

Modern in Venice Absorbing Modernity 1914–2014 at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition

The 2014 Venice Architecture *Biennale* is on display from June to November. This year's edition is directed by Rem Koolhaas and is bringing major novelties. For the first time the event will be held for six months and was assembled for a longer period than ever before. Koolhaas set this new schedule because he was committed to create a research-based exhibition. According to Paolo Baratta, the president of the Venice *Biennale*, this represents an unprecedented method that had never been used in past editions. The director engaged all participants in the theme *Fundamentals* and tried to establish a narrative between the show's three main components: *Absorbing Modernity*, *Elements of Architecture* and *Monditalia*.

Absorbing Modernity 1914–2014 is the theme offered to the sixty-six participating countries for showing their processes of modernization in the last century. In his provocative initial statement, Koolhaas invited all countries to reflect on the “erasure of national characteristics in favor of the almost universal adoption of a single modern language”. Most curators accepted the challenge and focused on specific national character and on the singularities of their countries' modernity. Throughout the *Giardini*, the *Arsenale* and some Venetian palaces, the exhibition presents a many-sided portrait of architectural modernity. Although using diverse strategies on display and aiming at different results, the national pavilions throw new light on the history of 20th-century architecture.

Great Failures in French Modernism

The French pavilion presents a critical exhibition curated by Jean-Louis Cohen, which received a Special Mention from the Jury. *Modernity: Promise or Menace?* focuses on the contradictions of the Modern Movement project, by portraying four French unsuccessful experiences.

The exhibition is divided in four parts: “Jacques Tati and Villa Arpel: Object of Desire or Ridiculous Machine?”; “Jean Prouvé: Constructive Imagination or Utopia?”;

“Heavy Panels: Economies of Scale or Monotony?”; and “Grands Ensembles: Healing Heterotopias or Places of Seclusion?”. Each part is represented by a large-scale object and linked-up to the others through a ubiquitous film.

The curator's statement argues that France has shaped modernity since 1914. The exhibition succeeds at expressing modernism as a complex reality by representing its great expectations and ultimate disillusion. From Jacques Tati's comedy to the tragedy of Drancy internment camp, France's discourse aims at epitomizing the Modern Movement itself.



01 *Office US*. USA Pavillion, *Giardini*.
© Zara Ferreira, 2014.

While France was focusing on its flops, other pioneers of the Modern Movement architecture chose to celebrate it. The Netherlands pays homage to Bakema with *Open*; Great Britain shows its specifically national forms of architectural and cultural modernity with a *Clockwork Jerusalem*; and *Office US* presents the American hegemony through corporate architecture, creating a repository of its worldwide contribution.

The Unwritten Story of Latvian Post-War Architecture

The *Biennale* was an opportunity for some countries to develop their first inquiries on 20th-century architectural legacy. Latvia, for instance, presents an exhibition curated by NRJA (No Rules Just Architecture) that asserts the need for acknowledged research and patrimonial evaluation of modern architecture in the country. The curators wish to start an informed debate on the future of these buildings that are currently at risk. They believe that biases towards Soviet architecture have blocked an objective assessment until the present moment; they name “aversion”, “uncritical nostalgia” and “superficial hipster joy” the responsables for the current situation.

Unwritten stands as an effort for starting a comprehensive survey on Latvia's recent architectural output. The exhibition develops a work-in-progress database performed by a bright installation. The collected examples of Latvian 20th-century architecture are presented in paper sheets hanging from the ceiling, which will continue to be piled up throughout the months of the *Biennale*.



02 *Modernity: Promise or Menace?* France Pavillion, *Giardini*. © Margarida Quintã, 2014.



03 *Monolith Controversies*. Chile Pavillion, *Arsenale*. © Margarida Quintã, 2014.



04 *Fair Enough: Russia's Past, our Present*, Russia Pavillion, *Giardini*. © Margarida Quintã, 2014.



05 *Unwritten*. Latvia Pavillion, *Arsenale*. © Margarida Quintã, 2014

Other post-socialist societies are dealing with similar challenges but using distinctive approaches to display their recent architectural past. Armenia, for instance, exhibits *The Capital of Desires* using Yerevan's modernism to represent the Soviet Armenian era. Russia shows *Fair Enough*, which is an original exhibition using the universal manners of a trade fair to advertise Russian modern ideas. According to the jury, the Russian Pavilion received a Special Mention "for showcasing the contemporary language of commercialization of architecture".

The winner of this year's Silver Lyon, Chile, also alludes to the Soviet influence in the country. *Monolith Controversies* is a notable exhibition set around a large concrete panel produced in the 1970's. At that time, the Soviet Union sponsored social housing programs in Chile by developing prefabrication systems. Chilean modernity is shown through an essential element of architecture embodying political and ideological debates.

Arab Modernism Collected by Bahrain

The Kingdom of Bahrain presents *Fundamentalists and Other Arab Modernisms*, documenting one hundred modern buildings across the Arab World. This architectural legacy is shown in "a subjective, non-exhaustive and sometimes fictional reading", as pointed out by the curators. The project is related to the Arab Center for Architecture, which is engaged in safeguarding the archival architecture heritage of this region.

The exhibition catalogue presents the collection of buildings and is used, simultaneously, as a relevant element to the display. Tall wooden shelves, in which countless catalogues are stored, outline a circular space with a large table. Sitting around the table, visitors can listen to political discourses, in different languages, from each Arab country. A map of the region with the buildings' location is shown in the table while a projection of the speakers takes place in the ceiling.

Focusing on the architectural legacy of the pan-Arab project, the Bahrain initiates a pioneering task. Modernism in the region is naturally linked to Colonialism, but the curators establish a chronological reading identifying different stages on its absorption within the last century.

Countries like Morocco and Kuwait, both participating for the first time in the Architecture Biennale, are also dealing with remains of 20th-century political and cultural transnationalism. Morocco presents *Fundamental(ism)s*, which is an exhibition divided in two distinctive periods; the first section is devoted to 20th-century modern housing experiments and the second to



06 *Fundamentalists and Other Arab Modernisms*. Kingdom of Bahrain Pavillion, *Arsenale*. © Ansgar Werrelmann, 2014.



07 *Acquiring Modernity*, Kuwait Pavillion, *Arsenale*. © Margarida Quintã, 2014.

08 *Forms of Freedom: African Independence and Nordic Models*. Nordic Countries Pavillion, *Giardini*. © Alexandre Delmar, 2014.



contemporary speculative projects in the Saharan desert. Kuwait displays *Acquiring Modernity* using the Kuwait National Museum, designed by Michel Ecohard, to represent the establishment of the state and its history of modernization.

Modern Africa by the Nordics

The Nordic Pavilion presents an exhibition on the modern production developed by Nordic architects in Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia in the 1960s. *Forms of Freedom: African Independence and Nordic Models* displays the architectural output of Nordic development aid in the newly established African nations.

The exhibition, curated by Nina Berre and Space Group, is part of a larger project developed by the National Museum in Oslo, Norway. The curators realized this legacy has been poorly studied, documented and exhibited until the present moment. Therefore, the *Biennale* is a first occasion to display a partial collection of buildings and projects from this historical period.

The show was specially tailored to Sverre Fehn's Pavilion: a series of walls, built-in the ceiling structure, present the chronological chart of projects. Iwan Baan and Mette Tronvoll's photographs complete the set showing contemporary aspects of selected buildings.

Nordic architects developed symbols for African independence using modern architectural language. In this case, modernism is presented as a synonym of freedom and hope for Africa. Nonetheless, Sub-Saharan African countries have many different stories to tell about the last one hundred years in the continent. The *Architecture Biennale*, unfortunately, could not cover a significant part of that narrative.

The five Portuguese-speaking African Republics of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe are portrayed in the exhibition *Ilha de São Jorge*, occurring in Venice from June 6 to July 6, 2014. The show curated by Beyond En-

tropy Africa is not officially part of *Absorbing Modernity 1914-2014* but is relevantly adding to the debate. With contributions from several scholars, architects and artists, the exhibition catalogue collects information on the ways modernity was developed, absorbed or rejected in these countries. With a common and recent colonial past, the five African countries share a cultural heritage with each other and with Portugal, overlapped with their own traditions and geographies. This contemporary struggle is the link between the seven videos presented at *Ilha de São Jorge*.

In spite of some blanks, *Absorbing Modernity 1914-2014* is a wide-ranging exhibition on recent world history of architecture. National pavilions, in general, present serious and precise investigations on their latest years. Although the commission was to reflect on the years between 1914 and 2014, most countries focused on their Post-War period. The contributions do not present uniformity or international tendencies but stress on "modernity with national features". The diversity resulting from this common strategy is on the origin of Koolhaas most interesting conclusions regarding *Absorbing Modernity*. In his vision, this exhibition questions "the so called 'end of modernism' that Portuguese and Jencks had already proclaimed in the 1980s." He goes as far as stating that the postmodernism presented by the first *Biennale* is not more than a "confuse footnote" when looking at all sixty-six national narratives. Provocative as ever, Koolhaas also declares that "modernity has served so many different master narratives that it has become, finally, ideologically neutral." Furthermore, he points out his success at presenting an architectural exhibition that does not mention major architects. He believes that these countries' modernization was translated into architecture, but he devalues architect's real impact on the process.

The Korean Pavilion won the Golden Lyon with the exhibition *Crow's Eye View: the Korean Peninsula*, which tries to establish a

common reading between North and South Korea. The jury highlighted the curator's efforts in "presenting a new and rich body of knowledge of architecture and urbanism in a highly charged political situation." Minsuk Cho put up a dense show using many different materials to present an architectural discourse from this geopolitical territory. The awarded countries, Korea and Chile, are both peripheral in the traditional history of 20th century architecture. Their non-West contributions not only complete our vision of the recent past but also inspire a potential future. ■

Editor's Note

Absorbing Modernity 1914-2014 had the participation of:

Monolith Controversies — Chile
Commissioner: Cristóbal Molina, **docomomo** Chile

Modernity: Promise or Menace?— France
Curator: Jean Louis Cohen, **docomomo** France member

Crow's Eye View: The Korean Peninsula— Korea
Curator: Changmo Ahn, **docomomo** Korea

Acquiring Modernity— Kuwait
Deputy Commissioner: Zahra Ali Baba, in charge of the on-going creation process of **docomomo** Kuwait.

...Condenados a Ser Modernos— Mexico
Commissioner: Maria Margarita Segarra Lagunes, **docomomo** Mexico

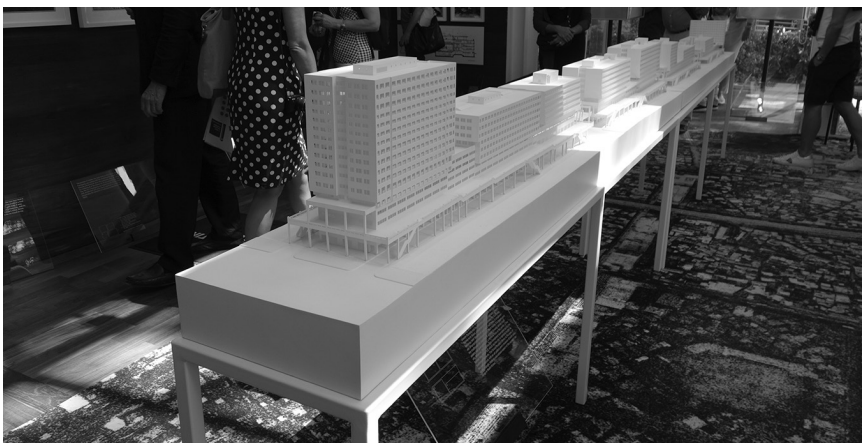
Open: A Bakema Celebration— The Netherlands
Curators: Dirk van den Heuvel, **docomomo** Netherlands

Forms of Freedom. African Independence and Nordic Models— Nordic Countries
Curator: Nina Berre, **docomomo** Norway

Homeland. News From Portugal— Portugal
Participant: Zara Ferreira, **docomomo** International

Officeus— USA
Curator: Ashley Schafer, **docomomo** US member

docomomo International congratulates all the **docomomo** members participants. Special greetings for Chile and Korea, for the achievement of the Silver's and Golden's Lion, respectively.



09 *Crow's Eye View: the Korean Peninsula*, Republic of Korea Pavilion, *Giardini*. © Margarida Quintó, 2014.

La Cité du Lignon has been distinguished with the Europa Nostra and SIA Awards

The Re-Use research on the Housing Complex of Lignon (Switzerland, Geneva) has been awarded with the Europa Nostra Prize for Research in 2013. The project, published in **docomomo** Journal 44 (2011/1), has been developed by the EPFL's Laboratory of Techniques and Preservation of Modern Architecture (TSAM), under the leadership of Franz Graf and Giulia Marino, **docomomo** Switzerland members. "The problem of energy efficiency affects all buildings and particularly social housing of the post-war period. The case becomes one of great significance when we consider the *Cité du Lignon*, which has been recognized, since its inception, as an icon of modern architecture, and therefore of international interest. The challenge is the need to introduce new materials for comfort and insulation into structures designed from the start as streamlined and minimalist. The Jury was fascinated by the problem when applied to this particular site. The rigor of the methodology and the exemplary thorough-

ness of the conclusions of this research left out an award beyond doubt. "*The Cité du Lignon* near Geneva (1963–1971) is the most ambitious and large-scale of all housing projects in Switzerland. Its heritage value was recognized in 2009 by the adoption of a site plan, giving protection on an urban scale and recommending the preservation of the whole site and its remarkable outdoor areas. Faced with new energy use regulations — a priority in Switzerland — a reduction in energy consumption in the *Cité* was unavoidable. Hoping to provide a framework for future interventions, the research conducted by the TSAM laboratory between 2008 and 2011 had a twofold objective: conservation of the existing fabric and at the same time a reduction in fuel consumption. In the wider context of the energy consumption problem throughout the canton of Geneva, this pilot research has been the means to develop an evaluation method, embodying several different relevant criteria, which could define the most appro-

priate forms of intervention. This initiative, given its encouraging early results, introduces a conservation tool which can be applied to a great range of buildings from all periods. Recently the research *La Cité du Lignon* (1963–1971). *Étude Architecturale et Stratégies d'Intervention* has been also distinguished with the SIA (*Société Suisse des Ingénieurs et des Architectes*) Award. The JURY stated that "the strategies for the improvement of the *Cité du Lignon* striking in their pragmatism, their targeting objectives and interdisciplinary roots. Through a concerted commitment involving authorities and owners over the long term, the allegedly conflicting demands have been optimally aligned and a series of housing have been already restored successfully. Respectful of cultural and architectural values of existing buildings, this approach represents a valuable reference whose scope far exceeds the Swiss context, for a wider approach for the rehabilitation of large ensembles from the 1960s and 70s". ■

Sources

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<http://www.europanostra.org/awards/113/>
<http://tsam.epfl.ch/>



01 © Claudio Merlini.

The School Building “The Ship” has been distinguished with the 2013 Brinkgreve Award

The School building “The Ship” in Amsterdam, rehabilitated by Wessel de Jonge - Architecten BNA BV, won the annual Brinkgreve Award for the best adaptive re-use & restoration project in Amsterdam of 2013.

The distinctive former First Technical School along one of Amsterdam’s main avenues has recently been fully restored and transformed into an up-to-date school building for the Cygnus Grammar School. The remarkable modernist’ structure, better known as “The Ship”, has been adapted to current insights on education as well as to contemporary health requirements according to recent governmental guidelines to improve the ventilation of school buildings. The government program as well involves funding incentives and, as a result, many school buildings in Holland are now upgraded in terms of climate control and sustainability.

The building was designed in 1952-1956 by the architect JB Ingwersen and strongly

inspired by the *Unité d’Habitation* of Le Corbusier. Partly because of the expressive structure of exposed concrete it has been designated as a national landmark in 2009. The concrete, which had been partly painted in the 1990s, was fully cleaned and carefully repaired, restoring the original texture and various natural colours of the material surfaces. Great care was given to restore the many art works that are integrated in the concrete as bas-reliefs, as well as the original colour scheme of the interior.

Bespoke insulation glazing is placed directly into the concrete rebates of the fixed façade elements. The distinctive ‘brise soleil’, the screen façade of prefabricated, mechanically compacted concrete elements, was inspired by Mediterranean examples but appeared in our climate as an inadequate shading device. The timber sliding windows have been replaced with an improved sound insulation but natural ventilation by simply opening them was no longer possible due to

the traffic noise. Given the limited budgets for educational facilities, a climate control system had to be developed without using mechanical cooling. As far as possible, the physical features of the building have been used to enhance the indoor climate, for instance by making good use of the heat-absorbing capacity of the concrete structure. Fresh air is blown into the class rooms. To avoid an excessive amount of ventilation ducts in the building, the corridors and stair cases are used as abduction ‘channels’. The Cygnus Grammar School is now accommodated in a relatively sustainable building, while CO₂ emissions are a greatly reduced.

Last December 17, the project by Wessel de Jonge architects was awarded the “Brinkgreve Bowl” as the best restoration and adaptive re-use project in Amsterdam of 2013. ■

Revised translation by Wessel de Jonge, from: <http://www.wesseldejonge.nl/cygnus.php>



01 © Photo: Raoul Suermondt, The Hague

Docomomo International discussing the Future of the Museum of Modern Art Kamakura by Junzo Sakakura

docomomo Chair Ana Tostões had stayed in Tokyo from 20th to 23rd February 2014 on the way to attend the scientific committee for the 13th **docomomo** International Conference, in Seoul. There were three missions for her visit.

First of all, she met the Kanagawa Prefecture representatives of Culture and Education in order to confirm the conservation and reuse of the Museum of Modern Art Kamakura (1951, MoMA Kamakura) designed by Junzo Sakakura (1901–1969) — See **docomomo** Journal, 49 (2013/2) —, adding to it the discussion with the director of the MoMA Kamakura, Tsutomu Mizusawa, on the future of the museum.

Kanagawa Prefecture representatives understood the revaluation of the MoMA Kamakura as a master piece of modern architecture in Japan, however, they did not declare to conserve it but they promised to decide some kind of directions including any possibility of conservation and maintaining this masterpiece by the end of 2014.

Ana appreciated their understanding of the **docomomo**'s missions; furthermore, she reconfirmed to promote any continuous investigation of its historical outstanding values as modern masterpiece.

After the discussion, she moved to Kamakura to visit the site and to meet its director, Mr. Mizusawa. Before the meeting, she looked around the Museum to take photos like a child. Because this building is one of her favorites (which she used as the image of hers Christmas and New Year Card 2012). Their discussion about not only the museum but also about artists and art history reflect upon their intellectual sympathy toward the Modern Movement in art and architecture, developing the issue of living heritage and the new museum in Seoul as the venue of the 2014 Docomomo International Conference. Secondly, she visited the architectural office of the Japanese prestigious modern architect, Fumihiko Maki (1928–), to show her gratitude for his acceptance to be present at the 13th **docomomo** International Conference as

a Keynote Speaker. Mr. Maki has shown his understanding of docomomo activities for long time, especially because of his appreciation of the modernity of Kameki Tsuchiura (1897–1996) house as his decision to become architect in his childhood.

Thirdly, she visited the Exhibition *Une Architecture Pour L'homme: Junzo Sakakura in Architectural Documents at the National Archives of Modern Architecture*, Agency for Cultural Affairs as a first architectural archive in Japan, and she had a seminar lecture on the *Re-Use Modern Heritage* for the **docomomo** Japan members, at the Conference Room of the Tokyo Metropolitan Festival Hall (1961) in Ueno, designed by Kunio Maekawa (1905–1986), which is on the **docomomo** Japan's registration list.

Her lecture showed us the case-study of the Headquarters and Museum of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon of which especially she had committed to its conservation and renovation work in explaining the scientific data and definition of conservation of modern architecture. Furthermore, her work compiled documentations of the buildings and architects, that is to say, one of the ideal actions for **docomomo**, suggesting us to the future of the MoMA Kamakura. ■

Kenji Watanabe,
docomomo Japan Coordinator

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01 Meeting with the Kanagawa Prefecture.



02 **docomomo** International Chair at the MoMa Kamakura, Mr. Mizusawa.



03 Meeting with Professor Fumihiko Maki.



04 Exhibition *Une Architecture Pour L'homme: Junzo Sakakura in Architectural Documents*, National Archives of Modern Architecture, Agency for Cultural Affairs.



05 Seminar lecture on the *Re-Use Modern Heritage* by **docomomo** International Chair, Tokyo Metropolitan Festival Hall.