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BEYOND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

SPECIAL Venice Biennale 2018

Six MENASA pavilions at Venice Biennale 2018 Bahrain Egypt Lebanon **Pakistan** Saudi Arabia **UAE**

Mario Cucinella Architects, MAP studio, Modscape, Mileto&Vegas Arquitectos, Flores&Prats, Fabris&Partners, Pietro Del Vaglio, Lorenzo Marini



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Decree of the Court of Naples n. 58 / 20-12-2016

Cover Image

S Courtesy of Venice Biennale 2018
Egypt Pavilion Curators

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[compasses] is a supporting member of

Compasses n.28 - 2018 Printed in Italy by Rossi Srl Nola (Napoli)

July 2018 ISSN NUMBER: 2409-3823

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United Nations, World Urbanization

3 Cresme, La città del futuro. Roma 2030 l'architettura come risorsa, 2017 4 Cresme, processing of ISTAT data, 2010-

Manifesto 2018

Prospects, 2018.

5 Ibidem.



the problem. It is a collective work that

the challenges of their time? What relationship do you think should exist between education and professional practice, and how you think this can give architects better chances to influence the shaping of our future?

M.C.: The collective nature of this project is evident in the pavilion because many people have contributed, both in our working team and in all consultants' ones; it was forged thanks to the awareness that complex themes such as the future of human environments. cannot be discussed according to the vision of the individual, who has a too narrow point of view, but to a vision that is not only shared, but is the result of many visions, many angles, and all these angles together create a much wider lens. Working collaboratively serves not to have a too narrow vision on a problem that an architect may see according to his professional expertise, which is not necessarily broad enough to encompass the size of

requires architects to have a capacity for synthesis; they share ideas and discuss on several issues but then the project comes as a moment of synthesis. We claim architecture to represent this moment of synthesis. which is the stratification of all those angles and different visions, and the project becomes interesting and complex because it welcomes all these points of view within itself. The architect's professional practice has its features and responsibilities, but if the ability of listening is lacking, in such complex world, his vision is not enough. Concerning education, we need to explain to those who are about to enter the professional practice to work together in order to open perspectives that are not too personal but instead more open and inclusive, enabling them to develop appropriate solutions to the issues that their projects embed. Even the projects done at SOS School of Sustainability are a synthesis that comes after a process of deep analysis

and listening that allow answering to the questions with precision, an approach that has a methodological relevance to me. An approach that may be as much old as the world which has recently of places, empathy, trying to understand where you are, allow you to operate creatively within a solid knowledge framework. Working collectively does not need to make a "commune" or to do a project together; it means for the architect to summarise within the project vision all the points of view.

M.I.: How has curating the Italian Pavilion changed you, both as a person and as a professional?

M.C.: The experience of the Biennale has confirmed the idea of working as teams formed by many people. I have got inspiration and knowledge on so many things, some even opportunistically, thanks to ideas and suggestions coming from trips, public meetings and debates that have

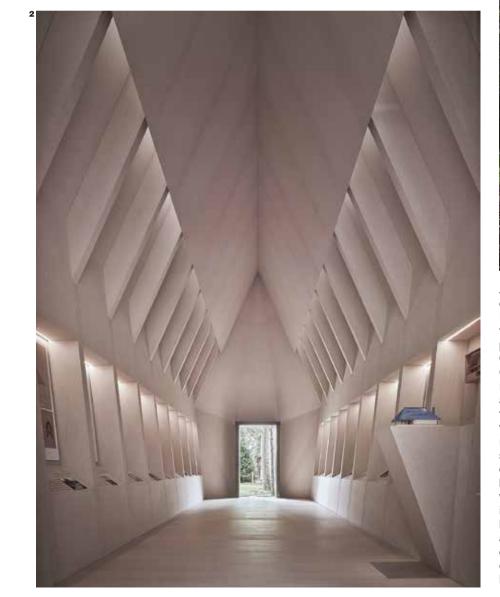
opened interesting scenarios. Ideas can strengthen the action of designers. and I believe that "listening" is a crucial and real theme. It's not strictly political, in the sense that people really need disappeared; listening practices, reading to be heard, and this is very important for me. Having discovered a part of the country that I did not know is also a part of the reward. I had a chance to know a world made by many little realities that have nothing to do with globalization, that don't even care about it, which claim their local role, their belonging to a place, an antidote to the idea that we must be as much global as possible. These places have taught us that we can have a very broad vision although having very deep roots. People, especially the new generations, have a hope of staying in their places of origin. even if they have the ability to crossover, and their attachment to the territories is the true DNA of the country.





Andrea Pane

The Vatican Chapels An interview with Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel (MAP studio)



- 1 Francesco Magnani, Traudy Pelzel, Asplund Pavilion, exterior view (photo: Federico Cedrone).



Among the most interesting initiatives of the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, there certainly is that of the Holy See, which for the first time participates in the Venice Biennale. Commissioned by H.E. the Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, with the purpose of returning to one of the main themes of architecture – that is sacred spaces – the project aims to involve all visitors. without distinction as to culture or religion. Thus, as Ravasi himself states, the project consists in «a sort of pilgrimage that is not only religious but also secular. It is a path for all who wish to rediscover beauty, silence, the interior and transcendent voice, the human fraternity of being together in the assembly of people, and the loneliness of the woodland where one can experience the rustle of nature which is like a cosmic temple»1.

In order to achieve all of this the curators Francesco Dal Co and Micol Forti have chosen a very special place: the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, located in the middle of the lagoon, home to an ancient monastery, whose church was marked by the great master Andrea Palladio². Here, after the suppression in 1806 and the restoration works of Ferdinando Forlati after World War II, came the great investment of the Giorgio Cini Foundation, a cultural institution established by the industrialist Vittorio Cini in memory of his son, died prematurely in a plane crash in 1949. Entrusted to another great name of Italian architecture. Luigi Vietti, the realization of the Cini Foundation also envisaged an expansion of the island of about one third of its surface, obtained by filling the lagoon. For this operation the materials >





deriving from the demolitions carried out by Forlati on the military superstructures added to the monastery after 1806 were re-used. On one side of it was finally planted a forest, which becomes an even more precious space in the lagoon landscape.

It is here that the curators decided to give life to this extraordinary project, assigning to ten architects from all over the world – some of whom culturally very distant from the Catholic religion the theme of the interpretation of sacred spaces, leaving them the greatest possible freedom, with the only constraint to keep a space for the Altar and the Bible in each chapel. At the entrance to this sort of "widespread pavilion" there is another small building. which has the key role of defining the main theme of the project: it is

the pavilion of the Woodland Chapel by Erik Gunnar Asplund, entrusted to the founders and owners of MAP studio, Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel, based in Venice. They are also responsible for all the technical coordination of the delicate operation, which in just three months has seen the rise up of eleven architectures of considerable quality also from a constructive point of view. At the end of our visit to the exhibition, we met Magnani and Pelzel and asked him some questions on the spur of the moment, asking them to tell us about this experience.

1. The experience of the Vatican Chapels, to which you have substantially collaborated from the beginning, is undoubtedly one of the Andrew Berman, Vatican Chapel, exterior view (photo: Alessandra Chemollo)

Carla Juaçaba, Vatican Chapel (photo: Alessandra Chemollo). 5 Eduardo Souto de Moura, Vatican Chapel, interior view (photo: Andrea Pane).



most important events put in place by the 16th International Architecture **Exhibition of Venice Biennale. Would** you like to tell us how it started?

For us the experience began at the end of the summer of 2017, with the invitation by Francesco Dal Co to participate in the design and to collaborate with him in the general coordination of the realization of the first pavilion of the Holy See for Venice Architecture Biennale.

2. Behind the project, conceived by Francesco Dal Co, it has been set a very strong and evocative reference model: Woodland Chapel by Erik **Gunnar Asplund. The whole genesis** of the other ten chapels has been generated and discussed with this reference in mind. Why was this evocative architecture chosen among so many examples of chapels created by the great architects of the 20th century?

This question should be asked to the curator, according to which with «this small but eloquent masterpiece, Asplund defined the chapel as a place of orientation, meeting, meditation within an ample wooded land, intended as a physical evocation of the mazy path of life and of the man's pilgrimage waiting

for the meeting. Even the chapels that form the Holy See Pavilion are isolated and welcomed by a totally abstract natural environment, characterized only by its emergence from the lagoon and its opening onto the water, an additional metaphor of the pilgrimage of life».

3. Among your main tasks there was precisely that of conceiving the Asplund pavilion, in order to exhibit drawings and models of the Woodland Chapel, in a prominent position within the path that develops around the ten Vatican Chapels. How did you seize this opportunity and what were the initial elements that influenced your project?

The idea of having to design a container for the drawings of the famous architect was welcomed by our studio with great enthusiasm and as a great challenge. The element, in its absoluteness, means to allude both to the stereometry of the supporting buildings (Ekonomibyggnad) designed by Asplund and Lewerentz for the cemetery of Skogskyrkogården and to the theme and the spatiality of the "hut-shelter" in nature. A sort of domestic absolute that borrows, from the traditional Nordic wood manufacturing and in particular from



the Stavkirke, a reinterpreted vernacular vocabulary

We imagined an exhibition space enclosed in an articulated covering and generated by a strong integration between structure and architecture: a unicum that defines the interior space hosting, in the articulation of the walls' thickness, the reproductions of Gunnar Asplund design drawings, texts and models for the Skogskapellet.

4. Your pavilion is the only one of the exhibition that doesn't have an explicit religious theme. Yet, visiting it, one feels a mystical tension that strongly recalls the theme of the Woodland Chapel, contained and exhibited in the pavilion. This result certainly comes from a very

hut with a pitched roof - but also from a masterly play of natural light. Can you tell us something more about this?

The pavilion wanted to be a sort of

game of mirrors, alluding – as already said – to the theme and to the spatiality of the "hut-shelter" in nature like the Skogskapellet by Asplund, and it is intended as a large roof that generates the "shelter space" in the woods; at the same time, we were looking for other references to Asplund's work and in this sense we identified the theme of natural light design that so frequently characterizes his work, not only in the Woodland Chapel. Therefore, we designed a device that allowed the entry of zenithal light through a series of Francesco Cellini, Vatican Chapel (photo: Alessandra Chemollo) Javier Corvalán, Vatican Chapel (photo: Alessandra Chemollo)



triangular skylights placed on both sides of the pitched roof of the emphasized vertical proportion. Natural light is then made even softer through the mediation of an apparently suspended shielding.

5. From a constructive point of view, your pavilion is entirely made of wood: is it a tribute to the Scandinavian tradition, as well as a strong link to the themes concerning the woods and the provisional nature that is inherent in the general project of the Vatican Chapels? What role do the technological and constructive aspects play in your project and how much did the Alpi company which realized it - contribute to its successful outcome?

The choice of wood is certainly both a tribute to the Scandinavian tradition and a material chosen to simplify the dry assembly, given the reduced execution time that characterized the operation as a whole. The constructive aspect and the integration between architecture and structure has always been a research theme in our projects. In the Asplund pavilion it is crucial because the eleven portals in laminated timber are designed not only to support the entire building, but also to define the ten spans in which Gunnar Asplund's drawings were to be

displayed. The Alpi company provided a great technical support with enormous enthusiasm and constructed the product with great expertise. In this case, in fact, the company - whose highquality production is related to interior decorative surfaces - has developed in a few months an experimental material for the exterior of the building, producing 9,000 weathering proof shakes.

6. Speaking of constructive aspects: vour task included also the technical coordination of the construction of the whole Vatican Chapels project, to be done in a short term and with all the difficulties of building in a lagoon city as Venice. Works started in winter - in March - and were concluded swiftly and efficiently. Could you tell us something more about this?

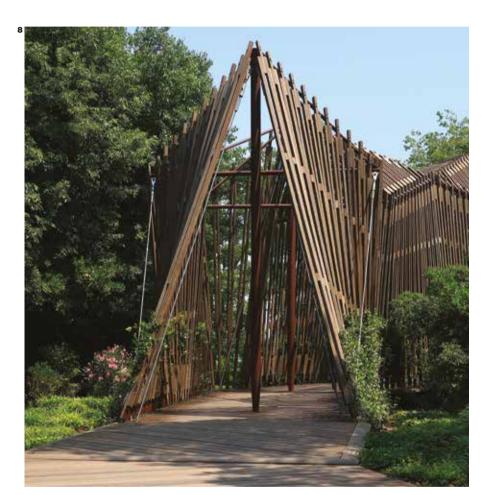
Planning and coordinating with extreme precision the whole process was a very important aspect of it. The idea of conceiving a pavilion for the Biennale not just through an exhibition of drawings and models, but rather constructing eleven interventions, even though of small dimensions, yet each one having its own peculiar constructive characteristics, was a big challenge for all. The peculiar lagoon situation hosting us was also taken into account: >

8 Norman Foster, Vatican Chapel, exterior view (photo: Andrea Pane).

9 Norman Foster, Vatican Chapel, interior view (photo: Alessandra Chemollo)

10 Ricardo Flores, Eva Prats, Vatican Chapel, exterior view (photo: Andrea Pane). 11 Sean Godsell, Vatican Chapel, exterior view (photo: Alessandra Chemollo).

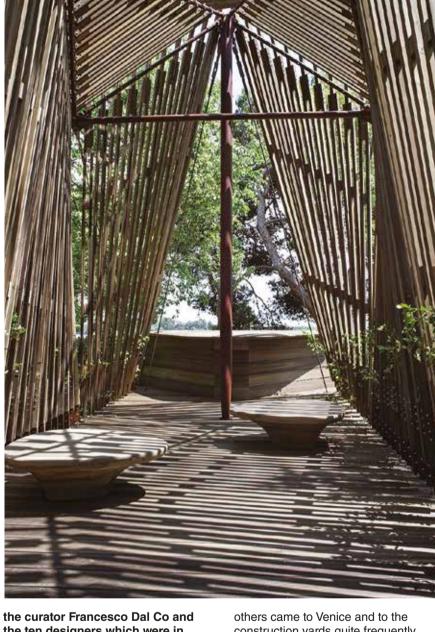
12 Smiljan Radic, Vatican Chapel, interior view (photo: Alessandra Chemollo)



the park, in fact, though recently set up (this part of the San Giorgio island corresponds to an enlargement dating back to the 1950s), limited the use of specific on-track machines for the construction of the whole pavilion. Hence a very experienced and professional venetian construction company was hired to help in the general coordination of the works. This company constructed and managed the yard's facilities and took care, apart from the transportation coordination, also of the preparation of the site for all the following execution phases regarding the assembly of every single chapel, each one of which was then constructed 7. Since you had to play a technical by its own contractors or "patrons," in the

words of H.E. the Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi. In order to achieve the chapels' anchorage systems, technologies linked to venetian traditional constructive techniques were used for the most part, as for instance wooden boards and poles. Moreover, a topic all the process actors have thought about was to plan prefabrication constructive components which could allow very fast assembly operations, always keeping in mind the limit in the use of large heavy goods vehicles as to respect and to avoid damaging the paths and vegetation context hosting us.

role in coordinating and interfacing



the ten designers which were in charge of the chapels, you certainly have attended to the genesis of all these ten projects, very different from one another. How was it to interact with so many architects having different cultures and backgrounds while trying to coordinate all their proposals?

It was quite simple in its complexity. The enthusiasm with which all the invited architects participated to the process following the evolution of the project was incredible. Of course while some of them, coming from far away, could not be continuously present,

construction vards quite frequently. Their experience, from that of the most famous architects to that of the youngest and less renowned ones, made it possible for a virtuous process to be generated so the necessity to face the commissioner, contractors and yard's limits never felt as moments of negative compromise, but, instead - also thanks to the professionalism of the actors involved and to the creativity of each - they became moments of growth, refinement and enrichment for the projects themselves. Even though the final outcome is a guite clear expression of it, it is worth highlighting that the interventions have been conceived and

for the Bible. 8. Andrew Berman, Francesco Cellini, Javier Corvalán, Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats, Norman Foster, Terunobu Fuilmori, Sean Godsell, Carla Juacaba, Smiljan Radic, Eduardo Souto de Moura, are the names of the ten designers. With whom did you interact more frequently?

realized in an extremely free way. The

Pontifical Council of Culture and the

curator only gave the following simple

indications including an about seventy

square meters dimensional reference

chapel an area for the Altar and a place

and the request to design in every







Almost all the architects visited the area for the exhibition between summer and autumn of 2017. Many of them have been involved in the choice of a place for their specific intervention, however within an overall picture which included almost a hectare of the park hosting the pavilion and which has been closely studied and continuously modified by the commissioner and us. There has been a very intense and continuous correspondence with all the architects characterized, in some cases, by full days of combined work when they came to Venice. Norman Foster and his team followed personally with enthusiasm and continuous support all the evolution of the project; Eduardo Souto de Moura >



- B Terunobu Fujimori, Vatican Chapel, exterior view (photo: Alessandra Chemollo).
- 14 Terunobu Fujimori, Vatican Chapel, interior view (photo: Alessandra Chemollo)

- 1 G. Ravasi, *Presentazione*, in *Vatican Chapels*, edited by F. Dal Co, Electa, Milano 2018, p. 19.
- 2 On the history of the island see E. Molteni, Così vicino, così lontano. Venezia, l'isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, la Fondazione Giorgio Cini, in Vatican Chapels, cit., pp. 29-46.



personally visited with us the guarries from which Vicenza's stone blocks were to be excavated to construct his chapel: Terunobu Fuilmori, besides visiting the location in autumn, spent a week with us in Venice in April in order to personally complete the interiors of his intervention; even though he was far away, there has been a guite daily dialogue with Sean Godsell, despite the time zones difficulties; also Smiljan Radic, who in the meantime was working in Europe, was able to come to Venice several times; also Flore & Prats, coming from the near Barcelona, taking advantage of their participation to the general Freespace exhibition at the Arsenale too, have been very often in the construction site, personally taking care of the

execution of some details in the inside of their chapel.

9. Among the ten chapels, very different from one another, there are diametrically opposed approaches, that range from Souto de Moura's, who designed a really poetic space with simple squared stone blocks, to Foster's hightech one, who also achieved a very evocative space, even though starting from a very opposite approach. Still different are Cellini and Juacaba's sharpened shapes, made up of orthogonal planes. Finally, other chapels rather insist on the theme of centrality and of the confined space, as Radic's, which I consider really successful.

What do you think of this variety of approaches?

The fortune of the final outcome of the pavilion is actually given by the projects' richness and by the difference in interpretation of the topic, developed by the architects who were asked to participate. This incredible result was achieved, above all, thanks to the choices made by the commissioner and, thus, also thanks to the great cultural (and generational) differences among the participating designers.

10. The connection already aroused between the extraordinary bushes of San Giorgio island and the architectures that are now hosted seems to be very well-established. Would it be possible

to imagine a permanent future for this exhibition which was born to be temporary?

That is a very delicate issue: with the pavilion of the Holy See for the Venice Biennale 2018, this part of the San Giorgio island, which has been inaccessible for a long time, was finally reopened to the public. All these architectures were born to be temporary and, at the moment, their dismantlement has been scheduled soon after the Biennale will be over, unless some particular agreement will be made between Cini Foundation, which is the concession-granting authority and manager of those areas and the State Property Office, which is the authority whom the places belong to.

Translation by Damiana Treccozzi and Daria Verde

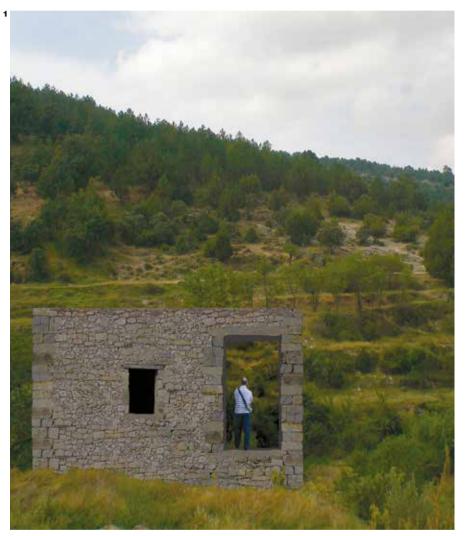


1 Project for a new Tibetan house for meditation in the Maestrazgo mountains (Spain), designed with local materials and techniques to harmonize with the environment from as many points of view as possible (project: Vegas & Mileto).

2 Detail of a mortuary chapel in Vila-Real (Spain), built with contemporary forms with local low-energy embodied materials and traditional techniques (project: Vegas & Mileto, photo: Vicente A. Jiménez).

Fernando Vegas & Camilla Mileto Universitat Politècnica de València

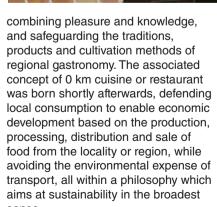
Quarry-to-Home architecture



Sustainability in architecture is ruled by three basic and often interconnected principles: environmental sustainability. socioeconomic sustainability, and sociocultural sustainability. Environmental sustainability is often linked to the rational extraction of available resources, the use of clean construction materials produced with little energy costs and saving on transport to building sites, all factors to blame for many of the pollution issues brought about by the construction industry. However, when applied properly, these three components can also lead to collateral socioeconomic

and sociocultural advantages. In addition to helping the environment, the extraction of resources and the local production of building materials can also aid in the establishment of local employment and in the economic empowerment of the most isolated communities, as well as in the continuity of traditional techniques and trades in construction.

This sustainability somewhat mirrors the international Slow Food movement founded by Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1986. This movement fights against the standardisation of taste in gastronomy, promoting a philosophy



There is also the farm-to-table (farm-to-fork or farm-to-school) movement

which defends the use of local food in restaurants, cafes and school canteens. Whenever possible this food should be sourced directly from farmers, agricultural workers and livestock breeders. This movement stresses the importance of the traceability, that is, the origin and provenance of the food we eat. In an increasingly globalised world this concept of traceability has spread to other products such as toys and clothes. This farm-to-table or 0 km cuisine movement finds an architectural parallel in what could be termed quarry-to-home architecture. This type of architecture defends and promotes the use of

