, Shumi Bose) è perfettamente coerente con l'approccio, poiché prevede che agli oltre settanta invitati non si chieda semplicemente di esporre un progetto o non so cosa, ma piuttosto di curare a loro volta una piccola mostra nello spazio assegnato, nel quale ospitare i lavori di amici, maestri, artisti e affini di vario genere. L'operazione implica degli ovvi rischi espositivi, poiché il percorso è appesantito e ridondante, con A che invita B e C nel suo spazio e poi viene invitato a sua volta da C e D eccetera, però offre una rappresentazione plastica molto efficace dell'intento solo apparentemente disincantato del curatore, che tende invece, inevitabilmente, a costruire un sistema solido di alleanze e affinità, perfettamente collocabile all'interno delle geografie disciplinari e delle complicate lotte di potere architettonico in una fase di vuoto e di incertezza (e del possibile tramonto di alcuni dei).



13 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Venezia, 2012. Peter Zumthor

Come si riflette tutto questo nella mostra? Alla fine, non so se per sapiente regia o per puro caso, la schizofrenia di cui soffre la mostra ha una rappresentazione molto chiara negli spazi della Biennale. Al Padiglione Italia, introdotto da un incomprensibile muro di mattoni scuri realizzato dallo studio danese Kuehn Malvezzi e da una stanza dedicata dalle Grafton Architects al maestro brasiliano Paulo Mendes Da Rocha, i visitatori trovano una versione più fedele della linea Chipperfield, con le foto dei padiglioni della Biennale fatte da Gabriele Basilico per Diener & Diener, col *Pasticcio* nel quale i morigerati inglesi Caruso & St, John invitano al banchetto veneziano tutti i loro amici, con un altro disturbante pastiche, dedicato questa volta da Peter Eisenman al Campo Marzio di Piranesi, fino agli omaggi espliciti di Toshiko Mori ai massimi maestri.

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

Lo stesso atteggiamento lo troviamo ovviamente anche in molti degli autori ospitati alla Corderie, ma all'Arsenale il percorso è più rapsodico e diseguale. Si passa senza mediazione dalla stanza (bella) ieraticissima con la quale Valerio Olgiati chiama a raccolta le passioni architettoniche dei propri amici alla folkloristica (troppo) realizzazione al vero dell'architetta indiana (residente in Australia) Anupamaa Kundo. Più avanti saltiamo dalla ieratica esibizione di ideologia classicista e panarchitettonica di Hans Kolhoff all'allegro ristorante (operante) venezuelano da favela allestito da Urban-Think Tank, dal candore col quale Zaha Hadid scopre improvvisamente di avere dei "debiti" disciplinari, costruttivisti russi a parte, verso Felix Candela e Heinz Isler agli straordinari arazzi realizzati da Noero e Wolff insieme a un gruppo di donne sudafricane.



13 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Venezia, 2012. Herzog & de Meuron

Anche i Padiglioni Nazionali, di solito il bene-rifugio della Biennale Architettura, hanno risposto in modo molto diseguale al tema proposto. Va però ricordato in questo senso che, per motivi che non abbiamo bisogno di spiegare, spesso i vari Paesi scelgono i loro commissari (e i commissari i curatori) prima ancora che venga indicato il curatore della mostra. Ne deriva che spesso i padiglioni vanno per la propria strada, oppure tentano riconessioni avventurose e non molto convincenti al tema generale della mostra, con risultati strani, ma anche con una libertà che alla fine fa bene alla mostra.

In questa edizione forse solo gli inglesi (*obviously*) hanno preso alla lettera l'indicazione del curatore e si sono sguinzagliati in giro per il mondo in un esercizio di colonialismo al contrario, cercando nei vari contesti "soluzioni da importare". Per il resto alcuni hanno interpretato il *common ground* come storia e identità nazionale (soprattutto tra i Paesi emergenti), altri come incitamento a guardare insieme al futuro dei loro paesaggi. Altri ancora - ad esempio gli australiani - come un'occasione di introspezione ironica e accurata. La sintesi più interessante è forse quella proposta dal Padiglione Danese, come sempre molto ricco, che raccoglie architetti e pensatori intorno al futuro di una terra fragile ed estrema, la Groenlandia.



13 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Venezia, 2012. Farshid Moussavi

"Ti è piaciuta la biennale?", è la domanda di questi giorni. Ma è quasi impossibile dare un giudizio sintetico su un evento che alla fine allinea centinaia di progettisti di tutto il mondo sparsi in decine di sedi veneziane (ormai la biennale architettura segue in questo le tracce di quella di arte). Posso dire quali sono secondo me le installazioni "da non perdere", oltre a quelle già citate. A parte i vincitori più meritevoli, Urban Think-Tank, i giapponesi e il repertorio di "attivismo urbano" degli americani, tra i padiglioni trascurati dalla giuria certamente lo spazio mobile e avvolgente disegnato, anzi "cucito", da Petra Blaise per il Padiglione Olandese. Il suo obiettivo, su un piano divergente da quello di Chipperfield, sembra essere l'affermazione che non sempre ci vogliono cemento e ferro per fare architettura. Poi il Padiglione Israeliano, ironico e accurato, dedicato a indagare il ruolo della cultura americana nel Paese. E quello serbo, ieratico e sofisticato, quasi vuoto. Tra le partecipazioni individuali le foto di Thomas Demand, lo spazio geniale del collettivo olandese Crimson Architectural Historians, Noero & Wolff, l'omaggio alle riviste di Steve Parnell, gli inserimenti di Olafur Eliasson e quelli (un po' meno riusciti) di Thomas Struth. Per accedere al padiglione centrale, ai giardini, si attraversa un'installazione ermetica e interessante di Alison Crawshaw, progettista inglese che ha dedicato diversi mesi allo studio di una delle più recenti "aree di edificazione abusiva" a Roma (Borghesiana) e ha reagito costruendo una struttura che qui a Venezia fa da ingresso ma a che a fine mostra tornerà a Roma e si trasformerà in una sala comune per gli abitanti del quartiere. Nel cuore del padiglione, invece, l'interpretazione più interessante del concetto di *common ground*, vale a dire la ricerca di OMA (lo studio di Koolhaas) sugli architetti operanti negli uffici tecnici delle istituzioni.



13 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura, Venezia, 2012. 13178 Moran Street

La biennale - o almeno la mostra del curatore - è fatta sostanzialmente di tre parti: la massa principale, molto londinese e un po' svizzero-tedesca, costituita dagli architetti fedeli allo spirito dolcemente *conservative* chipperfieldiano; le partecipazioni più eccentriche rispetto al tema ma molto rappresentative del paesaggio architettonico globale e infine una moderata rappresentanza di archistar, non essenziali al plot della mostra, forse più tollerate che volute dal curatore. C'è molta Europa e un po' di Nordamerica, ma poco Sudamerica, pochissime emerging countries, quasi niente Far East, Africa e Australia. La ragione dev'essere un po' culturale, poiché Chipperfield lavora per rinsaldare lo zoccolo duro della disciplina architettonica occidentale, e un po' pratica, dati i tempi sempre troppo ridotti che ha a disposizione il curatore di architettura. C'è poi un padiglione italiano, curato da Luca Zevi, che racconta il rapporto aureo che l'architettura italiana aveva con l'industria ai tempi di Olivetti e che auspica di ritornare a quelle sinergie. Di architettura ce n'è poca, ma sfido chiunque a fare un progetto di mostra documentato e soddisfacente quando si è nominati - e non si capisce proprio perché - a due mesi e mezzo dall'inaugurazione.



Los Angeles Times

Venice Architecture Biennale is on limited 'Common Ground'

British architect David Chipperfield's seemingly wide-ranging approach to the Venice Architecture Biennale ends up feeling exclusive and focused on past glories.

August 31, 2012 | By Christopher Hawthorne, Los Angeles Times Architecture Critic



VENICE, Italy — "Common Ground," the title British architect David Chipperfield chose for the 13th edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale, suggests a generous and expansive, if somewhat tame, strategy for organizing what still ranks as the most important architecture exhibition in the world.

And in fact that feel-good two-word phrase, defined in endlessly elastic terms by Chipperfield and his curatorial team, has allowed him to use this biennale to bind together a number of themes that have dramatically reemerged in architecture in the last three or four years.



The young British firm FAT contributed an installation about architectural... (unknown)

The exhibition, which opened to the public on Wednesday, focuses in particular on the city (the urban commons) and on history (the threads that connect generations of architects across time).

The approach surely appealed to Chipperfield in part as a way to bridge the gap between his own generation — he was born in 1953 — and that of the architects now in their 20s and 30s. Many of those younger architects are eager to tackle issues related to urbanism and public space in their work and are busy reinterpreting the postmodern architecture of the 1970s and '80s, which brought history, memory and the quotation of older styles back into the architectural conversation.

But the exhibition itself, despite that determinedly optimistic and wide-ranging approach, feels limited, exclusive, stiff, starched and a bit cloistered. And for a show that is so keen to question the value of architectural celebrity — Chipperfield writes in the catalog that he wanted it to "emphasize shared ideas over individual authorship" and reject "solitary and fashionable gestures" — this biennale includes an awful lot of stars, many of them longtime friends and colleagues of Chipperfield's.

Though Chipperfield makes a big show of casting a wide net with this biennale, mostly what he's caught with it are the kind of big fish immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the architectural scene of 20 or 25 years ago. The architects featured most prominently include Norman Foster (given two separate rooms to work with), Renzo Piano, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Rafael Moneo, Alvaro Siza, Peter Zumthor, Bernard Tschumi and Jean Nouvel.

Some of them move in new directions — Nouvel contributes a terrific proposal for reinventing Parisian highways and overpasses as public green space — but for the most part the ideas are as well-known as the names. The language of the wall text and catalog feels like a throwback to the 1980s, with references to collage, tectonics, pastiche, memory, continuity and mannerism.

Occasionally this sense of déjà vu is no problem at all, as with a superb and very simple roofless structure by Siza painted burgundy and installed outdoors. Even if it looks a lot like his full-scale buildings, it's a welcome reminder of his vast talent.

Elsewhere the content begins to feel airless and precious. There is a little bit of humor and irony in this biennale, including a series of installations about architectural copying by the smart London firm FAT, but not nearly enough. There is some color but not much.

In the final room of Chipperfield's installation at the Arsenale, the old shipbuilding yards, there is a wall covered with drawings by Moneo of projects for Madrid, enclosed in beautiful wooden frames. The work is remarkable, even virtuosic, but you have to wonder what the point is supposed to be: That nobody draws this way any longer? That standards have fallen? That the computer has ruined everything?

It's at moments like these — and in a few other spots in the Venetian Giardini, or gardens, where the other half of the main show is located — that you begin to think about what Chipperfield has left out. It's a fairly long list.

The most obvious omission is any sustained consideration of the developing world. There is an installation by the Indian architect Anupama Kundoo — in the form of a small two-story brick house — but it stands so clearly outside of the flow of the rest of the show that it feels like an afterthought.

There's also very little about digital design or the environment. Female architects play a minor role. And the show's political content is feather-light.

It would seem impossible to launch a show in Italy called "Common Ground" in the late summer of 2012 and not address, directly or indirectly, the experiment in political and economic common ground called the European Union, which has been in severe crisis all year. But Chipperfield seems to have pulled it off.



BIENNALE ARCHITETTURA 2012 / NEWS

Ripartire dall'esistente

Interventi spontanei e forme di riuso del patrimonio architettonico esistente: progetti ad altissimo grado di innovazione realizzati a cubatura zero **Leggi** →



E

È possibile fare architettura senza costruire nulla o quasi? Invece di aggiungere nuovi volumi che andranno inevitabilmente ad occupare uno spazio prima libero, immaginiamo per un attimo di poter progettare togliendo; anziché aumentare la cubatura proviamo a ipotizzare un'architettura che ci consenta di ridurla, liberando suolo, piuttosto che ingombrandolo.

Sembra un controsenso, ma molti padiglioni nazionali presenti alla XIII Biennale di Architettura, stanno proponendo strategie che sembrano contraddire la missione stessa dell'architetto, suggerendo forme di riuso e riqualificazione di luoghi e manufatti esistenti che non prevedano la realizzazione di nuovi edifici.

La mostra al **Padiglione tedesco**, curata da Muck Petzet, con allestimento di Kostantin Grcic, chiarisce già nel titolo quali siano gli obiettivi: **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**, Architecture as a Resource, propone 16 progetti che hanno come denominatore comune il recupero di manufatti già esistenti. Per ogni architettura viene evidenziata la strategia operativa applicata al vecchio edificio: non si tratta di semplici restauri con cambio di destinazione d'uso, ma di una vera riconcettualizzazione delle opere attivata con piccoli interventi puntuali e a basso contenuto tecnologico.

Vanno oltre gli **Statunitensi** che allestiscono il loro Padiglione con 124 banner sospesi al soffitto, ognuno dei quali rappresenta progetti spontanei, realizzati spesso senza autorizzazione e senza l'apporto di veri professionisti, che sono stati realizzati come azioni di design per il bene collettivo. Si va dall'installazione di distributori di proiettili per fionde fatti di terra e semi per contaminare naturalmente terreni abbandonati, alla trasformazione di cabine telefoniche in mini librerie pubbliche, passando attraverso aiuole portatili, drive inn temporanei allestiti su edifici abbandonati e giardini pensili da affittare sul tetto del proprio condominio.

La mostra curata da Cathy Lang Ho, David Van derLeer e NedCramer, toglie definitivamente dalla scena i progettisti per dare spazio alle comunità e alle loro esigenze, dimostrando come, a partire dall'unico vero patrimonio disponibile che è l'ambiente nel quale viviamo quotidianamente, sia possibile agire collettivamente per il bene comune: senza consumare altro spazio. **AT**

Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good



What at this year's Venice Architecture Biennale caused us to stop and stare?

(1) For "Public Works: Architecture by Civil Servants," CMA/AMO paid homage to the many bureaucrat architects employed for public works in Europe in the '60s and '70s. Though the names of the talents shown are lesser known, much of their work, often Brutalist, represents a time when the private sector wasn't the driving force in the field. (2) The Fondazione Giorgio Cini is showcasing 300 rare objects from the archives of the venerable Murano glass manufacturer Venini, staged by Annabelle Selldorf. Curator Marino Barovier concentrated on the period from 1932 to 1947, during which the architect Carlo Scarpa was the company's creative head. (3) One project by Yale students this year literally outshines the competition: a 4-by-5-foot gold-leafed model of Rome, based on plans by 18th-century polymath Giovanni Battista Piranesi. While Piranesi never provided information on how his designs would look in three dimensions, the team, with help from Materialise in Belgium, used 3-D printing to transform Piranesi's vision into a highly detailed model. (4) "Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good" at the U.S. pavilion cleverly weaves together a rich collection of small-scale, sometimes anonymous or collaborative proposals intended to transform small (and often destitute) pockets of American cities. (5) This 5-by-2-foot model by Berlin-based Robert Burghardt may be among the smallest exhibits at the Biennale, but it's hard to miss as you enter the opening room of the Arsenale. The 3-D collage combines disparate modernist "losers" into one "Monument for Modernism"—a commentary on the so-called trend of critical reconstruction. (6) The German pavilion's theme, "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," is an effort to raise the country's awareness of postwar Modernism. Curator Muck Petzet selected 16 projects by native firms that made successful reuse of existing structures. While it may sound drab on paper, the large-format project photographs by Erica Overmeer and the layout by Konstantin Grcic are truly delightful.—**Felix Burrichter**

