





RYAN REITBAUER

By William Menking

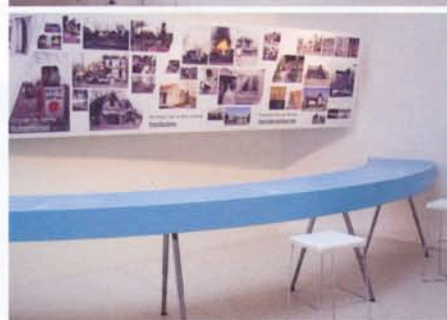
When word first went out that the theme of this year's architecture biennale was "Out There: Beyond Building," I suspected that Aaron Betsky would take a more formalist approach and not include the kind of social activism that has recently engaged an increasing number of architects frustrated by a sense of impotence in the face of the country's crumbling infrastructure and frayed social fabric. I turned to Teddy Cruz whose housing proposals for Hudson, NY, we've covered in *AN*; and he started a conversation with Pratt Institute's Deborah Ganz. Soon the team also included Andy Sturm of the PARC Foundation and Aaron Levy of the Slought Foundation, two non-profits often involved with architects pursuing alternative practices. There seemed to be an opportunity to provide a counterpoint to the main exhibition with something that focused more on new approaches to engaging with communities and shaping local infrastructure.

Time was not on our side: We had only four months to conceive, develop, design, ship, and install everything down to the guestbook to Venice. Right at the start, Leanne Mella, with years of experience as a biennale coordinator and with the State Department, warned me,

"I've done exhibits in Africa, and it can be a difficult place to mount an exhibition, but Venice is tougher!" and then she joined our team, an unbeatable vote of confidence.

Our goal was not modest: We were basically trying to develop and encourage an architecture culture that doesn't yet exist in the United States. And while we included efforts like The Heidelberg Project, where abandoned houses in Detroit have been encrusted by recycled refuse collected in the neighborhood, or Kyong Park's New Silk Road video montage, the impulse was to provoke new thinking about architecture, not to feature art projects.

While some of the work we decided to include (and that you may have read about in the last issue of *AN*) was very critical about aspects of American culture and the built environment, some of it was equally proactive about our problems, because they are in fact hard to believe. The reality is that in the last 25 years, this country hasn't really invested in our infrastructure, and so a lot of the projects in the pavilion looked at that rather than at buildings in order to make a connection between an architectural sensibility and a larger social infrastructure. Finally, I believe that architects are by and large urbanists who love cities and want to make them function better, and the projects we chose to include represented a range of ways to do just that.



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