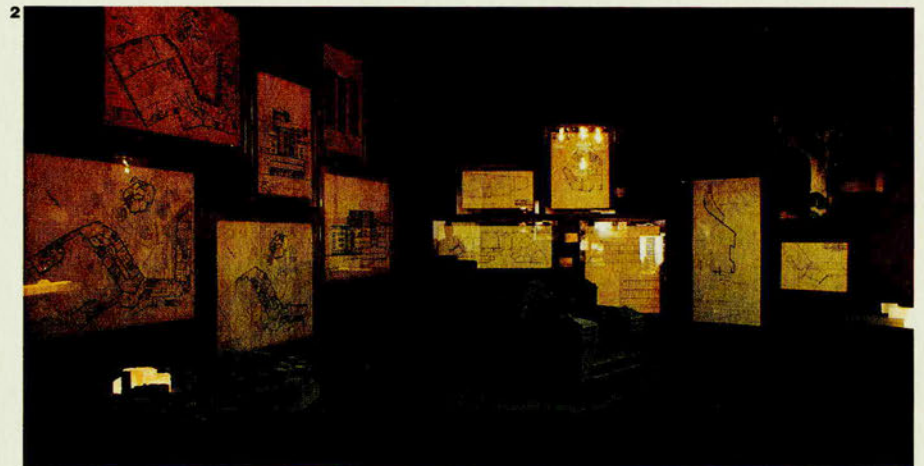
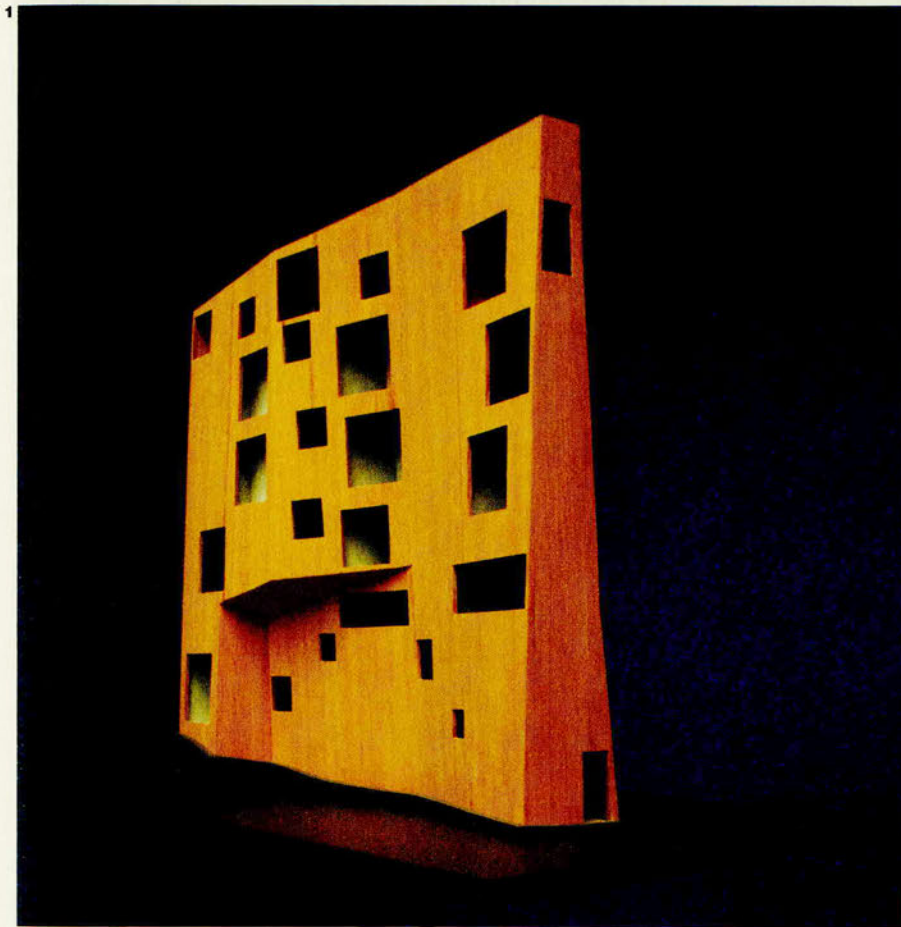


Maria Vittoria Capitanucci

Freespace/freeinterpretation The Venice Biennale Architettura 2018

 Venice Biennale 2018

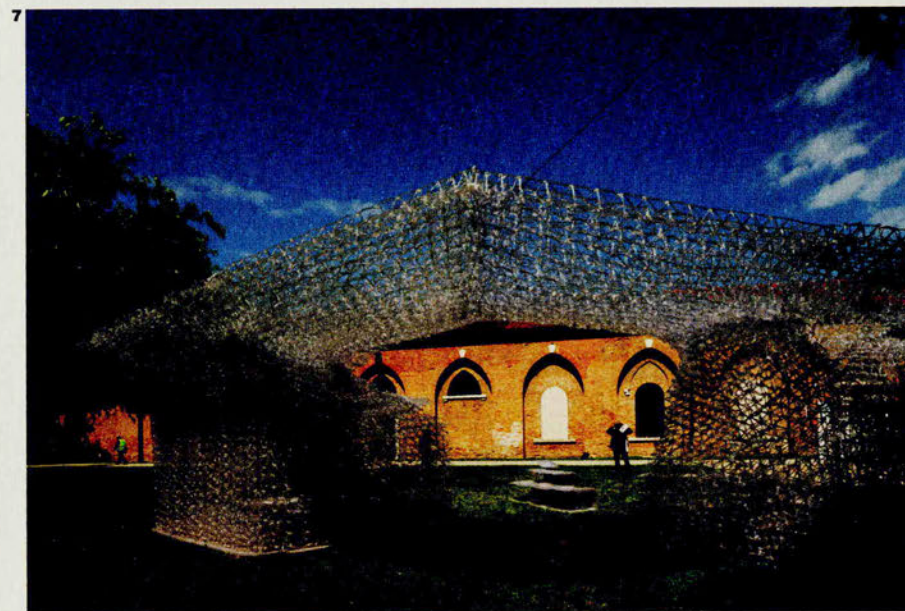
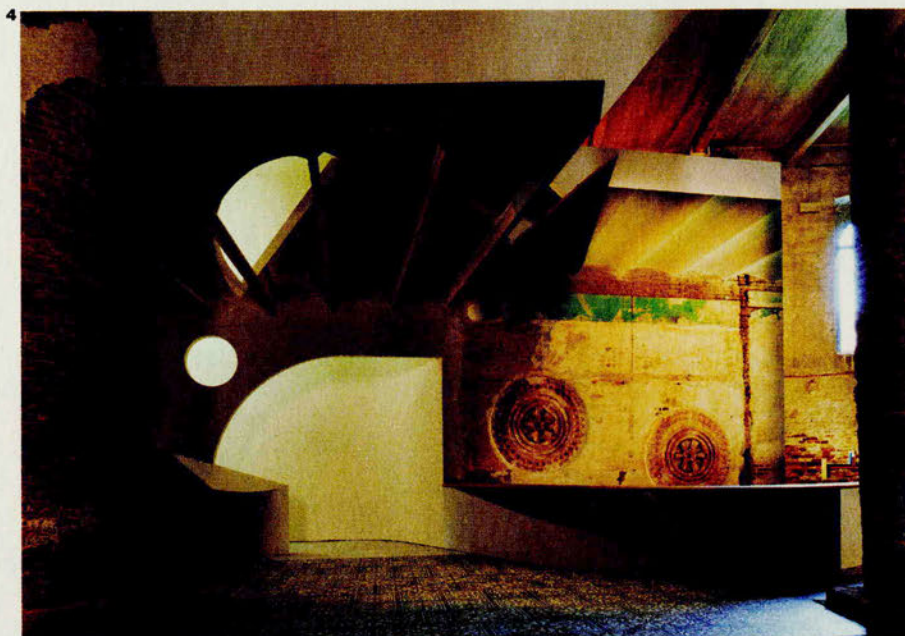


Is “Freespace” a declaration of intent? Most probably yes, with the nostalgic intention to create a space that is at the same time free and public, where both coincide and where sharing, participation and coexistence are seen as enriching the project itself. Of course, the Anglo-Saxon world has a strong tradition in this very sense, beginning with Team X and the Smithson, and continued throughout the 1970s until today, with a renewed attention to these same concepts, close to those expressed by Alejandro Aravena, curator of the last Biennale. And so another important question is raised, that of the curators themselves. Are architects really apt to curating? Are we witnessing such

a crisis for the curatorial and critics universe that curators are altogether replaced by other professionals? Nevertheless, the fact remains that this year’s edition of the career achievement award goes to one of the main historic critics of modern architecture, Kenneth Frampton and, as this may come as an encouragement for the cultural future of our discipline, it also underlines, even more, the gap between the theory and practice worlds. So it is no coincidence that the Venice Biennale has been curated by architects for years, where some of the most theoretic colleagues find themselves among the curators of the national pavilions.

Finally in this edition only, where there is a clear pedagogical direction and narration, we rediscover gestures and evidence of real quality, we see clear answers to the definition of something as polymorphic and rarefied as a free space. But free from what? Free from whom? In the central garden pavilion, certainly the most interesting of the two curated by Grafton, freedom is perceived through the quality and constellation of the contents of space. It is evident in the opening salons with the marvelous Mediterranean pavement which is the salon of honor of the antique marine republic, a space open at once to history and to modernism. On the other hand, the Irish reinterpretation of modernism is

less convincing and yet here again a succession of significant contents, as the set up which is almost a retrospective of the models and works by the poetic Peter Zumthor, that look down from the mezzanine, keeping their distance once again (fig.1). That is also the case of Cino Zucchi as he re-imagines the work of his mentor, the great maestro of post-war Italy Luigi Caccia Dominioni, magic creator of fluid and enveloping spaces and for this of course free of constrictions. It could have been a risky praise and yet it is transformed into an interpretation of substance, in contemporary wrapping (fig.2). This is followed by another very high tribute to the great Sigurd Lewerentz >



with Freestanding, a project by Kieran Long, director of Ark Des, Johan Örn, curator of collections at Ark Des, Petra Gipp, architect, Mikael Olsson, artist and James Taylor-Foster, curator of contemporary architecture and design at Ark Des (fig.3). In 2020, Ark Des will stage the first major exhibition on Sigurd Lewerentz since the 1980s, presenting an in-depth view of the architect's most well-known buildings while shedding light on projects that have hitherto been overlooked. Then comes the installation of the projects of public buildings of the great Indian architect Rahul Mehrotra, Harvard lecturer and with projects all over the world, who has been honored with a special mention and much

more. The other section curated by the Grafton in the Arsenal is less impactful, where, especially at the Corderie, most of the "big ones" really let down, grafting instead on the work of some protagonists of the educational section, unfortunately not clearly stated, with contributions and interventions of the highest level. Surely also through this narration some outstanding projects come in succession though rather weakened, as well as the magnificent and powerful scenography of the whole Arsenal, by the choice of an absent curatorial set-up. Therefore that is a mixed exhibition that doesn't perfectly convey the general concept, but in

which the brutalist architecture by Angela Deuber and the linguistic freedom of the Spanish Flores & Prats (fig.4-5), and Paredes Pedrosa Arquitectos stand out anyway, as well as Rozana Montiel, Niall McLaughlin and the special mention given to Architecten de Vylder Vinck Taillieu for their social participation with the Caritas (fig.6). The poetic, cultured, and maybe not-easy-to-understand, work of Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo reminds an art installation conceived as a real and vibrant threshold of metal rods for an exhibition at Hangar Bicocca, in Milan, and here changed in its essence with a full-screen image backlit that craves for public

participation. Still in the Arsenal two national presences, offering an unexpected quality, need to be mentioned: the Italian pavilion and the Chinese one, located close by each other at the end of the exhibition path, between the Virgins' garden and the ever suggestive Gaggiandre. The Italian pavilion, curated by Mario Cucinella, author of the beautiful set-up, subdivided into sections without forgoing a strong continuity, speaks about territory and Italian landscape (Arcipelago Italia) throughout a wide spread and in-deep report among ancient villages, nature and contemporary works in absence of metropolitan suggestions and scenic