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Sue Williamson Filipino Cinema in the Digital Age
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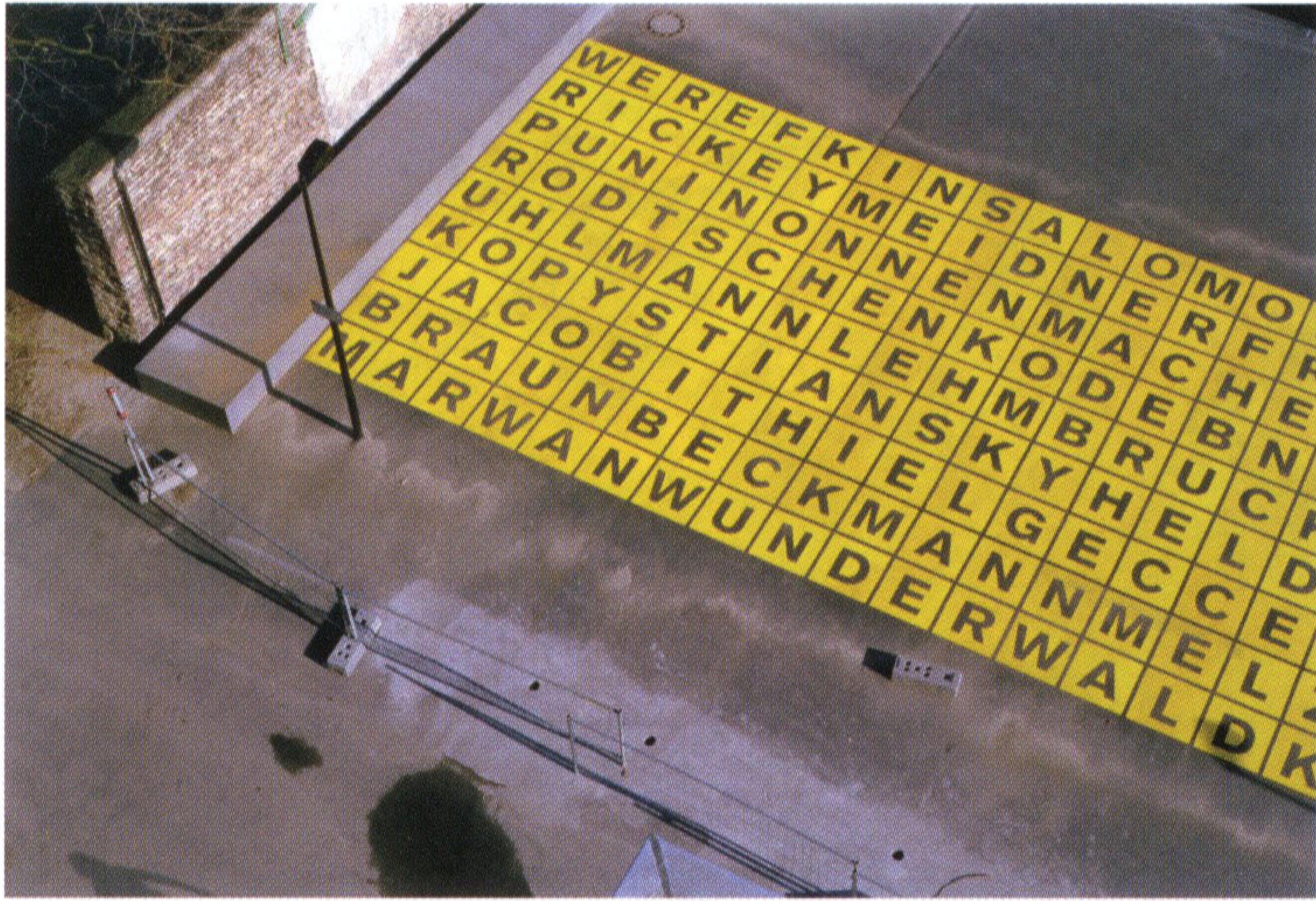
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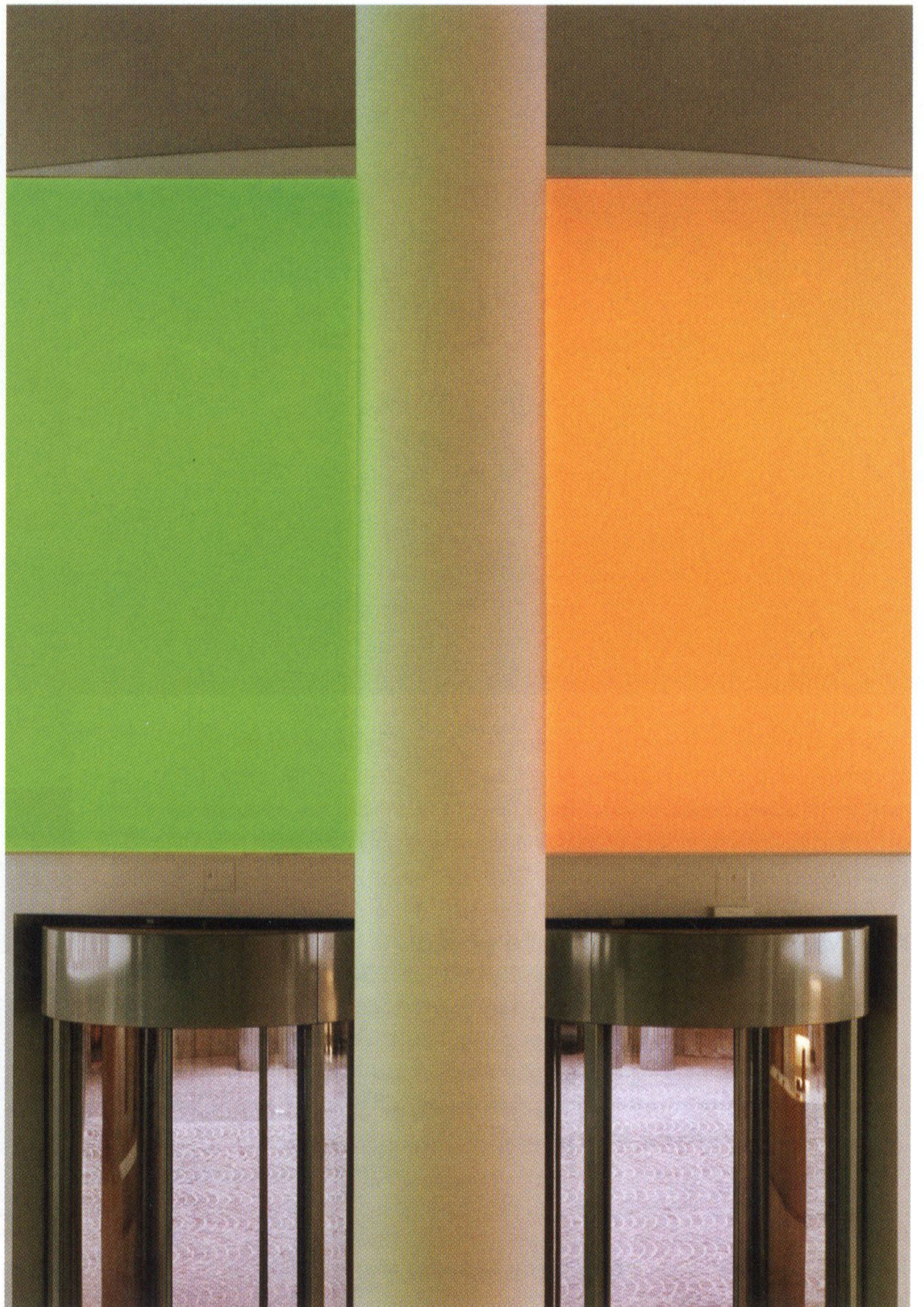
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Clockwise from top left: Letter Field, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, 2002/2003. Binding Brauerei, Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002. Foyer Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, 2002. Sammlung Friedrich Christian Flick, Berlin, 2004. Photos: Ulrich Schwarz

INVISIBLE THREADS

MICHELE ROBECCHI ON KUEHN MALVEZZI



'THE artist and the experience of the work comes first' is the golden rule every architect would indisputably agree with when it comes to designing a museum or an exhibiting space; yet there are many different ways to achieve this and the fact the artists themselves rarely have the opportunity to be vocal about it doesn't simplify the matter.

The Kuehn Malvezzi Studio was founded in Berlin in 2001. Johannes Kuehn, Wilfried Kuehn and Simona Malvezzi have always been involved with contemporary art on different levels, sharing an interest in the dynamics and processes involved with the production of a work of art rather than just its final result. Their passion for conceptual art, along with a very constructive and open dialogue with artists, curators, and gallerists was eventually reflected in their architecture, where very defined and difficult spaces generate a confrontation with the artist and his/her work.

Contemporary caught up with Simona Malvezzi just a few days before the opening of the 10th International Exhibition of Architecture in Venice, where the studio is featured in 'Convertible City', the German Pavilion exhibition curated by Armand Grüntuch and Almut Ernst. The two curators selected Kuehn Malvezzi's project for the Theaterformen Festival that takes place every two years in Braunschweig – a temporary red stairway that provides an extraordinary access to the theatre, to function both as a social space and a symbol for the event.

MICHELE ROBECCHI: How would you define your architecture?

SIMONA MALVEZZI: Our architecture is invisible but able to create relationships. It doesn't imply an absence of form, but rather the research of one strong element that characterises the space and allows attention to focus on what's happening inside. We don't aim to create a style but rather a very specific solution to every situation. This means responding to the context and working on it. We realise that artists, gallerists, and curators appreciate our working method because it is predicated on a full understanding of their needs. This is probably the biggest difference between our work and the spectacular but not too practical architecture of many museums built over the last decades.

MR: The Signage system and foyer you did for the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt (2002) was characterised by a very innovative use of the light.

SM: Yes. When the new director of the Schirn Kunsthalle, Max Hollein, invited us to redesign the museum's foyer, we realised that the existing space was already full of elements that couldn't be removed, and that gave us the choice of an 'immaterial material' like the light and the use of light walls for the signage. This resulted in an apparently bi-dimensional space – a sort of life-size architectural drawing. We work on the concept of the model. The final project doesn't have to look like a very detailed product but like a model in scale 1:1.

MR: How about the renovation of the Binding Brauerei in Kassel (2002) and the extension of the Sammlung Friedrich Christian Flick in Berlin (2004)? They seem to rely more on a modular system.

SM: For the Binding Brauerei in Kassel the request was to design both the foyer and the exhibiting spaces. [Documenta 11 Artistic Director] Okwui Enwezors' idea was to create a constellation of correlated spaces without assigning artistic positions in spatial order. We designed a modular matrix that would establish a path and provide enough ambient space. Positions and spaces would have been defined as time went by, while the paths – which were actually divided in two, 'En Suite' and 'Short Cut' – would have taken the same route. The design of Documenta is the expression of a specific form that is not self-referential but open to the use of the space.

MR: Were you surprised by the fierce response of the public opinion to the Sammlung Flick/Hamburger Bahnhof affair?

SM: The polemics around the Sammlung Flick started way before the opening so it wasn't a surprise. I think what happened was right, but this didn't affect the importance of the collection or the museum, which is regularly visited.

MR: From 'Letter Field' (2002-2003) to 'Momentary Monuments' (2006), the exhibition with Michael S. Riedel at Giò Marconi Gallery in Milan, you are not only designing art spaces, you exhibit in them as well.

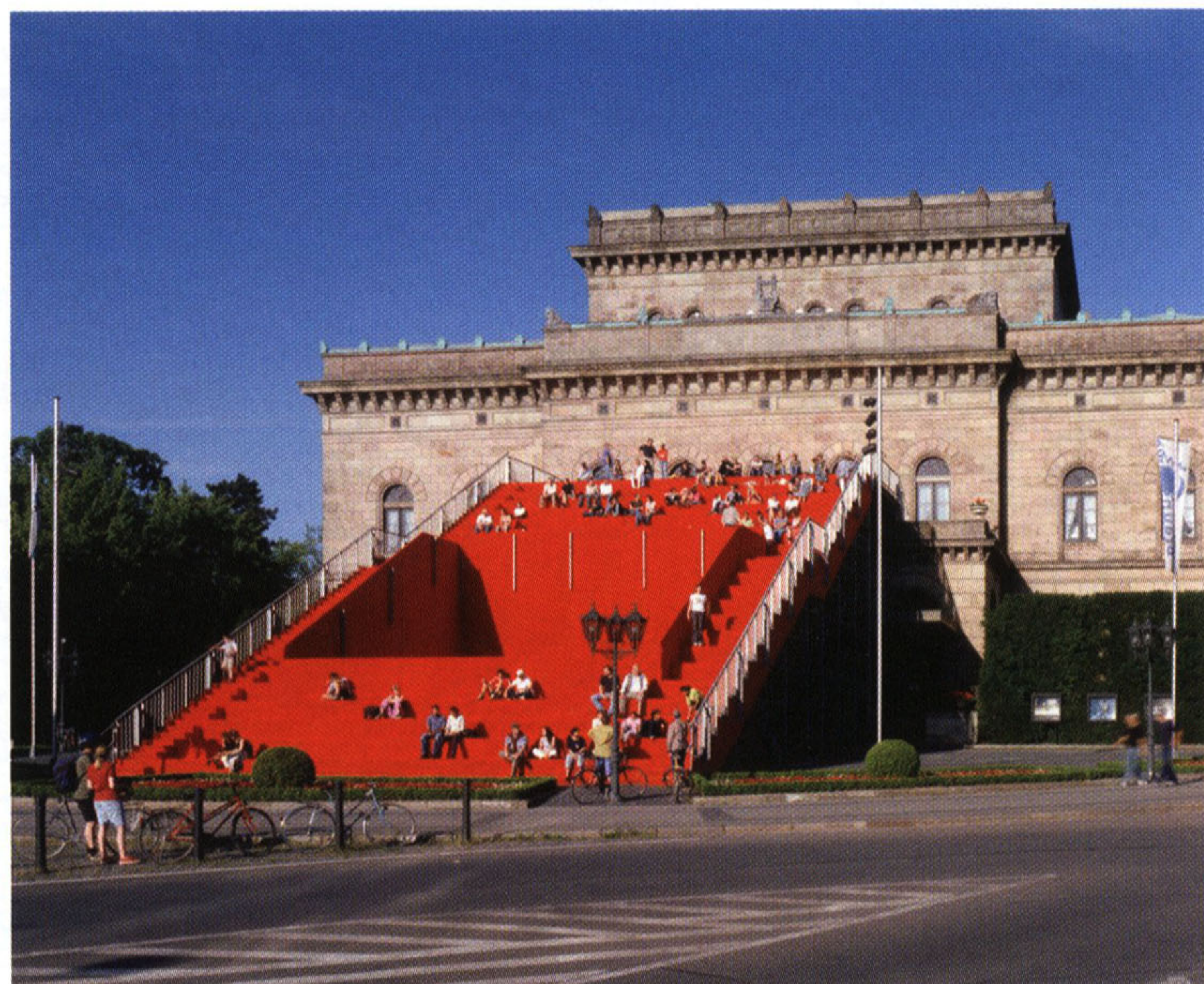
SM: Riedel's work is very interesting because it uses Pop Art elements like covers, repetition, posters, magazines, videos, reproductions and representations in a very conceptual way. For the exhibition 'Momentary Monuments' in Milan, which was in Berlin a year ago, we posed ourselves the problem of how to show our

projects and we reached the conclusion that architecture cannot be exhibited like an object in itself, but it needs to be represented in a specific and conscious way. This generated the idea of showing the production of the catalogue with Riedel. Our light table with the large scale slides of our projects represents the moment of the choice of the images for the catalogue. Riedel built life-size models of the tables of the printers, the binders, the designers and the library where the catalogue is sold. In addition he made a copy of the catalogue that features the conversations he recorded between the people that worked on the production of the book.

MR: Your working method puts you in touch with many curators, with whom you established a dialogue to better understand their exhibiting needs. What did you learn from these meetings?

SM: We have learned that some curators, although very competent, lack the ability to imagine the space or its depth of field just as they fail to comprehend the experiential nature of the works on show. It's a fact that many curators have an art history background and are essentially theoreticians who organise an exhibition every once in a while. There are of course curators that are determined to work with an architect, seeking to formalise the professional roles and brushing aside the slightly megalomaniac model of Harald Szeemann's 'Ausstellungsmacher'.

MR: You are currently working on the Museum of Fashion at Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin? What will it be like?



Red Carpet Treatment, Municipal Theatre, Braunschweig, 2002. Photo: Ulrich Schwarz

SM: We won the competition for the renovation of the Kunstgewerbemuseum, which is located in the Kulturforum complex next to Potsdamerplatz about a couple of years ago. It's one of the biggest museums of applied arts in Europe together with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the MAK in Vienna. It recently bought an important collection of clothes that goes from the 16th Century to today and it consequently required a renewal inside and a new image outside. The existing space is a sort of 1950s Utopia – a very expressive open space with no walls but plenty of columns, stairways and galleries. We designed a museum inside the museum, with a series of well-defined spaces, as if they are geometric islands. For budget reasons the museum can't undertake the full renovation at the moment. It will start with the fashion gallery and a new foyer with an orientation and information system. The opening is scheduled for 2008.

KUEHN MALVEZZI'S RED CARPET TREATMENT – MONUMENTAL TEMPORARY ENTRANCE FOR THE MUNICIPAL THEATRE IS FEATURED IN 'CONVERTIBLE CITY – MODES OF DENSIFICATION AND DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES' AT THE 10TH INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF ARCHITECTURE IN VENICE UNTIL 19 NOVEMBER 2006.
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