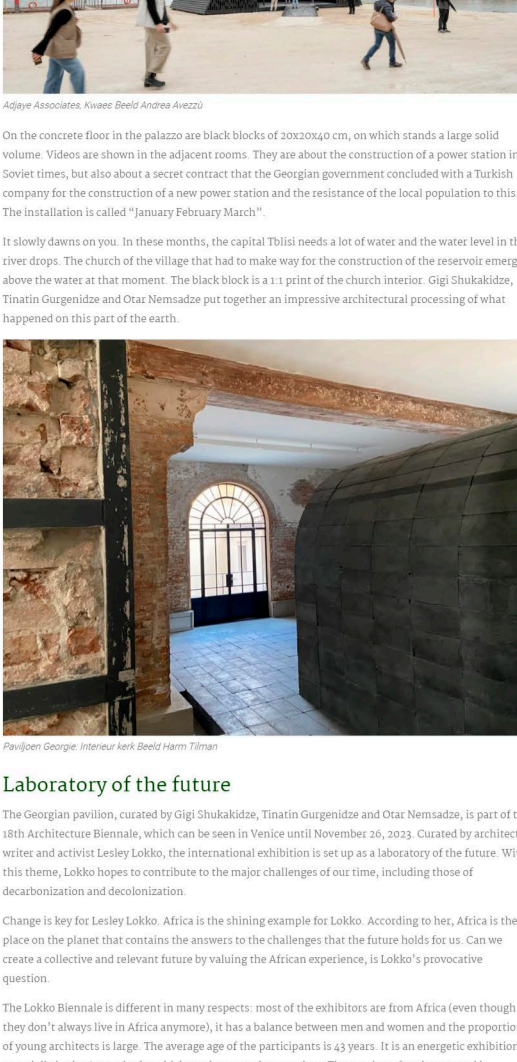


Energetic Venice Biennial puts architecture on a new track

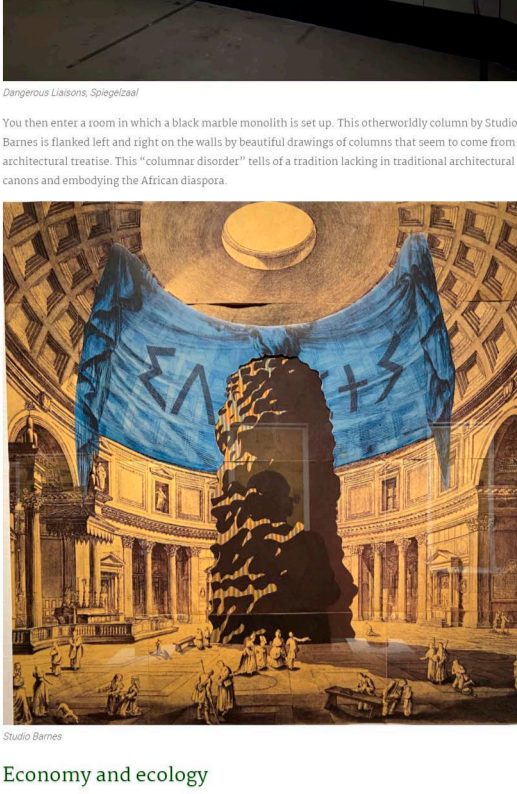
The exhibition *"The Laboratory of the Future"* by the Ghanaian-English architect Lesley Lokko offers visitors an overwhelming experience. It is a good opportunity to reflect on some of the structural issues facing the discipline of architecture



Adaptive Architecture, KNAUF (© KNAUF, 2019)

On the concrete floor in the palazzo are black blocks of 20x20x40 cm, on which stands a large solid volume. Videos are shown in the adjacent rooms. They are about the construction of a power station in Soviet times, but also about a secret contract that the Georgian government concluded with a Turkish company for the construction of a new power station and the resistance of the local population to this. The installation is called "January February March".

It slowly dawns on you. In these months, the capital Tbilisi needs a lot of water and the water level in the river drops. The church of the village that had to make way for the construction of the reservoir emerges above the water at that moment. The black block is a 1:1 print of the church interior. Gigi Shukakidze, Tinatin Gurgunidze and Otar Nemadze put together an impressive architectural processing of what happened on this part of the earth.



Pavilion Group: Interview with Beeld Harm Tilmán

Laboratory of the future

The Georgian pavilion, curated by Gigi Shukakidze, Tinatin Gurgunidze and Otar Nemadze, is part of the 18th Architecture Biennale, which can be seen in Venice until November 26, 2023. Curated by architect, writer and Lesley Lokko, the international exhibition is set up as a laboratory of the future. With this theme, Lokko hopes to contribute to the major challenges of our time, including those of decarbonization and decolonization.

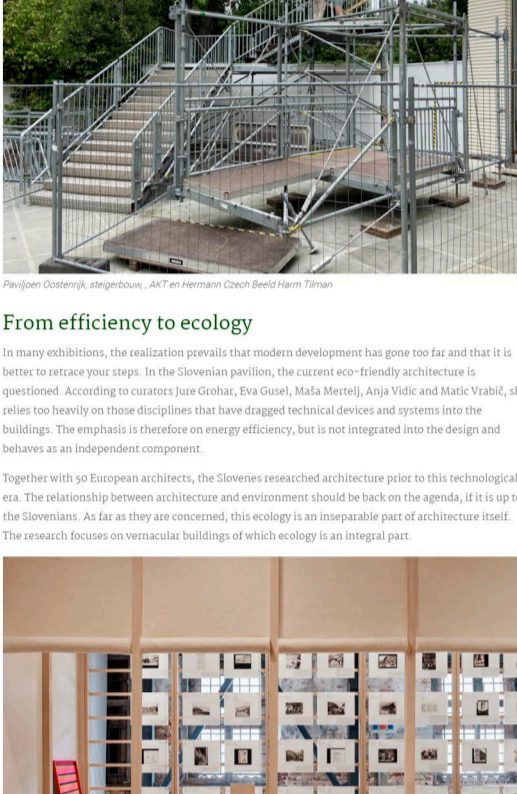
Change is key for Lesley Lokko. Africa is the shining example for Lokko. According to her, Africa is the place on the planet that contains the answers to the challenges that the future holds for us. We can create a collective and relevant future by valuing the African experience, is Lokko's provocative question.

The Lokko Biennale is different in many respects: most of the exhibitors are from Africa (even though they don't always live in Africa anymore), it has a balance between men and women and the proportion of young architects is large. The average age of the participants is 43 years. It is an energetic exhibition, especially in the Arsenal, for which you have to take your time. The number of topics covered is staggering.

Blue Hour

The story goes that Rem Koolhaas would have liked to limit the 2014 Biennale to the Giardini, but was not permitted to do so. Even now, the main exhibition is divided between the Arsenal and the Central Pavilion in the Giardini. The exhibition in the last pavilion is called "Force Majeure" and focuses on architectural production in Africa. The exhibition at the Arsenal has been dubbed "Dangerous Liaisons" by Lokko, with a special focus on the African diaspora and the concept of hybridization.

The opening sequence of "Dangerous Liaisons" is fabulous. The visitor then enters a large round room covered with mirrors. In the next room you can see an impressive, meter-high presentation by the London poet-architect Rhael Lionheart Cape. He proclaims that architecture should serve feelings, feelings that transform spaces. In passing, he reformulates a famous principle of architecture by demanding that "form follows disorganized function".



Dangerous Liaisons, Singapore

You then enter a room in which a black marble monolith is set up. This otherworldly column by Studio Barnes is flanked left and right on the walls by beautiful drawings of columns that seem to come from an architectural treatise. This "columnar disorder" tells of a tradition lacking in traditional architectural canons and embodying the African diaspora.



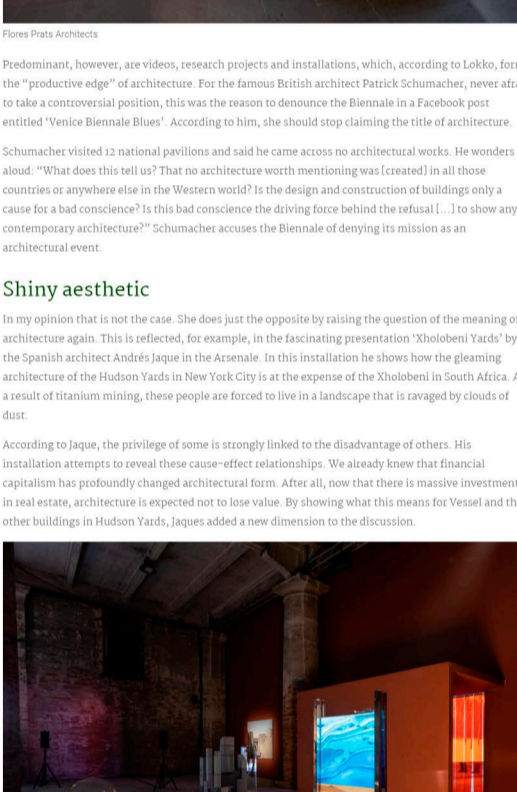
Studio Barnes

Economy and ecology

The Dutch pavilion addresses the relationship between the production systems and the water retention systems. These are the systems that shape the built environment and regulate the flows of people, resources and ecology. In most discussions about ecology and sustainability little attention is paid to this. The Dutch pavilion rightly states that these systems need to be revised for a sustainable future.

On the one hand, the pavilion presents the impressive series of drawings "The Waterworks of Money" by architect Karlijn Kingma. In these drawings she translates the economic system into a spatial environment in which the represents money as water. These drawings understand the economic mechanisms that drive change but also frustrate it.

At the same time, Jan Jongert is investigating the way in which a low-tech water retention system can be incorporated into Rietveld's pavilion. By collecting the rainwater instead of draining it directly into the sewer, the pavilion can support itself, but Jongert also researched in collaboration with the Rotterdam Urbanists how the surrounding Giardini can be made more resilient in this way.

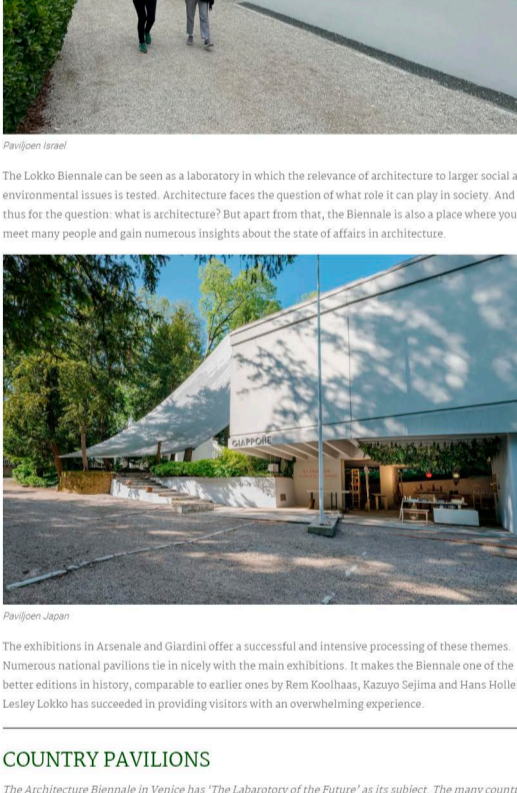


Pavilion Nederland: Plumbing the System Beeld Cristiano Corte

Open gardens

The proposal by Jongert and the Urbanists resonates beautifully with the "Open Giardini" project by Unfolding Pavilion. The Giardini Park, commissioned by Napoleon at the beginning of the 19th century, was a public space designed in the style of the neoclassical landscaped park. The first art pavilion was not built until the end of the nineteenth century, soon followed by the Belgian pavilion and the other pavilions of other countries. At the moment, the Biennale occupies 2/3 of the once public park.

However, the gardens are not owned by the Biennale. The city has awarded the land to the organization in exchange for maintenance and security. The idea is therefore not strange to open the gardens to the residents of Venice. Those months when the pavilions are empty and no exhibitions are held, the theater practice, however, the site is increasingly becoming a place of the outside world. According to Unfolding Pavilion, this expansionist practice is inconsistent with the progressive values of inclusiveness that the Biennial claims to support.

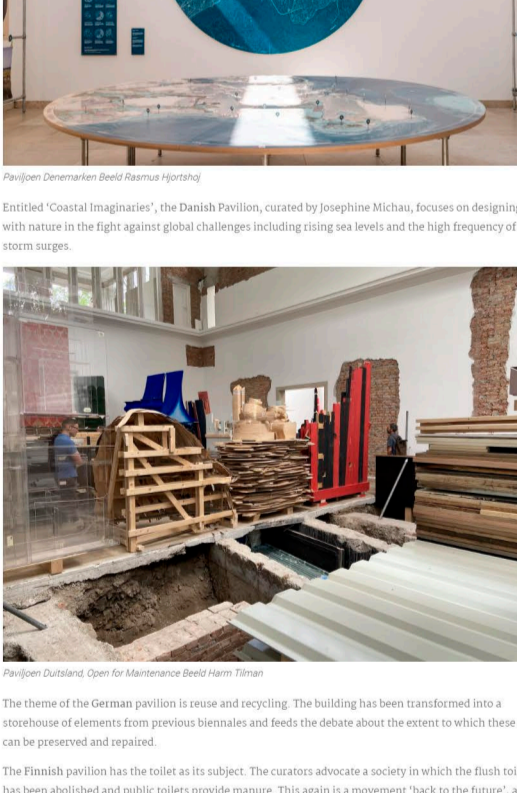


Open Giardini Beeld Laurent Grognot

Exchange with city

Although the number of exhibitors in the main exhibition has been considerably reduced by Lokko, the Biennale is still experiencing strong growth. This growth is mainly realized in the city itself, in which the Biennale has now penetrated deeply and the number of exhibitors has exploded. Parallel activities are also thriving. The "Space Time Existence" event, in which architects can "buy" an exhibition during the Biennale, once started in Palazzo Bembo, but this year can be viewed for the first time at three locations in the city.

Conversely, the Biennale has become increasingly impenetrable for the city. In the Austrian pavilion, the young group of architects AKT, in collaboration with the legendary architect Hermann Czech, gives a theme to this pavilion. To connect the Biennale with the San'Elena district behind it, they designed a jetty bridge over the canal. The architect also wanted to make half of the pavilion available for activities to be organized by the neighborhood. Both ideas were rejected by the Biennale's management. Now there is a half bridge that leads to a viewing platform over the water.

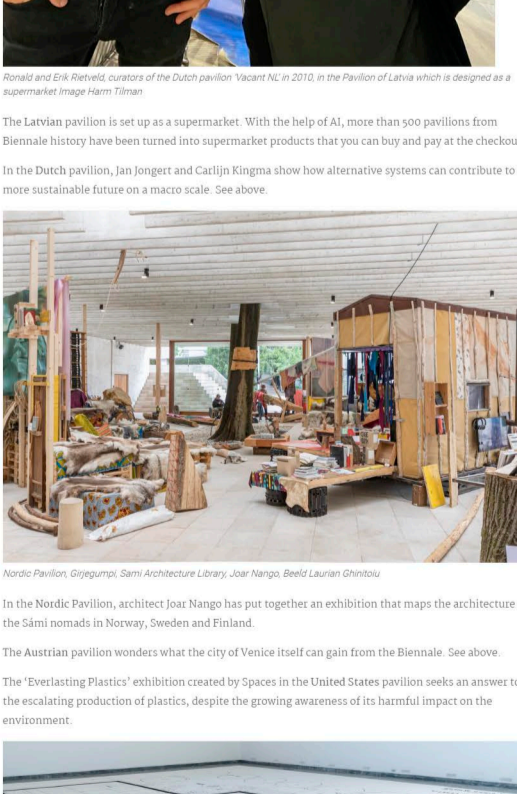


Pavilion Österreich, architecture: AKT and Hermann Czech Beeld Harm Tilmán

From efficiency to ecology

In many exhibitions, the realization prevails that modern development has gone too far and that it is better to retace your steps. In the Slovenian pavilion, the current eco-friendly architecture is questioned. According to curators Jure Grohar, Eva Gusek, Mala Metelk, Anja Vidic and Matjaž Vrabl, she relies too much on those disciplines that have dragged technical devices and systems into the buildings. The emphasis is therefore on energy efficiency, but is not integrated into the design and behaves as an independent component.

Together with 50 European architects, the Slovenes researched architecture prior to the twentieth century. The relationship between architecture and environment should be back on the agenda, if it is up to the Slovenians. As far as they are concerned, this ecology is an inseparable part of architecture itself. The research focuses on vernacular buildings of which ecology is an integral part.

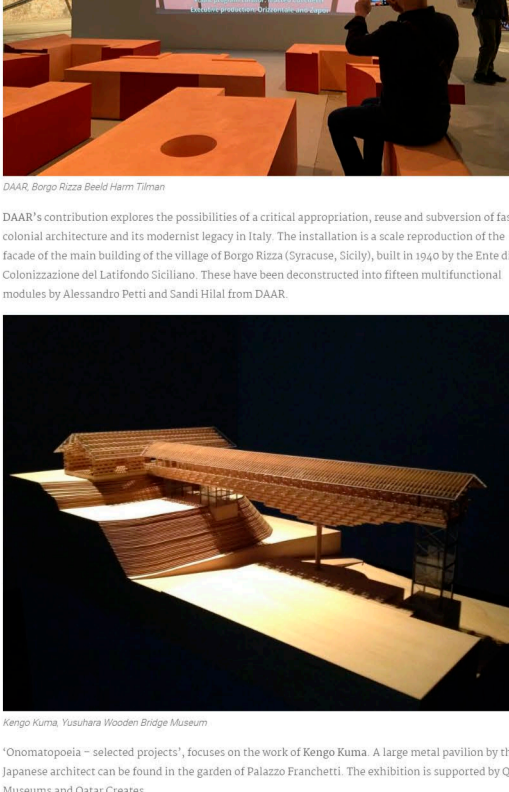


Pavilion Slovenia, intermediate zone energy principle Beeld Klemen Ivanc

Return to pre-modern times

This has led to the formulation of eight ecological principles that go back to a time when, for example, the Biennale could be regarded with the help of intermediate zones in houses. The human body itself was also used as a heat source. The use and the house itself were adapted to the changing of the seasons. Such measures fulfill a social and ritual function and are once again topical. According to the makers, architecture should strive for more than energy efficiency. She should become ecological.

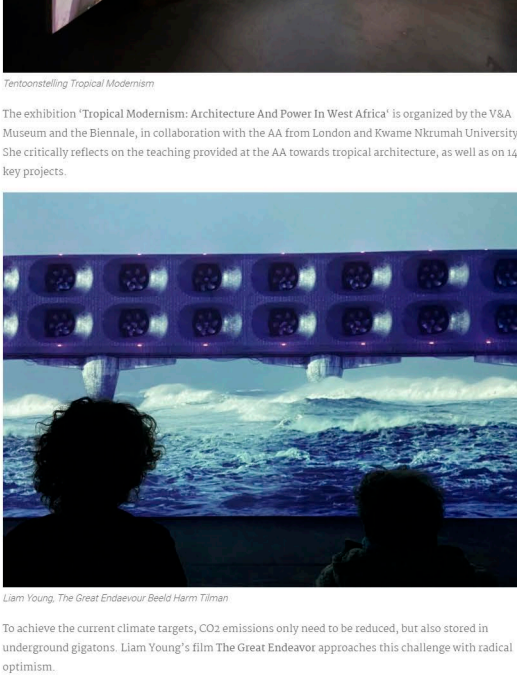
The curators thus appeal to the practical sense that existed in architecture prior to the twentieth century, as before air conditioning was introduced. In the reduction of CO2 emissions and energy consumption, as well as the fight against global warming, the elements that at most still had a symbolic function are once again relevant.



Pavilion Slovenia, intermediate zone energy principle

Invitation to utopia

A theater is set up in a spherical shape in the French pavilion. Involuntarily it is reminiscent of the designs of the French architect Etienne Boullée, or of a globe, but the curators Murto & Georgi Stanishiev present the sphere as a disco ball. Clearly, what crisis? You hear them say. Not the heavy seriousness of the German pavilion here (see below), but a party attitude that feels refreshing. It is an invitation to utopia: the focus is no longer on the crisis, but on the possibility of an alternative future.



Pavilion Frankreich: Ball Theater Murto & Stanishiev en La Sagre

The sphere is a theater of a special kind. Moments of calm alternate with sudden explosions of voices and sounds. Performance questions identity, gender and colonial legacies. On the one hand, the theater resembles a futuristic capsule, but you can also see Laurie's primitive hut in it. This ambiguity has been deliberately created: should we create new communities with an eye to the future or withdraw from the world, the makers seem to wonder.

What is Architecture?

Most exhibitions do not feature many buildings. That does not alter the fact that I admire the models of David Adjaye's latest projects (including the new Kisan Nadar Museum in New Delhi), the drawings of Atelier Masoni and the installation "Counteract" by Francis Kéré. The tables on which the work of Flores & Prats has been devoted to Tropical Modernism.

Flores Prats Architects

Predominant, however, are videos, research projects and installations, which, according to Lokko, form the "productive edge" of architecture. For the famous British architect Patrick Schumacher, never afraid to take a controversial position, this was the reason to denounce the Biennale in a Facebook post entitled "Venice Biennale Blues". According to him, the should stop claiming the title of architecture. Schumacher visited 12 national pavilions and said he came across no architectural works. He wonders aloud: "What does this tell us? That no architecture worth mentioning was created in all those years anywhere else in the Western world? Is the design and construction of buildings only a cause for a bad conscience? Is this bad conscience the driving force behind the refusal [...] to show any contemporary architecture?" Schumacher accuses the Biennale of denying its mission as an architectural event.

Shiny aesthetic

In my opinion that is not the case. She does just the opposite by raising the question of the meaning of architecture again. This is reflected, for example, in the fascinating presentation "Xhobeni Yards" by the Spanish architect Andrés Jaqué. In this installation he shows how the gleaming architecture of the Hudson Yards in New York City is at the expense of the Xhobeni in South Africa. As a result of titanium mining, these people are forced to live in a landscape that is ravaged by clouds of dust.

According to Jaqué, the privilege of some is strongly linked to the disadvantage of others. His installation attempts to reveal these cause-effect relationships. We already knew that financial capitalism has profoundly changed architectural form. After all, now that there is massive investment in real estate, architecture is expected not to lose value. By showing what this means for Vessel and the other buildings in Hudson Yards, Jaqué added a new dimension to the discussion.

Presentatie 'Xhobeni Yards', Andrés Jaqué

This obsession with bright, shiny and glittering buildings comes at a high price, which Jaqué and his team reveal. Titanium is one of the most important components in the material mix of smooth buildings. To extract this material, sand is collected, filtered and then returned to the extraction site. This makes the ground lighter and blows up more easily, with the result that clouds of dust are continuously spread by the wind. It has also become more difficult to grow crops on soil where titanium has been extracted. The sparkling glass in Manhattan is at the expense of the health of people on the other side of the world.

Relevance of Biennale

The Venice Architecture Biennale is bigger than ever this year, and so is the endless stream of publications, meetings and tours that accompany this event. Everything you can say about such an event is true, but also that it provides a good opportunity to reflect on some of the structural issues facing the discipline of architecture.

Pavilion Japan

The Lokko Biennale can be seen as a laboratory in which the relevance of architecture to larger social and environmental issues is tested. Architecture faces the question of what role it can play in society. And thus for the question: what is architecture? But apart from that, the Biennale is also a place where you meet many people and gain numerous insights about the state of affairs in architecture.

Pavilion Japan

The exhibitions in Arsenal and Giardini offer a successful and intensive processing of these themes. Numerous national pavilions tie in nicely with the main exhibitions. It makes the Biennale one of the better editions in history, comparable to earlier ones by Rem Koolhaas, Kazuyo Sejima and Hans Hollein. Lesley Lokko has succeeded in providing visitors with an overwhelming experience.

COUNTRY PAVILIONS

The Architecture Biennale in Venice has "The Laboratory of the Future" as its subject. The many country pavilions respond to this in different ways. Below is an overview of the most notable.

Pavilion Brazil: Terra (Earth/Earth), curators Gabriela de Mattos and Paulo Tavares Beeld Matteo de Mello

For Terra, the Brazilian pavilion of architect Gabriela de Mattos and Paulo Tavares, the exhibition proposes to rethink the past and design possible futures from there. She does this by putting forward architects who have been "forgotten" in the architectural canons.

Pavilion Denmark: Beeld Hanne Hørring

Entitled "Coastal Imaginaries", the Danish Pavilion, curated by Josephine Michau, focuses on designing with nature in the fight against global challenges including rising sea levels and the high frequency of storm surges.

Pavilion Outdoors: Open for Maintenance Beeld Harm Tilmán

The theme of the German pavilion is reuse and recycling. The building has been transformed into a storehouse of elements from previous biennales and feeds the debate about the extent to which these can be preserved and retained.

The Finnish pavilion has the toilet as its subject. The curators advocate a society in which the flush toilet has been abolished and public toilets provide manure. This again is a movement "back to the future", a return to the traditional "pissus".

"Ball theater" - the party is not over - is a hemispherical theater set up in the French pavilion. See also above.

In the Japan pavilion, the exhibition "Architecture, a place to be loved" shows the work of Takamasa Yoshizaka, an architect who was active in the post-war reconstruction. The varied exhibition includes textiles, ceramics, design, assembly, metalwork and animation.

Beeld van Erik Hørring, curator of the Dutch pavilion 'Vacant HC' in 2012. In the Pavilion of Latvia which is designed as a supermarket Image Harm Tilmán

The Latvian pavilion is set up as a supermarket. With the help of AI, more than 500 pavilions from Biennale history have been turned into supermarket products that you can buy and pay at the checkout.

In the Dutch pavilion, Jan Jongert and Carlijn Kingma show how alternative systems can contribute to a more sustainable future on a macro scale. See above.

Nordic Pavilion: Grognot, Sami Architecture Library, Joao Nango Beeld Laurin Grognot

In the Nordic Pavilion, architect Joao Nango has put together an exhibition that maps the architecture of the Sámi nomads in Norway, Sweden and Finland.

The Austrian pavilion wonders what the city of Venice itself can gain from the Biennale. See above.

The "Eviscerating Plastics" exhibition created by Ciprice in the United States pavilion seeks an answer to the escalating production of plastics, despite the growing awareness of its harmful impact on the environment.

Pavilion Switzerland

Neighbors, the Swiss pavilion by artist Karin Sander and architectural historian Philip Ursprung, emphasizes the spatial and structural proximity to the Venezuelan pavilion. The Swiss pavilion, designed by Bruno Giacomelli, opened its doors in June 1972, while Carlo Scarpa designed the Venezuelan pavilion four years later.

EXHIBITIONS

The Architecture Biennale in Venice has "The Laboratory of the Future" as its subject. The many exhibitions respond to this in different ways. Below is an overview of the most pronounced.

DAAR, Borgo Ricca Beeld Harm Tilmán

DAAR's contribution explores the possibilities of a critical appropriation, reuse and subversion of fascist colonial architecture and its modernist legacy in Italy. The installation is a scale reproduction of the facade of the main building of the village of Borgo Ricca (Syracuse, Sicily), built in 1940 by the Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano. These have been deconstructed into fifteen multifunctional modules by Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal from DAAR.

Kengo Kuma: 'Selected Projects', focuses on the work of Kengo Kuma. A large metal pavilion by this Japanese architect can be found in the garden of Palazzo Franchetti. The exhibition is supported by Qatar Museums and Qatar Creators.

The exhibition 'Qatar creates' showcases a next generation of cultural institutions, designed in collaboration with internationally acclaimed practices, including Alejandro Aravena Arquitecto, Herzog & de Meuron, OMA and UNStudio Architecture. Of the latter, the wonderful Children's Museum (ADAD) is included in the exhibition. It can be seen until November 26 in the ACP, Palazzo Franchetti, near the Ponte dell'Accademia.

Temboerling Tropical Adomdom

The exhibition "Tropical Modernism: Architecture And Power In West Africa" is organized by the V&A Museum and the Biennale, in collaboration with the AA from London and Kwame Nkrumah University. She critically reflects on the teaching provided at the AA towards tropical architecture, as well as on 14 key projects.

Liam Young: The Great Endeavor Beeld Harm Tilmán

To achieve the current climate targets, CO2 emissions only need to be reduced, but also stored in underground pigments. Liam Young's film The Great Endeavor approaches this challenge with radical optimism.