

DISPLAYED SPACES
NEW MEANS OF ARCHITECTURE
PRESENTATION THROUGH EXHIBITIONS

edited by Roberto Gigliotti

Spector Books

1:1

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Space may be displayed but first of all space is a display itself. There is no architecture, which is not at once a display. If we address space as a relation rather than as a purely geometrical problem, we see our work as architects closely related to questions of exhibiting. Space needs to be experienced first-hand. Being itself invisible and untouchable, a space requires a one-to-one perception-construction through subjective involvement. With the exhibition of architecture we are facing the doubling effect of this one-to-one experience. The way to display space then is making once more a different but equally real space. As we come to realise, one-to-one does not add up to exact repetition. Revisiting historical projects like Palladio's Teatro Olimpico and Ungers' Green Archipelago in this respect, we find evidence of the exhibition nature of architecture at varying scales. The key aspect of displayed space is the construction of a context which paradoxically rather than with the situation as found is to be identified with the architectural model to be inserted into it. The theme is developed along projects by Kuehn Malvezzi like the competition for the Berlin Humboldt-Forum in 2008, the contribution to the Biennale di Venezia 2012 and the exhibition Carlo Mollino-Maniera Moderna at the Haus der Kunst Munich in 2011.

I'm going to approach the panorama that we are trying to embrace from a specific perspective. I am talking from the point of view of an architect, but I am also showing an exhibition that I co-curated because I think there are certain things happening between the curatorial and the design practices. In fact, these practices are not clearly separated. Design is not just a service that is delivered when one does an exhibition. Something is happening in-between and I will call it *curatorial design* because you may not decide if it is design or if it is curatorial practice when you make spatial decisions in exhibiting something.

Pediment

In Piero Manzoni's *Socle du Monde* the base displays the world as an object. The Earth became the object of an exhibition by way of being put on top and thus actually



Piero Manzoni, *Socle du Monde*, 1961.

under a pediment. Manzoni was engaging conceptually with an act of architecture: framing and opening the perceived reality to a different view. Manzoni's act does not change reality but triggers a different way to look at it. Thus the space of his exhibiting is not geometrical but rather relational: how we see and frame it, and this is what we call a display. The point is that this is not exhibition-architecture but architecture as such. Architecture always displays. Architecture is never just a building, architecture as space is not something that you can touch, it is not something that you can actually photograph and see but a reality you have to experience and thus produce yourself first hand. Space and architecture for that matter are always entities that are real, that are 1:1 and in their way they relate objects to one another because making architecture does not mean making a singular building but producing a context. This principle guides our practice when we make architecture and we always think of how to make a 1:1 experience possible. 1:1 means life-sized in the sense of an unmediated experience. That is why I do not believe too much in scale models and in fact we talk a lot about models in our office but when we talk about models we think of models 1:1, we think of how reality itself becomes a model and assumes a demonstrative aspect by shifting your perspective. Manzoni actually made a model out of the Earth by displaying it.

Making things invisible

Charles de Beistegui, a Paris art collector and party animal of the 1920s, asked Le Corbusier to transform a rooftop on the Champs Elysees into a location that twenty years later might have been called a penthouse. Le Corbusier made moving hedges and a periscope through which you can look at Paris as an exhibition. He finally realised the *Plan Voisin* by way of display after no one would follow his plan to enhance Paris on the ground through physical demolition. With the help of these hedges put on top of the roof and the kind of wall the art collector himself had built (apparently with a fireplace), you could actually block out most of Paris and just look at what you wanted (which was the Arc de



Le Corbusier, *Rooftop de Beistegui*, Paris, 1929–31.

The space of the exhibition as a field of action



Le Corbusier, *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau*, Paris, 1925.



Andrea Palladio, *Teatro Olimpico*, Vicenza, 1580–1585.



Canaletto, *Capriccio of Palladio buildings*, 1756–59.

Triomphe, in this case). The point is that Le Corbusier did not want to look at the whole city as a scenery but he wanted to display Paris as he conceptually imagined it: a void with singular monuments. In order to achieve this effect, he needed to reduce the visible reality. As we can see, exhibiting means making things invisible rather than visible.

Cut-Out

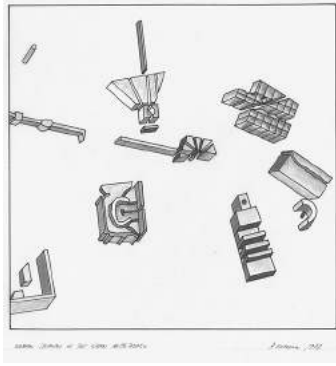
The optical city model of the de Beistegui design goes back to another project Le Corbusier had done some years earlier, the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau realised in 1925 for the International Decorative Arts Exhibition in Paris. The interesting part of this exhibition was the fact that Le Corbusier made a life size model of an apartment – the whole pavilion set in the park was actually a 1:1 cut-out of the *Immeuble-Villa* and you could walk in and look out from the apartment into the park, you were able to actually feel the whole experience of being in the *Immeuble-Villa* in spite of it not having been built. The point is again that it was part of an urban design scheme and, additionally, there was a big diorama inside of the pavilion, but still, as a visitor, you could directly experience its spatial reality.

Palladio I

In the late 1500s Palladio realised in Vicenza his famous theatre, which is not a theatre at all but can be considered an exhibition. An exhibition of a theatre. This space is a display of the honour and dignity of the academy members who financed the project and it is basically a way of displaying the citizenship in Vicenza. It realises a *museification* of Roman architectural elements. It frames architecture; it is an architectural model that you can experience because its scenography creates an imaginary perspective behind the model of the Roman triumphal arch, the same by the way Le Corbusier framed in the form of the Arc de Triomphe.

Palladio II

Two Centuries after the theatre Canaletto paints the Palladio buildings as a Capriccio, putting them together in a sort of architecture museum, similarly to the Roman



Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Berlin The Green Archipelago*, 1977.

Villa Adriana in Tivoli or today's Pergamon Museum in Berlin. The almost complete work of Palladio is brought together in an imaginary architecture museum. Even this is a 1:1 model as it works through the experience of painting; thus rather than illustrating Palladio's architecture, Canaletto chose to transform it into yet another object of art.

Green Archipelago

In his 1977 drawing O. M. Ungers represents Berlin as a shrunken city that has been largely erased. Just isolated buildings remain like relics of a former age. This picture becomes an architectural museum not unlike the *Capriccio* by Canaletto. Ungers did in Berlin what Le Corbusier had done in Paris, although pointing more at morphological contexts than at singular buildings: He selected a limited number of architectural constellations, leaving out all the rest. Again, a show based not on amassing but on reducing. Reducing architecture and reframing it is the creation of a display. This example can be described as a form of urban design and can again be interpreted as a 1:1 exhibition.



Carlo Mollino, *Villa Garelli*, Champoluc, 1965.

Ready-Made

Villa Garelli in Champoluc, 1965. This building by Carlo Mollino is extremely interesting, because it is an architectural ready-made. Mollino did not invent this building, but he found it fifty kilometers away from where it stands now. The building, an old traditional hay barn in the rural valley, was dismantled and reassembled in Champoluc, on a new base built by Mollino. It is a base conceived to exhibit the old building and thus transform it from a barn into a villa. It is a very humble building put on display and made into something new. Mollino built in 1:1 scale something that he did not invent, but something that he reinvented through a different way of framing. He not so much created a building as he designed a context.

The space of the exhibition as a field of action



Martin Kippenberger, *Modell Interconti*, 1987.

Modell Interconti

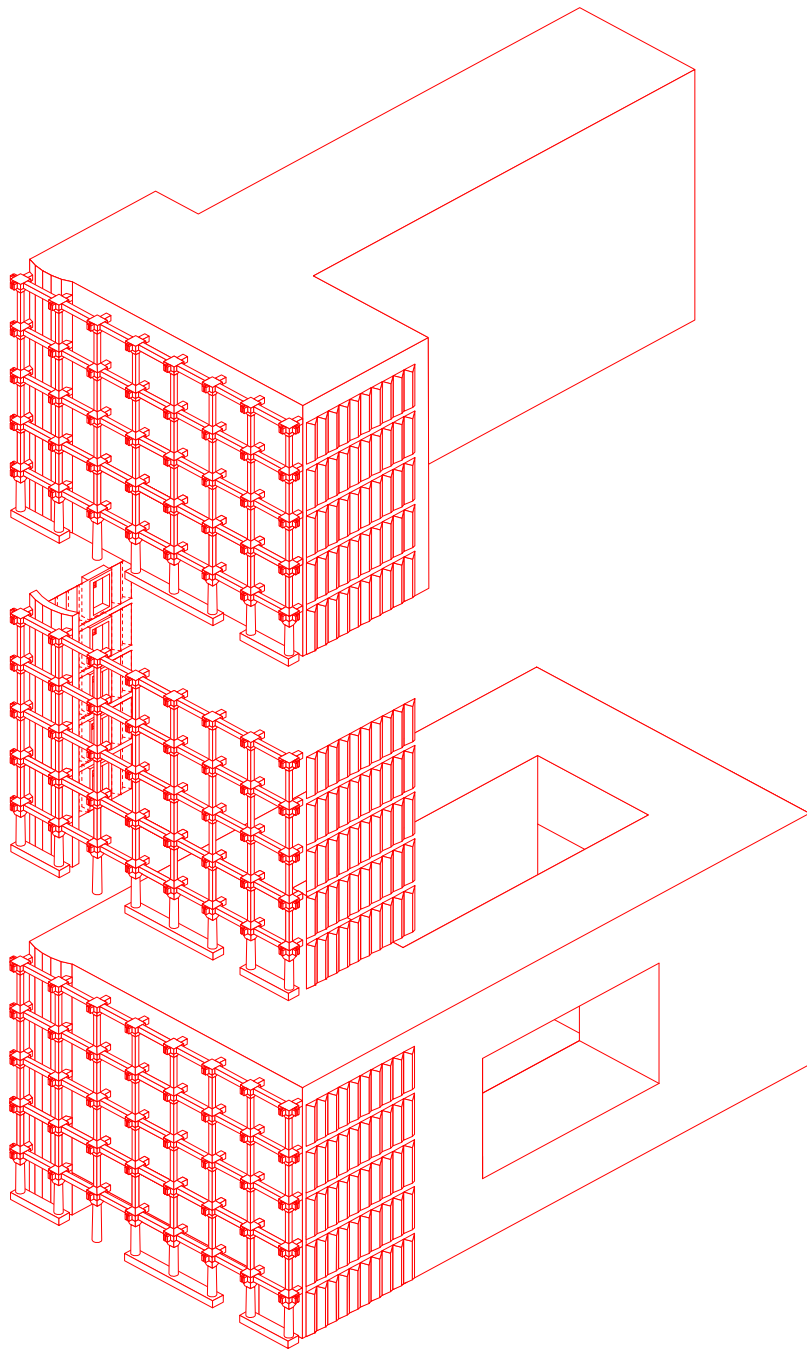
It looks like a table but it actually is an artwork used as a ready-made to make yet another artwork. In 1987 Martin Kippenberger bought a 1972 grey painting by Gerhard Richter and screwed table legs under it in order to make it look like a table. A piece, rather valuable at the time, purposefully devaluated by transforming it into a somehow reverse ready-made. The process is similar to what Mollino did: a form of appropriation of an existing work in order to create a new context.

Political Facade I

In our 2009-competition entry for the German embassy in Belgrade, we were confronted with the problem of architecture as a political display. The call by the German Foreign Ministry asked for a new building on a prominent site which today is occupied by a remarkable building: an existing structure from the early 1970s which is a political landmark. It is a late modernist Yugoslav building, highly symbolic for the beginning of the *Entspannungspolitik* which Willy Brandt initiated at that time, following ten years of cold war, by reopening the West-German embassies in all socialist countries. Even so, the building today is supposed to be demolished. Our design turns the logic of erasure around, proposing the demolition of the technically exhausted building but not of its remarkable structural concrete facade. By designing a white cube behind the existing facade we produce a new context that at once highlights and alienates the historical fragment. It is a transfer of the museum condition into the city in which a familiar object is being transformed into an object on display. The fact that the political representatives in the jury vetoed our design gave a demonstration of the political nature of our proposed architectural move and uncovered the suppressed political nature of the allegedly technical demolition.

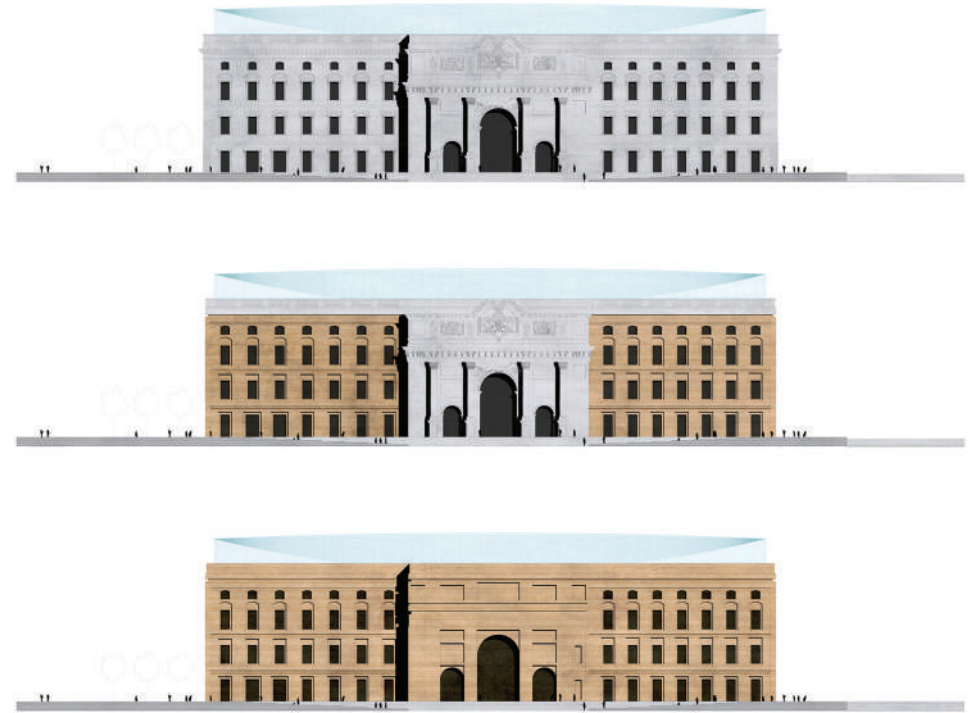
Political Facade II

Humboldt Forum, the reconstruction of the historical castle in Berlin, 2008. A strange competition as the organisers already had a plan for the reconstruction of the facades; no suggestions were required for this particular



*German Embassy Belgrade,
competition entry, 2009.*

The space of the exhibition as a field of action



*Reconstruction of the Berlin
Castle, competition entry, 2008.*

part of the project. The Berlin castle had been demolished in the 1950s by the socialist government and of course it is a political issue to decide to rebuild the castle. Our point was that you cannot rebuild a castle which has been absent for half a century as if it were a work of ordinary city repair. Rather it means initiating an experiment of conscious architectural reproduction, being aware that issue of reproduction itself today has achieved a major role in all parts of our society. We proposed a model of the historical castle, 1:1 scale. As full volumetric model of the historical event, it will interact with the surrounding structures, above all Schinkel's Altes Museum. It will be able to engage Schinkel in his yet to be realised plan for an active relation between Museum and castle by opening the new facade instead of reconstructing the historical fortress-like terraces on this side. A massive two meter thick brick wall will give form to the huge architectural model and appear in the urban space as a relief without decoration. In the event of successful fundraising by private initiatives in favour of historical reconstruction, stone ornaments and stuccos will be applied in a second building phase, thus putting the reproduction process itself on display. The project obtained a special mention but did not win due to vetoes by the political representatives, as again the display of a historical facade revealed itself to be the political point of conflict.

Use

Komuna Fundamento is our 1:1 contribution for the Venice Architecture Biennale 2012. Curator David Chipperfield's motto *Common Ground* meant for us that you aim at disappearing in the exhibition, entering the exhibition space and, somehow, mingling. We realised a big bench made of grey brick, a pediment in front of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni blocking the usual way into it. The construction incorporates a tree that was already there. Many visitors did not even recognise the construction as part of the exhibition. In fact we asked not to put any label on or next to this object. The intervention became architecture just because people sat on and started using it. We think of physical use as a real 1:1 experience that distinguishes architecture from most other arts. Inside

The space of the exhibition as a field of action



Reconstruction of the Berlin Castle, competition entry, 2008.



Komuna Fundamento, installation view, Venice Architecture Biennale 2012.



Komuna Fundamento, installation view, Venice Architecture Biennale 2012.

The space of the exhibition as a field of action

the Palazzo delle Esposizioni we realised another object as the counter-image or counter-space of the first one. The space outside of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni is a big sculptural intervention creating space around it, while the space inside is a place you can move through, a hollow intervention creating space within, used to exhibit photography by Candida Höfer and Armin Linke, two photographers we have worked with for many years, who share our interest in the relational presence of space.

Curatorial Design

Making the exhibition *Carlo Mollino. Maniera Moderna* at the Haus der Kunst in Munich in 2011, I asked myself what it means to make a monographic exhibition. The architect Carlo Mollino is quite recognised in both the art and design worlds but paradoxically largely ignored in architectural history. This was a good starting point for us and it was important to exhibit Mollino in an art museum. We wanted to create a real experience as I do not agree that architecture cannot be exhibited as a one-to-one experience in an exhibition. Architecture is not only about building or about space making but also about the narration and perception of reality. Carlo Mollino is an architect who uses many conceptual tools. This is what we decided to show. Of course that is still not enough to render an experience, so a further step was to ask Armin Linke to co-curate the exhibition and to be engaged in the show as an artist. I think that this decision was important in terms of curatorial design because it dealt with the issue of what it means to make a concept interact with direct authorship. Armin Linke travelled all the Mollino places and made large format, colour photographs of the buildings and spaces as he found them, more often than not abandoned or untidy. This was a way for us to take a new look and open new perspectives on the work of Mollino, allowing the visitor to reach a closeness to the work of the architect and make an experience in the exhibition. I would argue that, although these photographs are not life size, the perceptive experience that they deliver is 1:1 as it is not at all illustrative.

Let me take as an example a picture by Linke of Mol-



Carlo Mollino. *Maniera Moderna*, installation view with Mollino's antifascism monument photographed by Armin Linke, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2011.



Carlo Mollino. *Maniera Moderna*, installation view with furniture treated as sculptures on high pedestals, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2011.

The space of the exhibition as a field of action

lino's antifascism monument. When he went there, he happened to assist and photograph the ritual meeting of the partisans' relatives and followers who regularly meet there to commemorate. The antifascist monument is not represented as a piece of sculpture but as something that is being used, in a political way, for the commemoration of the partisans. The picture witnesses an active use of Mollino's structure and I would say that this is very important for an exhibition, because it actually shows the kind of update it is able to produce.

We had a limited number of furniture pieces by Carlo Mollino on exhibit. We constructed a sort of a theatre for these objects putting them on high pedestals and fully treating them as sculptures. The objects lost their closeness to the earth where they are expected to be used and we went a step further and transformed them into objects that you almost look at on eye level – in this way these objects become theatrical and architectural and this is another way of making a 1:1 experience. Since you cannot sit on or touch and use them, you have to create another and even alienated way of translating one-to-one. Then we had one room of projections, where we used Mollino's photography of his interiors. Next to the original framed vintage prints exhibited on the wall we projected a number of photographs on three large walls, giving the visitor the freedom to move into these interiors. The pictures changed in a slideshow and the visitor could move in these historical environments seen through the eyes of Carlo Mollino. This is a way of having a 1:1 experience using Mollino's photographs.

In the exhibition we had a sculptural wood-part of a table that we exhibited without the glass surface in order to move one step further in showing it as a sculpture; not only did we take off the glass top but we also placed it on a pedestal so that the object became something like an historical structure, a skeleton. You could see on the wall behind this object the original documentation including the technical drawings as we generated a relation between the work (how you draw and make the table) and the piece itself.

We showed a film made by Armin Linke about how people live with Mollino's artefacts. There is a last villa left



Carlo Mollino. *Maniera Moderna*, installation view with room of projections as 1:1 experience, Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2011.

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that is fully furnished and completely designed by Mollino and the owners are still using it as a holiday home. In Linke's video you see how they move the table through the garden. The video shows a gentle and unspectacular way of living within the spaces designed by Mollino and with Mollino himself. You can look at this film and almost feel that you are invited to lunch in this house. In different ways we added a series of layers of reality to the show as we did not see it as a form of documentation but as a form of direct experience.