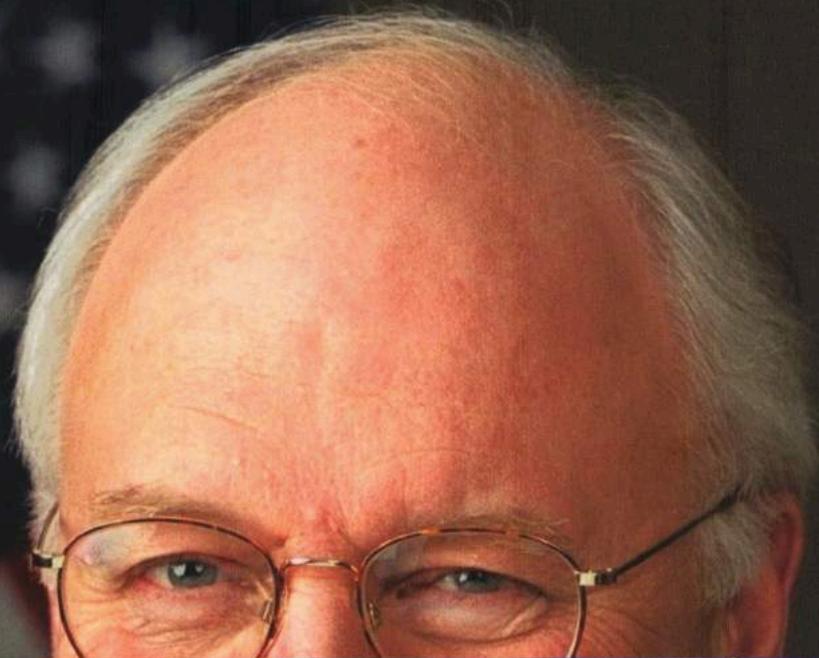


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METAHAVEN

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THE NINETIES
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ARCHITECTURE

OFFICE

BY KUEHN MALVEZZI

A Cast of Space under My Chair (1965-1968) by Bruce Nauman directs the attention of the viewer towards the void under the chair, usually disregarded, and at the same time activates the mental reconstruction of the invisible chair—making the invisible visible and the visible invisible. The same principle underpins the designing method employed by OFFICE (Kersten Geers and David Van Severen). In their work *Cité de Refuge*, on the border between Morocco and Spain, they put the border itself on stage, treating it like a building, making it physical. Their goal is not to solve the issue of borders: according to Geers Van Severen, architecture does not solve problems. The aim here is to focus upon a place, in this case the border with Ceuta, that remains invisible despite being a setting for drama and death. The architectural sign that defines such a place is basic, and taken from a catalogue of established models. Geers and Van Severen do not create objects but situations; they do not conceive an expressive gesture but rather employ predetermined and typical shapes: square, triangle, round. They say, “We employ the instruments of architecture to create very physical things.”

In their work, the architectural concept is taken to its extreme and supported by an abstract representation, that is, by collage. OFFICE uses Baldessari’s cut-outs, especially those from *Two Crowds* (*with Shape*

of Reason Missing), because of the bold graphics of the city plan of the new South Korean administrative capital: a square matrix, an organizational frame devoid of buildings with the exception of the Auditorium and of the City Hall. In the accumulation of layers of order and disorder, they recall the work of Superstudio and of the Continuous Monument. In *After the Party*, the title of the Belgian pavilion at the last Biennale in Venice, they tackled the paradox of exhibiting architecture. Their project: a steel enclosure that surrounded the pavilion, creating a sort of patio before the main entrance. The construction totally redefined the pavilion without altering it; the enclosure was the “display” and the pavilion thus becomes the exhibited object.

With this intervention, Geers and Van Severen summed up the essence of today’s exhibition-design: the absence of rhetoric. Their architecture means defining spaces, links, thresholds, paths, relations, visual perceptions. The maze located on a side of the Pavilion determines a new entrance and creates a feeling of disorientation and expectation; the patio defined by the enclosure isolates and removes itself from the rest of the Biennale gardens, forcing the viewer to observe the existing building. The confetti on the floor suggests the continuity between the inside and the outside. The title, *After the Party*, is casual.

ARCHITECTURE



Photo: Bas Partnoen