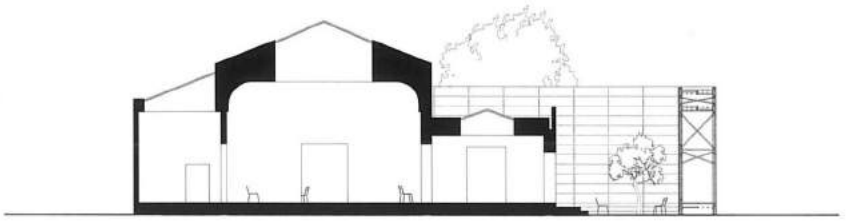

OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen

After the Party

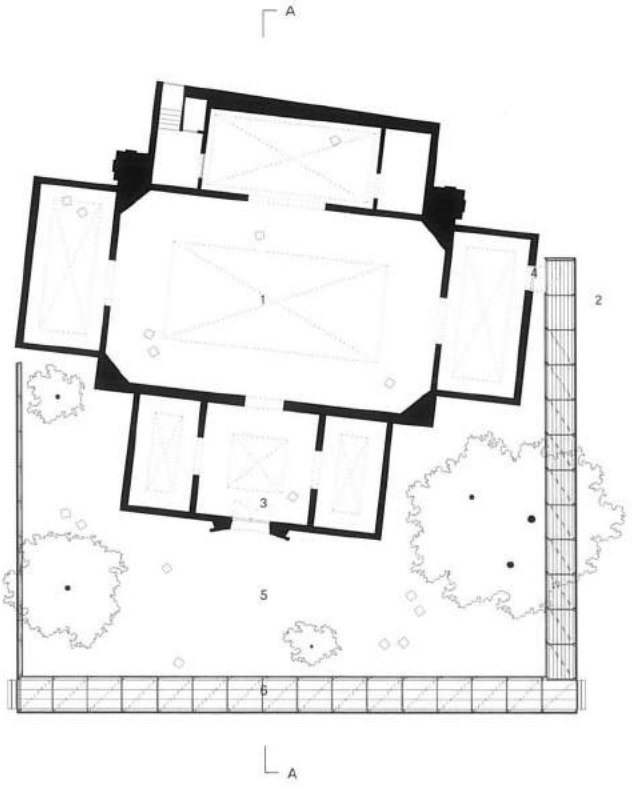
2007–2008 / Venice, IT

What appeared to be a slick metal box aligned with the main Giardini alley was in fact a 7m-high wall enclosing the Belgian pavilion at the 2008 Venice Biennale of Architecture. In its ambiguous performance, the new pavilion exhibited the old one by framing it, ignoring the predominant context of the biennale. The thinness of its volume was revealed only upon entering the structure of galvanised steel scaffolding panels, which embraced the existing building from three sides, creating a courtyard in the space in between. Passing through the two portions of a double wall, visitors entered the original pavilion through its back door. The sudden disorienting transition from the dark perimeter passage to a gleaming interior – with direct sunlight streaming in through the skylights, stripped of their awnings – intensified the notion of displaying a set of empty rooms. The enclosed courtyard in front of the main door appeared as yet another room in that sequence, and the continuity of the spaces was further enhanced by a unifying layer of confetti covering the floors. A number of black chairs were scattered around the rooms.

0 5m



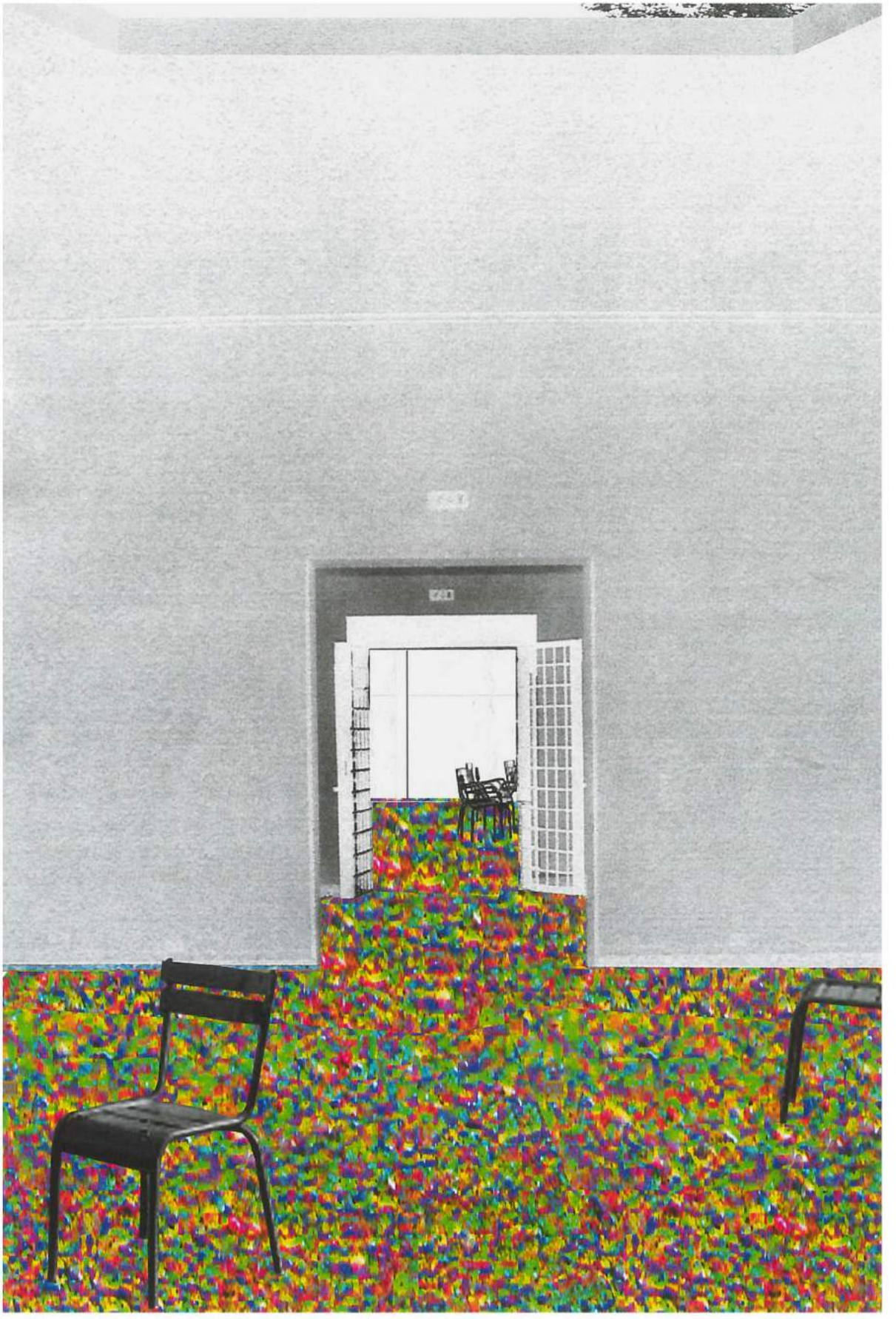
Section AA

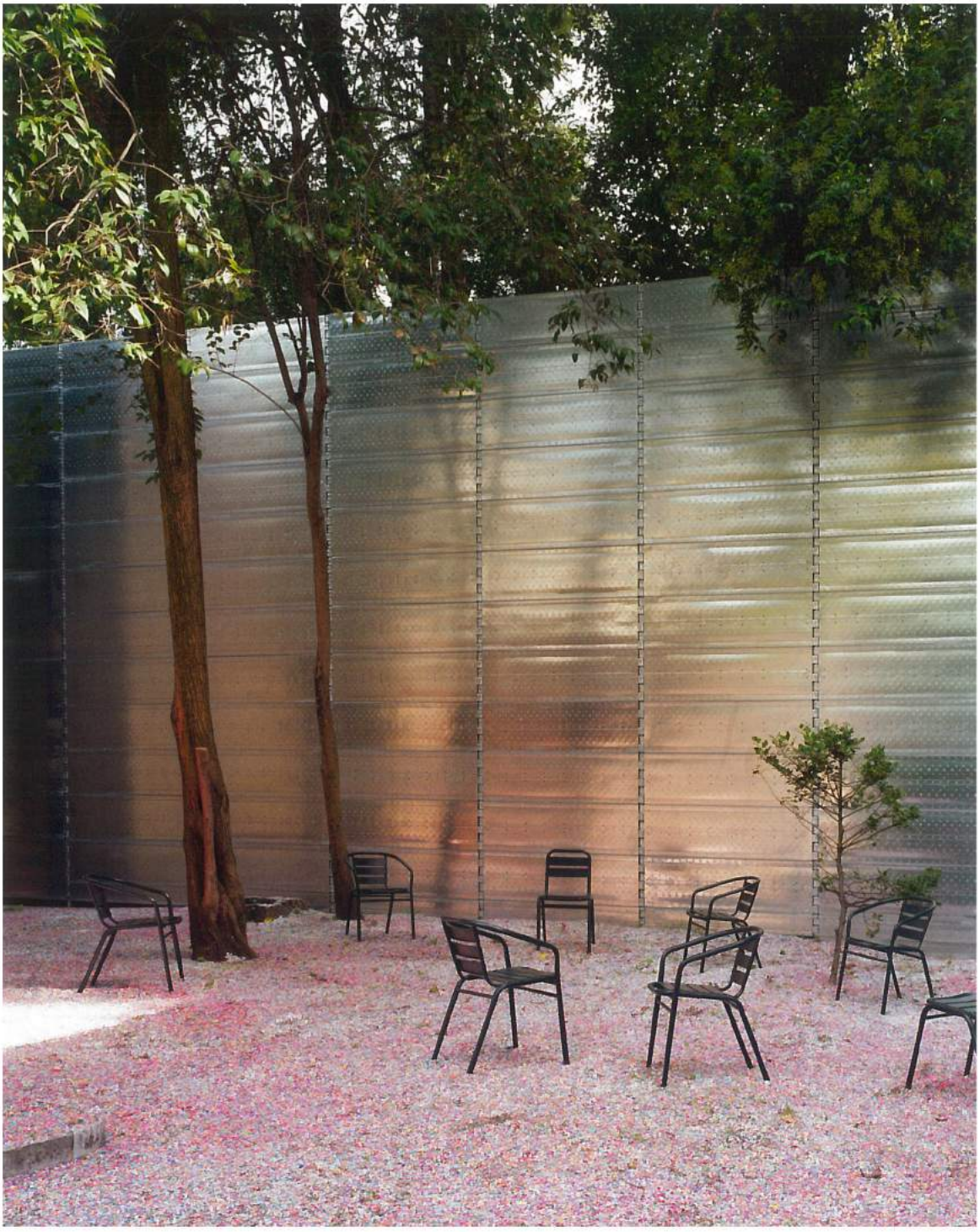


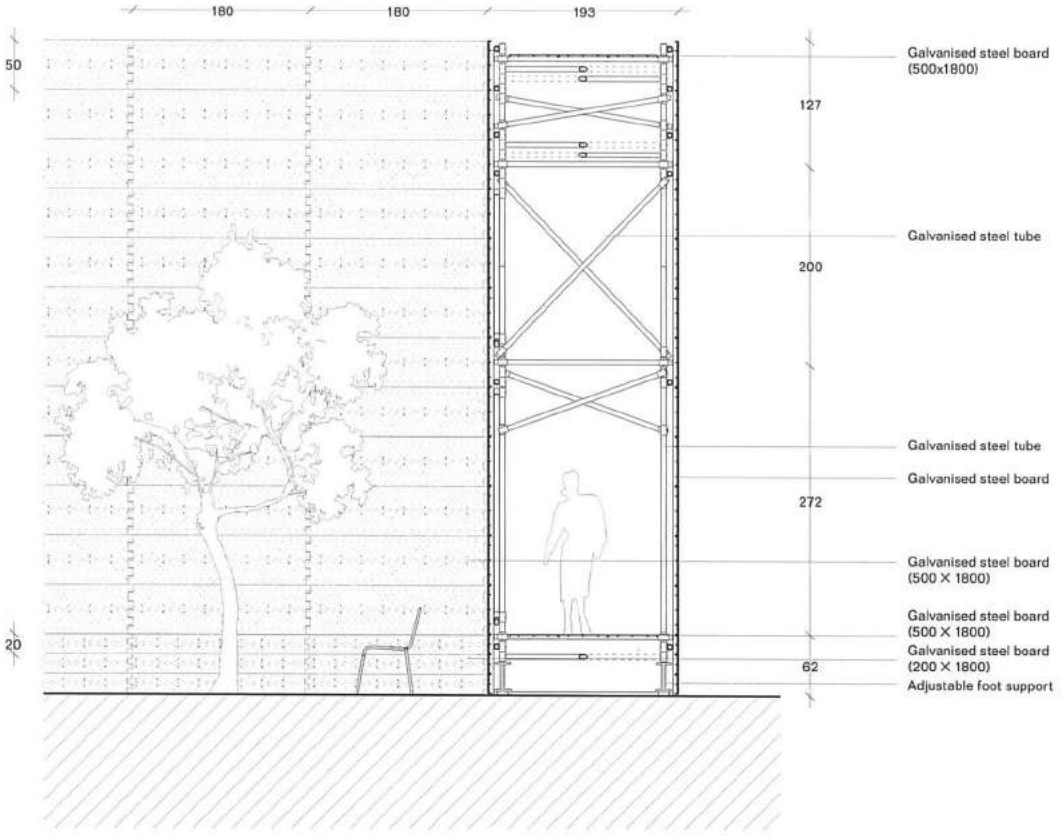
Ground floor plan

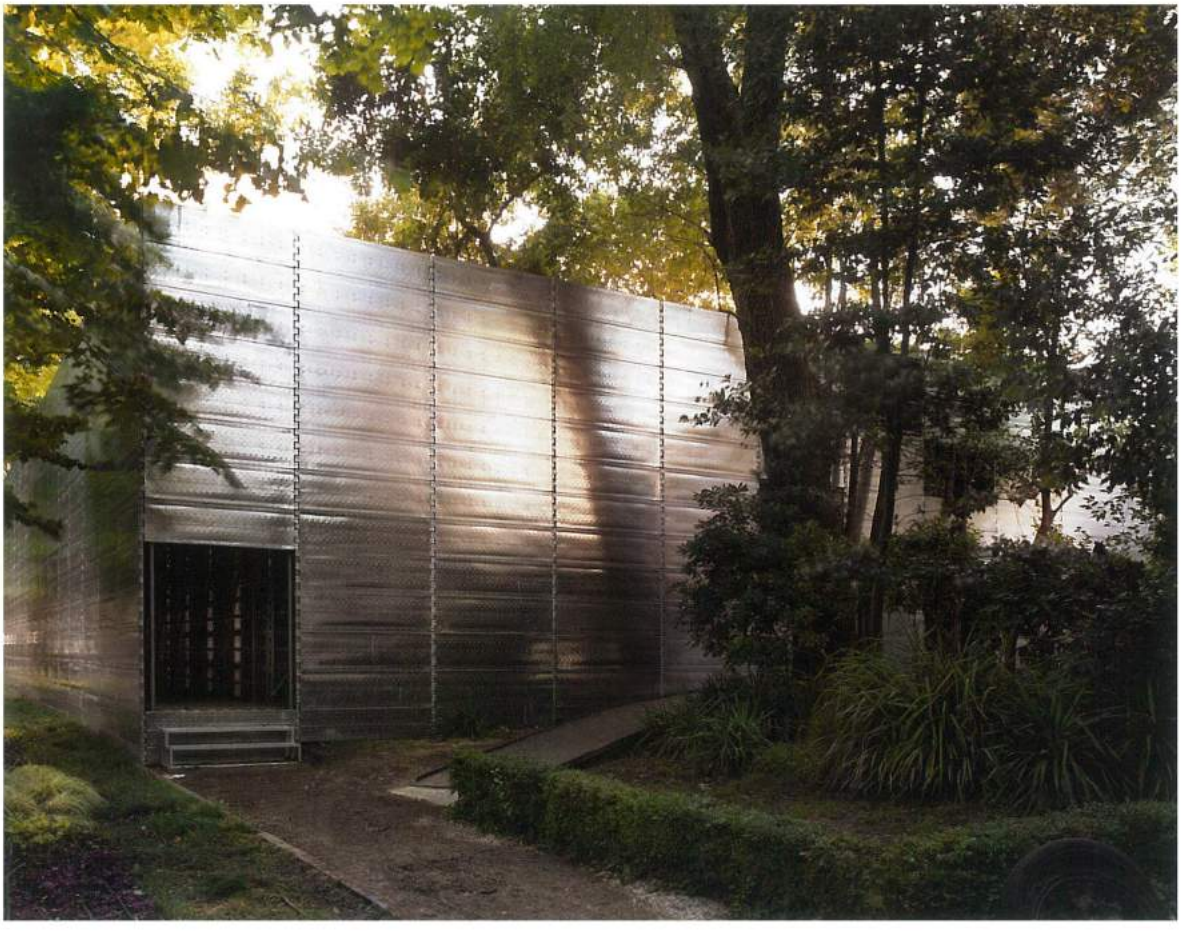
1 Existing pavilion
2 New pavilion
3 Main entrance
4 Side entrance
5 Exterior courtyard
6 Scaffolding passage

0 50m






180
180
193
50
20
127
200
272
62
Galvanised steel board (500x1800)
Galvanised steel tube
Galvanised steel tube
Galvanised steel board
Galvanised steel board (500 X 1800)
Galvanised steel board (500 X 1800)
Galvanised steel board (200 X 1800)
Adjustable foot support



Exhibit, Display – Wilfried Kuehn

The doubling makes the Belgian Pavilion invisible. Physically separated from the context of the Giardini, the twentieth-century structure appears as a readymade in an ad-hoc exhibition space. Inside and outside, front and behind, are cast into doubt by this nesting. The intervention by OFFICE brings a new building into play. Depending on the standpoint of the viewer, it can be a wall or a space. From a certain standpoint, too, the historical pavilion designed to host exhibits itself becomes the object that is exhibited. The simultaneity of the two perspectives creates an oscillation between exhibit and display. By taking the Architecture Biennale as its subject, the Belgian contribution turns the questionable practice of the 'architecture exhibition' into a project. Without the aid of diagrams, mapping or any other 'architecture as ...' manoeuvres, a simple spatial gesture produces architecture and exhibition, one entirely coinciding with the other. Through this, it establishes a relationship with certain wilfully misunderstood historical events, chief among them Le Corbusier's *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau*. Contradicting this one-to-one coincidence of architecture and exhibition then becomes the subject of the intervention. In its concrete, tangible form, the intervention at the Belgian Pavilion is an obstacle that sets boundaries while remaining accessible and usable. A wall is erected, an entrance constructed, and a patio created and furnished with chairs, inviting people not only to enter the space but also to use it. The abstract counterpart of this same intervention then distances the viewer by exhibiting itself. An exhibition is created by a relationship that can be prompted in the eye of the beholder. It is that which is at the same time visible and invisible. The contradictions inherent in exhibiting architecture arise from the paradox of the simultaneous proximity and distance of an object. The concrete present and abstract present compete with one another. In architecture exhibitions this usually means they cancel each other out. With *1907 ... After the Party*, however, this competition gives rise to a tension expressed as an oscillation between the two poles of abstract and concrete, primarily on two levels – scale and choreography. The metal wall, at around 7m high, relates to the scale of the Giardini, surpassing the historical pavilion and recontextualising it within its perimeter. The existing building becomes a life-size model. Rather than approaching it axially, visitors suddenly find themselves standing in front of the pavilion after entering it from the side and crossing it backwards. Through the inverted movement, a choreography unfolds which allows the familiar to be experienced in a different way. The aggressive temporality of the experience alienates perception, distancing the exhibited architecture. The route is the display. If the structural intervention is isolated from its context, all that remains is an opaque U-shaped metal fence, an object that does not lend itself to fetishisation. The architecture is situational and produces a context that develops in historical relation to the pavilion. In contrast to the erroneous context debates of the last decades, the context here is neither the found nor the historical, nor any other background. On the contrary, the intervention itself is the context.