

La Biennale di Venezia
20th International Architecture Exhibition



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Do Architecture
— For the Possibility of Coexistence Facing a Real Reality

The world is in an increasingly unstable state. A world of complete uncertainty is madness; rapidly changing uncertainty is delirium. The rapid and multiple changes in architecture are, more than anything, a surface phenomenon: a symptom of excessive conceptualization or commercialization. Overly conceptual experiments are often detached from reality, while excessive commercialization is merely fashionable and short-lived. In order to survive, the cycle of rapid architectural change continually repeats itself at great speed, severing its connection with real spaces. This will lead to the death of architecture. Architecture thus becomes a kind of illusory expression of the future. This is why, in the face of the real crises of this turbulent world, there is special value in upholding a simple and truthful architectural idea and method.

This effort requires the capacity and strength to cut through concepts and reach reality directly. It requires a way of facing the act of building head-on. Only then can it be truly experimental, for incomplete experimentation is meaningless.

Architecture must recognize the depth of the crisis in which it finds itself! We agree with the judgment of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss: among the many crises humanity experienced in the twentieth century — wars, economic crisis, energy crisis, epidemics, climate crisis, social crisis, and others — the crisis between nature and human-made construction is the most profound. Clearly, the rapidly expanding scale of architectural activity makes it the largest form of human-made construction. Combined with overconfident large-scale urban planning, this building activity has dramatically amplified its destructive impact on the fragile relationship between natural and human-made environments. It should be stressed that nature does not mean pure wilderness alone. It also includes the cultural remains of human cities and villages shaped by long processes of growth, whose richness is comparable to the diversity of nature itself.

If we move beyond the academic debates around modernism, postmodernism, landscape theory, Situationism and other such schools of thought, the crisis of architecture lies precisely in architecture itself: in its excessive professionalization, abstraction, and conceptualization. What we must remain highly alert to is the enormous power that twentieth-century technological progress has given architects to change other people's ways of life. When this professional power loses its connection with lived experience, it exerts a destructive impact on local urban and architectural heritage all around the world, with very few exceptions. The attempt to impose a single architectural language worldwide is not so much extraordinarily difficult, as it is extraordinarily arrogant and frightening.

In response to this state of crisis, in 2000, Amateur Architecture Studio published the first version of its manifesto, which stated:

“Amateur Architecture is architecture that comes infinitely close to spontaneous order. This is why, within its field of vision, spontaneous building, unauthorized building, and temporary assemblage have a status equal to that of professional architecture. I call all of this the “present of the past”, or, one could say, the “tradition of the present”;

Amateur Architecture is not an architecture that leaves this world behind to revolve around the central image of monumental architecture. It is an architecture that shatters the center. [...] It relies on the contact between body and architecture, not on the frenzy of the retina. It is concerned with events that may erupt at any moment, not with grand narratives formulated in advance or retrospective explanations produced after completion;

Amateur Architecture is architecture that uses technology appropriately and patiently refines its construction. It does not pursue the symbolic expression of the technological age, nor the indiscriminate abuse of technology. Rather, it attempts to present architecture in an appropriate, restrained, and technically intelligible form. In fact, it attempts to leave, at the technical level of construction, a certain margin for building to continue. Its ideal users are those who are interested in continuing to build. *Amateur Architecture* is never completed, but always in the process of being so, always old and new at the same time.” (See Appendix)

It should be stressed that, whether in cities or in architecture, and wherever in the world, real appeal stems from diversity. But true diversity depends on the distinct character of each thing. Diversity pursued as an end in itself is nothing more than vulgar repetition, becoming synonymous with cultural conservatism and resistance to innovation.

The effort to defend diversity is another kind of utopia. Yet practical experience tells us that reality is often stranger than anything we can imagine. It is never ideal, but rather the coexistence of contradictory things.

Following the publication of the “Amateur Architecture” manifesto, and beginning in 2002, we started using reclaimed materials in large-scale urban public buildings. These reclaimed traditional materials were precisely the waste products of modern professional architecture and planning, and reclaiming them was our response to the rapid expansion of cities, the widespread demolition of historic buildings, and the spread of spontaneous constructions.

In the face of widespread collective amnesia, extending from cities to rural areas, reclaiming materials also meant reclaiming local cultural memory and craftsmanship. We believe that only when these materials and crafts coexist with modern architecture—not as decorative fragments, but as a substantial, large-scale presence—can architecture respond directly to reality. It is both an exploration of more sustainable ways of building, as well as a critical expression of the architect’s role as a public intellectual. Only this kind of experiment is truly thorough.

With this in mind, for the Biennale Architettura 2027, we continue to confront reality with a series of fundamental questions concerning architecture: faced with urban development on such a large scale, how can we avoid the vulgar cloning of new buildings and allow

new development to coexist with the richness of local culture? If these large-scale architectural and planning operations are indeed incompatible with the richness and difference of local cultures, how can architectural knowledge and practice protect what is heterogeneous or even accidental? How can active public and community participation allow the authenticity of lived experience to coexist within reality? And if unified planning and large-scale development must be approached with vigilance and restraint, is architecture ready, in both theory and design method, to make coexistence in diversity and gradual renewal its primary practice?

In the face of global climate change, can active and passive approaches to design, strategy, and technology work alongside one another? Can land and architecture coexist? Can more natural materials and local craftsmanship overcome conceptual and technical barriers to stand alongside modern design and construction as their primary components? Can memory and innovation coexist dialectically? Can the efficiency of modern design and construction coexist with slower, more meaningful forms of craftsmanship? Can we resolve the conflict between urban and rural models of development? Is there a way for them to coexist while preserving the vulnerable character of rural areas? Can large design firms and small studios coexist, not in spite of their different values, but because of them? Can a commitment to the diversity of things and to human tactility coexist with today's technological development, especially the rise of AI?

As Roland Barthes reminds us, life is made of trivial fragments. If working through fragments, small interventions, and incremental work is indeed a more sustainable and more natural way of building, is architectural education ready, both theoretically and in design practice, to experiment with breaking through the barriers that stand in its way?

All these questions point to one essential path: facing real reality and local practice, and directly “do architecture”, especially a kind of “do” that is grounded in bodily touch. It is precisely through this concrete act of “do” that things which seem impossible to bring together can gather in one place. This is the theme we propose for the Biennale Architettura 2027: **Do Architecture — For the Possibility of Coexistence Facing of Real Reality.**

Returning to “natural building” means choosing materials that are as natural as possible, insisting on real construction, on community participation, and craftsmen's involvement. If this is the ultimate ideal for overcoming the opposition between nature and the human-made, and for rescuing architecture from being reduced to a pile of finishes, then it must confront an entire human-made system: concepts, design methods, materials, construction systems, regulations, and the social desires and inertia behind them. It must also confront the limits of modern architectural and planning theory and design. This pursuit is therefore a battle, and a long one. We believe that architecture as an effort to protect local cultural heritage can coexist with architecture as an avant-garde force for social transformation. Only in this way can architecture preserve its value in an age flooded by technology. Only in this way can humanity, through architecture, preserve a tangible value. Only through continuous struggle can hope be kept alive.

Beyond identifying and presenting the most experimental explorations connected to the Exhibition theme, whether in practice or in theory, we also speak as teachers who have long been committed to architectural education. We deeply understand that this future —

the kind of future of “uncertain diversity” described by the writer Jorge Luis Borges — will depend above all on the younger generation, and therefore on architectural education. For this reason, we imagine architectural education playing an important role in this Biennale Architettura 2027. It will be included through active dialogue, and through forms that encourage the creative coexistence of diversity, like in “The garden of forking paths,” to borrow the title of Borges’s story.

We believe that architecture is not only something to be discussed but, more importantly, something to be done first-hand. The philosophy of architecture is a philosophy of how to do: a practice that confronts real reality, in real places, through real construction.

This exploration cannot ignore the city in which the Exhibition takes place: Venice. Nor should it allow Venice to become, in any real sense, one of Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. For this reason, a direct architectural intervention in Venice will constitute another important site of the Exhibition, gathering forces from around the world in the city itself.

Venice is also the city where the Venice Charter, the landmark document on the conservation of architectural heritage, was issued. The charter had a positive influence worldwide on the protection of heritage authenticity. Today, Venice should continue to play an active role in social transformation, through forms of architectural innovation that can coexist with the notion of “conservation.” Such a transformation will certainly be difficult. Yet Venice’s peculiarity gives this effort profound significance: not only for Venice itself, but for the world at large.

“Do” is only a beginning, but it may be a decisive one.