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.
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 from the occasional story about Filipina maids in Hong Kong. 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 throbbing. 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) – Événement éphémère*

V enise célèbre la vertu des bâtisseurs. Plusieurs fois par jour pendant plusieurs mois, des équipes de travailleurs passent sur le toit de la Cité des Arts pour réparer les dommages causés par le tremblement de terre qui a secoué la ville en octobre 2009. Chaque matin, les ouvriers se rassemblent pour un petit-déjeuner dans la cour intérieure de l’édifice, avant de s’attaquer à leur travail quotidien. Le matin, ils nettoient les débris des jours précédents, avant de commencer à réparer les dommages causés par le séisme. Chaque jour, ils sont rejoints par de nouveaux travailleurs venus de différents endroits du monde. Leurs efforts sont récompensés par le soutien financier de plusieurs institutions et fondations, qui ont fourni les matériaux nécessaires pour la reconstruction. Le projet, dirigé par Félix González-Torres, est soutenu par le gouvernement espagnol et la Fondation Steve Jobs pour l’Art, qui a fourni un important financement pour l’achèvement des travaux. Le projet, qui a pris environ deux ans pour être achevé, a été inauguré en octobre 2012, lors de la Biennale de Venise. Il a reçu un accueil chaleureux de la part des visiteurs, qui ont salué l’effort des bâtisseurs pour rétablir l’équilibre architectural de la ville après un siège si intense de la nature. Le projet, qui a été conçu par l’architecte espagnol Félix González-Torres, a été inauguré en octobre 2012, lors de la Biennale de Venise. Il a reçu un accueil chaleureux de la part des visiteurs, qui ont salué l’effort des bâtisseurs pour rétablir l’équilibre architectural de la ville après un siège si intense de la nature. Le projet, qui a été conçu par l’architecte espagnol Félix González-Torres, a été inauguré en octobre 2012, lors de la Biennale de Venise. Il a reçu un accueil chaleureux de la part des visiteurs, qui ont salué l’effort des bâtisseurs pour rétablir l’équilibre architectural de la ville après un siège si intense de la nature. 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Video report featuring interview with U.S. Pavilion commissioner Cathy Lang Ho.

To view the video, click here.
Venice: the Golden Lions

The 13th International Architecture Exhibition awarded Urban-Think Tank, Grafton Architects, and the Japan Pavilion, while distinguishing Zucchi and the Polish, Russian and US Pavilions with special mentions. An architecture report from Venice

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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; Akhisa 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.
Silver Lion for a promising practice of the International Exhibition
Common Ground to Grafton Architects
Common Ground, 2012, Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara (Island, 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. Karolynska Krakowska (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.
United States of America

Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good, Pavilion at Giardini.
Commissioner/Curator: Cathy Lang Ho
Curators: Neil Carson, David van der Leer
Deputy Curators: Paula Antonelli, Anne O'Dwyer, Joe Ryan, Michael Seddon

Modifications 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 unexpectedly simple presentation was a delight.

Russia

City: ARK 5

Department: Kuznetsov, Valentina

Architecture: Valdenko, Potapov, Motorin, Merkulov, (SMA), Kuznetsov, Baranov, de Naurois

Stefano Boeri architect: Project MEGAKOM, MVP Mikhaylovsky, Kuznetsov, Baranov, de Naurois, Baranov, de Naurois, Baranov

Commissioner: Usatyev, Usatyev

Deputy Curators: Savelii Kuznetsov, Valentina Kashtanova

Modifications of the International Jury: Special mention goes to Russia for city. The 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
* City: Zaschki

Commission: Depurare e insedia cura generale di forma. 2012 (Milano, Italy, architects at Coenraat, Amsterdam)

Modifications of the International Jury: Special mention goes to City Zaschki for its installation which "aims to avoid a complex network of relationships that shape our physical environment." The jury believes that this serves as an exemplary seminar of the all-embracing theme of the Common Ground Exhibition.
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
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

#1 ANGOLA | BEYOND ENTROPY
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 actor. 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

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, Arne Gryniewicz, Zoe Ryan, Michael Sorkin]

#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 (Golândia, 1973) by Mendes da Rocha.

#4 USA | SPONTANEOUS INTERVENTIONS

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 Erez Elia, Milana Gratiz Adiram, Dan Handel]
#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 material, 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 22x6 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]
The Ground Beneath Our Feet

Scanning the Architecture Brochure

As Common Ground, this year Venice Biennale's fundamental question, 'What will it be like to live in the twenty-first century?', according to Anna Sansom. With the big names and the urban architects now having cause to reflect on and question the way in which we are developing our built environment, this has been a decided return to the state of the site and its impacts on sustainability taking precedence over individuality and impact.

Anna Sansom

Spontaneous Interventions: Designs actions for the common good

DAM Nº 35. The Ground Beneath Our Feet by Anna Sansom | 10.2012
Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

DAM Nº 35. The Ground Beneath Our Feet by Anna Sansom | 10.2012

The Ground Beneath Our Feet
by Anna Sansom

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

The shock of the earthquake caused the news to reconsider the responsibilities of his profession and the importance of sustainable architecture. He explains, "before the earthquake, I would talk to students and other young architects and ask them a very simple question: What is architecture?" But after the earthquake, you could no longer just say, "I mean, I make beautiful architecture, but do they look at it. Because now there are people who are really unfortunate living in temporary housing. I tried to get money from architects who know it, and we are able to help out again with real architecture. I think it is the right moment to rethink architecture."

The team visited the disaster area at the end of March 2011 in order to inspect Sandai Macchupe, which he wanted to "see as soon as possible". During the damage, it became known to the community centre in Sendai. The centre to provide the initial design and the only one for which he requested the collaboration of Iwateken. Fujimura and Torii. "The theme was to go beyond individualism, very slow, Last century, identity and individualism were strongly appreciated and respected. But at some time it could turn into greatness. So this time, we had these people building just one thing. So something that could be named now I made that. Finally, there were a few interesting ideas. We didn't know how to collaborate because we had different, competing ideas," admits Fujimura. "Then, gradually, as we had more contact with local people and understood their lifestyles and how they were determined, we began sharing the curtain together and it became a structure.

Added about how he felt when he asked them to become involved, Fujimura 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 what architecture is and investigating how to make architecture — big exercise."

Fujimura describes how the two-story community centre relates to the builders of the local residents, offering flexibility through multiple small, empty spaces that are slightly divided by partitions. There is a sense of place as the entire approach is composition. "Now the columns are finished, and people look up and say 'wow' that's something strange but it is special and living for the area."
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 curator, attributes 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
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, those 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.
Led by commissioner Cathy Lang Ho and her two co-curators David van der Laer and Ned Cramer, the team selected 124 projects that embodied the “lighter, quicker, cheaper” ethos—a rebellion against the decadence and malaise of the new century and a survival 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).

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 Diworth, 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.
"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.”
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.

...
Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

US Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale

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 oligar – that intervene in the urban context.

Sausalito-based design studio mA|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 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.

An integrated infographic 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 Luedtke 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 "commonspace" designed by New York studio spao borrowed from the Venetian elevated sidewalks to design the meeting and workshop spaces, with a collection of portable blocks that can be arranged in any configuration.

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 expanding, 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.

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. Now bike lanes in NYC might ilk 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.

Continue

The "commons" have been under assault for centuries, but intensely so since the dawn of industrialism. With the extreme privatization and pilfering of land and natural resources combined with the bad mismanagement by our esteemed 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 "commons" feel compelled to stop in? Spontaneous interventions embody ignorable ways of rethinking our collective well-being, both physical and emotive.
Architectural Record. Projects for the People at the U.S. Pavilion in Venice by Fred Bernstein  |  07.18.2012

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

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 notions for shared space, and the idea we are after about architecture. Chipperfield tapped 63 people, including architects as well as artists, curators, philosophers, and other professionals, to help create the show. Kenneth Frampton, the Columbia University architectural professor, will present work by Steven Holl, Patkau Architects, Rockwell Group, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and Stanley Saitowitz, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas, and David Chipperfield, among others designing projects for the exhibition.

Among the national pavilions, standout are likely to include Portugal’s display, with works by its two Pritzker Prize winners, Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura, and Japan’s, where commission Toyo Ito will present works by up-and-comers, such as Sou Fujimoto and Kimitake Ito.

Many of those national pavilions 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 reign to create an exhibition without Washington’s imprint.

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 school samples from their yards to be tested; and a mobile produce market meant to serve urban “food deserts.” While all the projects had to be new and not 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 460 entries, Ho worked with the Institute for Urban Design and a group of advisors led by the Institute’s board chair (and long-time Record contributor) Michael Sorkin. The projects will be shown on banners, which 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?
Architettura Spontanea

IL PADIGLIONE USA METTE IN MOSTRA
124 PRATICHE DI "AZIONISMO" METROPOLITANO.
LABORATORI OPEN SOURCE CHE HANNO SFORNATO NELLE ULTIMI ANNI
UN'IDEA DI CITTÀ ALTERNATIVA
Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good


...
ARCHITECT THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

Exhibitions

VENICE BIENNALE

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.
Spontaneous Interventions: design actions for the common good

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.
“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 Armborst. “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.*

by Rosalie Genevro and Gregory Wessner

September 19, 2012 + no comments

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 year, 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 1903. In 2006, 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. 89 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 precisions 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, co-operation, 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.
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.
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.

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."

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?

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 affect 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.
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.

“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 Lluis 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 Mehrota 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.
A Sneak Peek of the Venice Biennale U.S. Pavilion

by Meghan Edwards | Tuesday, August 28, 2012

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.

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 array of uninspired rainbow graphics or rows of banners, but if you do twist around in the space, you will discover the projects on the other side of the banners.

Whether you spend three minutes or three hours parsing 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 spacy blocks waiting to be assembled into multifunctional 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

CZWV - 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?

DVL: 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 architectural 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 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.

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

DVL: Well, actually, how we made our selection was even more complicated. We sat down with our full advisory committee on this: Paola Antonelli, Anne Gunney, Zoe Ryan, MichaelSorkin. 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 make our selections and talk through them. In the end, I thought it was a very fine 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.

CZWV - 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”?

DVL: 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, those 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 that have been in place for 200 years. This 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 will be helpful for classrooms, etc. The second part of the show is interesting. The timeline looks at the past and the present of the American City, but we’re also looking forward, to 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 to explore what you’re thinking about what you’re seeing around you, and what’s happening on our cities, our city planer, 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 potential 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 littleestyle. [We asked] People to imagine themselves as the government official, or architect of your city, or whatever, and to make these statements. It’s beautiful, because they’re sitting in these rooms, with the desk behind them or a globe next to them, and they’re giving these speeches.

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 more often with which many of these projects have been made. The belief to really make change is beautiful.

CZWV - 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?

DVL: We realized that we liked them more practically, but that it was good to stir up conversation. All of these projects have been executed already, because they’re not complete 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 if the cities are now more abstract, or living more on the side of things, it’s important to realize that those also can help... There’s a project taking place in Râles, 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 get people to walk. It was, basically in some sense, a public art project and 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

CZWV - Discolé: Can you talk a little bit about Spontaneous Interventions being being 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?

DVL: A very relevant frustration for architecture curators like myself. It’s difficult to make compelling architecture shows. What we’ve done is create a primal timeline as its own iconic official, or architect of your city, or whatever, and to make these statements. It’s beautiful, because they’re sitting in these rooms, with the desk behind them or a globe next to them, and they’re giving these speeches.

We 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 photos, artists 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 mentioned before—timeliness can be dreadful things— but Eric Adams made this amazing family. [We added] the elasticity timeline that was so central to the decades of American planning. In the central space—I hope it will be as memorable as it was building it now—we’re asking people to deliver these static messages of what the American future will be like. It’s a really interesting way to get a sense of people mouths, nose, and part of their eyes, delivering these static messages. You see these faces in the context of the flags and so on.

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.
ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE

CWZW - Discolé: 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?

DVL: 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.
Ieri sera Michelle Obama è salita sul palco della convention democratica che da 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 sciolto 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 manifestato 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 dai semplici cittadini per migliorare le proprie città.

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

Da piccoli giardini pubblici o 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’ultimo allestimento racconta questa vasta documentazione con chiarezza e originalità, così come riesce a farlo il sito di riferimento www.spontaneousinterventions.org.
Radio interview featuring Cathy Lang Ho, David van der Leer, Mike Lydon, and others on tactical urbanism as a growing movement.

Strane coincidenze insomma, che lasciano intendere che per il presidente della Biennale è in questo momento di condotto debolezza della ricerca architettonica, la soluzione può essere rivolgere direttamente ai progettisti e richiamarli alla loro responsabilità verso la società (_people meet in architecture_ o verso i colleghi (Common Ground)). È di confidare nel pragmatismo professionale britannico come unica cultura capace di trasformare tutto questo in un dispositivo espositivo semplice e di successo.

Come si riflette tutto questo nella mostra? Alla fine, non so se per sapere rega o per purezza, la schizofrenia di cui soffre la mostra ha una rappresentazione molto chiara negli spazi della Biennale. Al Padiglione Italia, introdotto da un incomprendibile muro di mattoni curvi realizzato dallo studio danese Kuehn Malvezzi e da una stanza dedicata alle Grant Architects al maestro brasiliano Paulo Mendes Da Rocha, i visitatori trovano una versione più fedele della linea Chipperfield, con le foto del padiglione della Biennale fatta da Gabriele Basilico per Diener & Diener, col Pastificio nel quale i marroni inglesi Caruso & St. John invitano al banchetto veneziano tutti i loro amici, con un altro disturbo pastiche, dedicato questa volta da Peter Eisenman al Campo Marzio di Piranesi, fino agli oggetti esplicativi di Toshiko Mori ai massimi maestri.
Lo stesso atteggiamento lo troviamo ovviamente anche in molti degli autori capitolati alla Corderia, ma all’Arsenale il percorso è più rapsodico e diseguale. Si passa senza mediazione dalla stanza (bella) iperteticca con la quale Valerio Olgiati chiama a raccolta le passioni architettoniche dei propri amici alla folla lotteria (troppo) realizzazione al vero dell’architettura indiana (residente in Australia) Anupama Kundoo. Poi avanti sfiliamo dalla iperteticca esibizione di ideologia classica e panarchitettonica di Hans Kolhoff all’allegro ristorante (doppiamente) venezuelano da favola allestito da Urban Think Tank, dal canto col quale Zaha Hadid scopre improvvisamente di avere dei “debitti” disciplinari, costruttivi russi a parte, verso Felix Candela e Heinz Isler agli straordinari arazzi realizzati da Neri & Hoff insieme a un gruppo di donne sudamericane.

“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 dedine 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 meritati, Urban Think Tank, i gialloni e il ripetitore di “artekismo urbano” degli americani, tra i padiglioni trasdotti dalla giuria certamente lo spazio mobile e avvolgente disegnato, anz è “curato”, da Petra Blaes per il Padiglione Olandese. Il suo obiettivo, su un piano diventato da quello di Chipperfield, sembra essere l’affermazione che non sempre si vogliono cementi e ferro per fare architettura. Poi il Padiglione Israeliano, ironico e accurato, dedicato a indagare il ruolo della cultura americana nel Paese. E quello sarto, ironico e sofisticato, quasi vuoto. Tra le partecipazioni individuali le foto di Thomas Demand, lo spazio geniale del coletto olandese Crimson Architectural Historians, Neri & Hoff, formaggio alle ritrovate di Steve Parrel, gli inserimenti di Oflur Ettason 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 Crowshaw, progettista inglese che ha dedicato diversi mesi alla studio di una delle più recenti “aree di coltivazione abusiva” a Roma (Borghesiana) e ha raggiunto costruendo una struttura che qui a Venezia fa in 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 terrificanti delle istituzioni.

Anche i Padiglioni nazionali, di solito il beneficio della Biennale Architettura, hanno risposto in modo molto diseguale al tema proposito. Va però ricordato in questo senso che, per motivi che non abbiamo bisogno di spiegare, spesso i vari Paesi scelgono il 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 riconversioni 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 squinzazzati 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 paesi. 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 raccolgono architetti e pensatori interni al futuro di una terra fragile ed estrema, la Groenlandia.
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 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, starchy and a bit chintzy. 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, Álvaro Siza, Peter Zumthor, Bernard Tschumi and Jean Nouvel.

Some of them move in new directions — Nouvel contributes a terrific proposal for reinventing Paris's Saint-Lazare Station — 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, tecktonics, pastiche, memory, continuity and manierism.

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 anymore? 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.
Spontaneous interventions: design actions for the common good


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.

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 intercalare un'architettura che ci consenta di ridurlo, liberando spazio, 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 attivate 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’approdo di vere professionisti, che sono stati realizzati come azioni di design per il bene collettivo. Si va dall’installazione di distributori di progetti per florde fatti di terra e semi per contaminare naturalmente terreni abbandonati, alla trasformazione di cabine telefoniche in mini librerie pubbliche, passando attraverso aiuole portatili, drive in temporanei allestiti su edifici abbandonati e giardini pensili da approntare sul tetto del proprio condominio.

La mostra curata da Cathy Lang Ho, David Van der Leer e Ned Cramer, 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.
What at this year’s Venice Architecture Biennale caused us to stop and stare?

(1) For “Public Works: Architecture by Civil Servants,” OMA/AMO paid homage to the many bureaucrats 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. (4) 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. (5) “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 desolate) pockets of American cities.

This 5-by-2-foot model by Berlin-based Robert Burchard 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 Eric Overmeer and the layout by Konstantin Grcic are truly delightful.—Felix Burrichter