about ourselves? In which form would it be more profoundly poetic? A water fountain is made which the architect wants to be 20 feet high; but can it be so? Once the thought is taken seriously that what has been made already sets its own scale, quite often in spite of what is desired, the scale is set free to become the reality which is found last or merely surrendered to in exhaustion. These projects thus become a way of asking about the price of closing the gap between what has actually been made and what is merely planned by means of a risky venture and prediction grounded somewhere in the nebulous zone between a wish and a hope.

The several interventions are grounded in a guidebook for the city of Palmanova. The guidebook plays the role of a *historia* (a helpful story) rather than a mere guide to the history of the city. The book interweaves fact and fiction in order to make the sleepy town of Palmanova a visible object once again for its 2,000 inhabitants and the future tourists who will visit it. Could this also be a form of urban renewal? Could it be a form of urban renewal which has about it the additional virtue of modesty, in that it does not presume either to know "all of the facts," or to impose upon the city a "foreign" architecture from "other lands and other customs?" These were the questions we began with in trying to understand how to approach the project. We could not visit the "site;" above all, even if we had, we could not have presumed to have lived there as if "to the manor born." Upon what genius or form of life can one presume to ground an international competition entry? We chose the form of life called the *story* because, today, perhaps it alone remains "international." It cannot be denied that Chaucer, Dante, and Shakespeare still speak to us today from a greater distance than Palmanova. And if they do so it is because they tell us a story which is worth reliving like the myth of Oedipus.

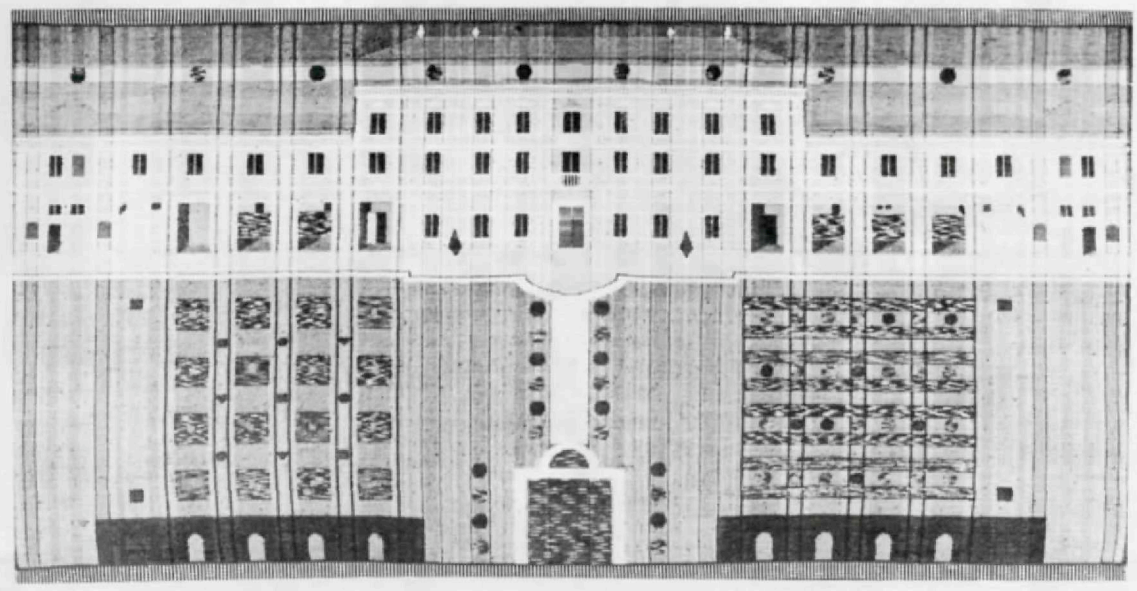
Our aim was to make the guidebook and projects for Palmanova a bringing-forth rather than a challenging-forth. The guidebook invites the tourist or visitor to submit to a story and an artifact, both of which perhaps merge into a single artifact which turns the city into a theater once again - a theater in which the fundamental project of life as self-understanding is played out in all its variations, vagaries, and vicisitudes, like a ticking clock in search of a *time* to tell. At work is always the principle of theater - the suspension of disbelief - the involuntary submission to the story as a thing to be lived through by catharsis or abreaction, through which something more than the predictable becomes available for living.

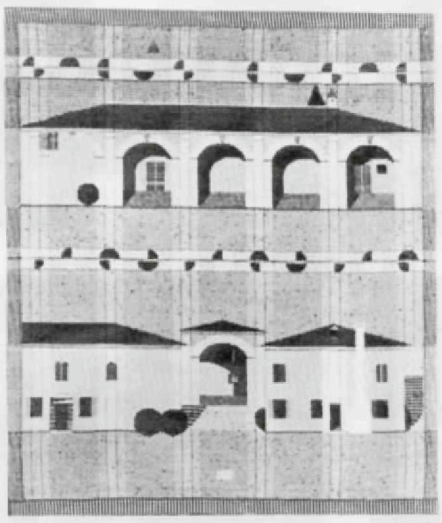
Theory is thus fundamentally an inquiry into the relation between building and being - a poiesis of action and action - a making of the as yet unmakable and a saying of the as yet unsayable. And this would be the task of thinking at the end of philosophy, where the comet of metaphysics reaches its *epochē* in the quest for certainty, somewhere between the vacuum and the stars.

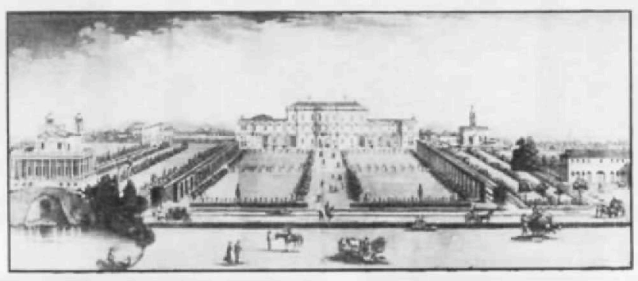
History, if it would be *history*, might then be asked for its account of the progressive erasure of the artifact. Could it be that what is truly history must either help erase the invisibility of the object or die with metaphysics as a past not fit for the present? If the thunderbolt of Zeus turned out not to be the one that split the roof of the Erechtheion on the acropolis at Athens, would it matter? Suppose it turned out to be the Trident of Poseidon. Before both, the artifact stands mute, speaking all the while of something these "facts" seem unable to contravene. Reversing Wolfgang Köhler, it thus becomes possible to ask for the place of facts in a world of values.■

Notes

1 See Frances A. Yates, *Theatre of the World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969.
2 Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks*, Ms. 23, B.N. 22 V.
3 Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, New York, Dover Press, 1960, 104.
4 Leon Battista Alberti, *De Pictura*, London, Phaidon, 1972, 99.
5 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *Basic Writings*, New York, Harper, 1977, 296.
6 John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, New York, Dover Press, 1971, 25.







Top and left: *Silk and wool tapestries of the Villa Farsetti, 1985, Laura Nicholson, weaver.* Above, *Villa Farsetti, view of the villa and park, 1833 (Drawing by A. Lazzari)*

Houston at the Venice Biennale

"The Biennale," we wrote in the quadriennial program presented to the Board of Directors at the beginning of the present quadrennium, "has in its nature a double cultural vocation: one that originates from the very unusual quality of its territorial emplacement and one that rises from the historical role it has developed (and is declared in its statute), operating on a worldwide scene through an organization just about unique in its kind, that involves, in its cultural management, a great number of nations from the whole world." Internationality and "Venetianity" were thus placed at the base of the work in this quadrennium as an aim to reach, not only through alternation, but also through a synthesis that could represent the great contradiction of Venice, a floating raft on which is perpetuated the myth of a courageous community that has challenged the world and time with weapons of beauty that have helped put in communication and sometimes united opposed parts of the earth. Venice, in fact, is the protagonist of this exhibition . . . for one whole season Venice becomes, thanks to the Biennale, the capital of projectual hope. - *Paolo Portoghesi, "The Projectual Offering," introduction to the Third International Exhibition of Architecture of The Biennale di Venezia.*

Nine projects by Houston architects and artists were selected for exhibition in the Third Biennale International Exhibition of Architecture this summer. Responding to chairman Aldo Rossi's "thin work-program" to create designs and interpretations for 10 historical sites in and around Venice, over 1,300 architects and artists from around the world submitted projects this year. Judges Aldo Rossi, Sandro Benedetti, Gianfranco Caniggia, Claudio d'Amato, Gugliemo de Angelis D'Orsat, Rafael Moneo, Werner Oeschlin, and Gino Valle had the Herculean task of sorting through the entries, making an initial selection of 500 projects for viewing. From these, 150 were displayed in the Pavilions of the Giardini di Castelli, the permanent exhibition space for the Venice Biennale.

Tapestry artist Laura Nicholson's submission of nine wool tapestries depicting a poetic reconstruction of the Villa Farsetti won a prestigious Stone Lion, one of 14 projects honored with this highest award.

Works from the studios of three faculty members at the University of Houston's College of Architecture also were selected for display. Projects from Ben Nicholson's studio undertook a transformation of the Rialto Market in Venice. William Taylor and his students worked on schemes for the Romeo and Giulietta castles and the Accademia Bridge. Mark Schneider's studio submitted a group of projects reinterpreting elements of the Renaissance plan for the ideal, fortified city of Palmanova.

Taylor and the Nicholsons visited the exhibition this summer; the Nicholsons made two trips, the first to view the exhibition and the second, a hasty trip, so that Laura Nicholson could accept her award.

A two-volume catalogue of the Biennale is now available in translation. *Cite* asked Taylor and Laura and Ben Nicholson to reflect on their participation. *(B.C.W.)*

Villa Farsetti: A Garden in Silk and Wool

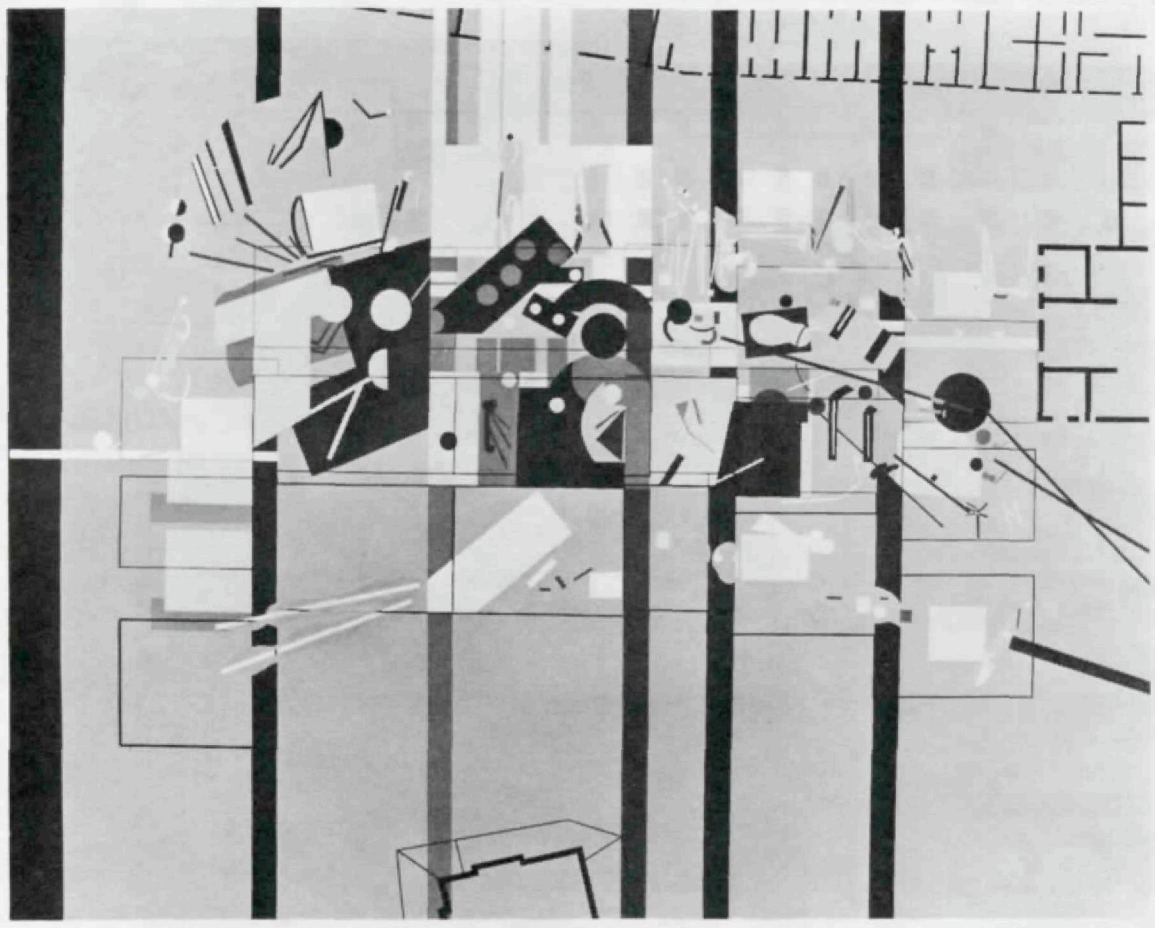
Laura Nicholson

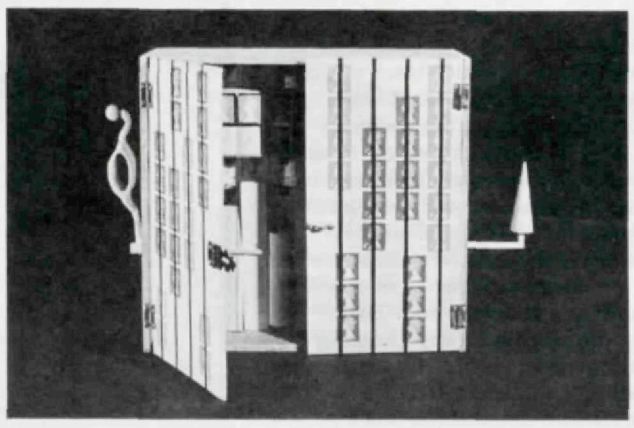
When the ten prospectuses for the Venice Biennale Exhibition fell across my desk last summer - my husband announcing his intention to enter the competition - I leafed through them, attracted perhaps by the photographs of crumbling Venetian architecture on their covers. One of the set caught my imagination: the Villa Farsetti, built in the mid-18th century by Abbot Filippo Farsetti.

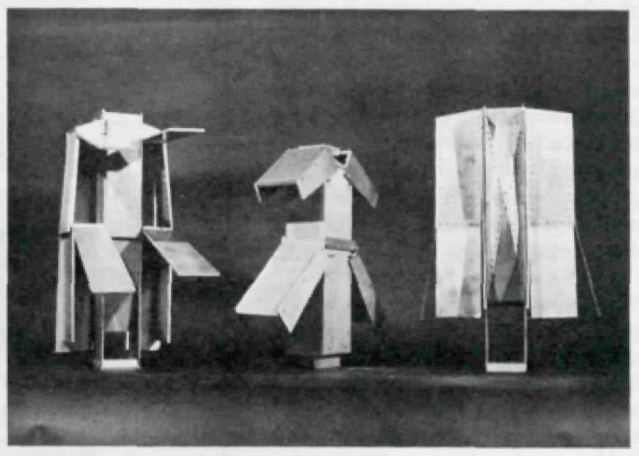
He created a "garden of marvels," a collection of beautiful and wonderful things. He built gardens, mazes, orangeries, conservatories, and botanical gardens. He had two water ducts installed . . . for domestic purposes, fish ponds, and fountains. He commissioned copies of the most beautiful sculptures, models of the most famous buildings and temples; he erected the Temple of Thunderous Jove, he built baths, a naumachia, and an arena in rough stone in the middle of which he put a copy of Trajan's column, and planned the "ancient spina," a Roman road with a Roman bridge.

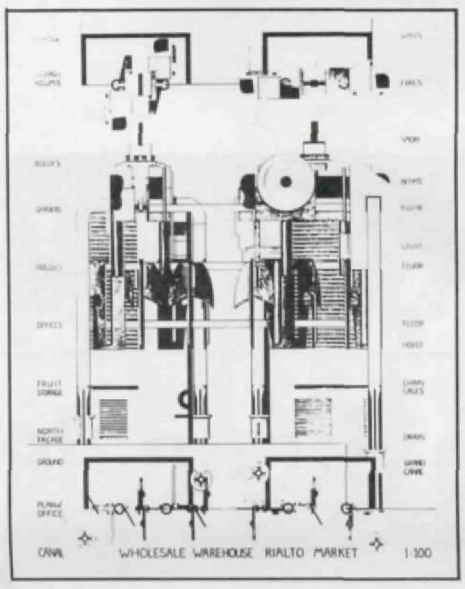
Although I am not a trained architect, having taken both my degrees in fine arts, I have become involved in the last five years with work that is concerned very directly with garden and architectural subject matter. My tapestries set stages for events, implying narrative; the Farsetti story provided a most fabulous script to work around. The liberal nature of this year's Biennale encouraged all with any sort of interest in the proposed themes to respond; in all it seemed a project designed with my interests in mind.

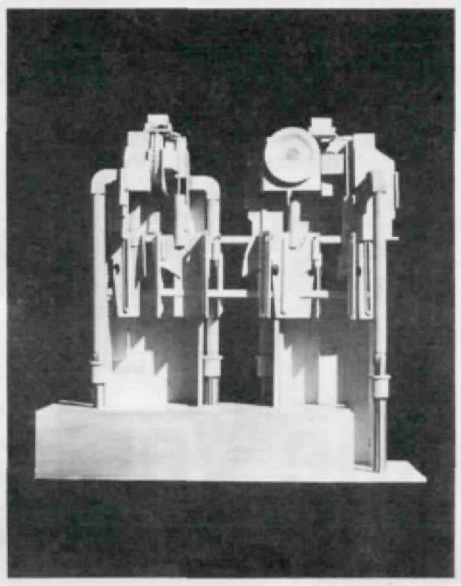
I made nine tapestries, in wool and silk, to describe Villa Farsetti, working over six months to produce them. Decisions were

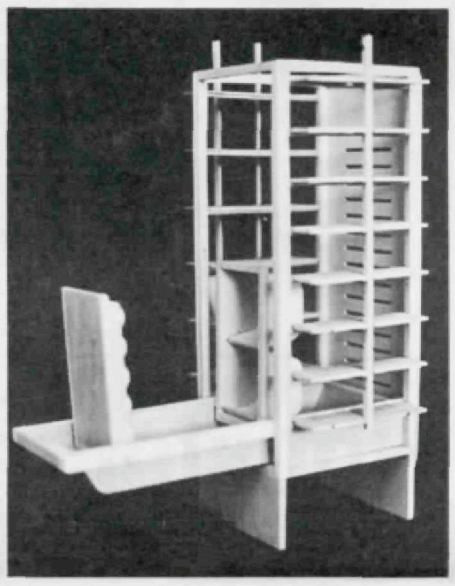












Projects for the Rialto Market from Ben Nicholson's studio, University of Houston. Clockwise from upper left: *Collage Plan of the Retail Market, Frooz Goravanchi; "The Merchant Centaur," Chris Obi; Retail Kiosks, Michael Meller; The Ice Machine, Alberto Cepeda; Wholesale Warehouse, Ben Nicholson and Minh Dinh, model and elevation*

made according to my usual methods of working, rather than to a particularly architectural method. As a result, scale was only of moderate importance; perspective and spatial problems were dealt with in terms which have evolved from working within a textile vocabulary, and mood and implication were considerations as important as specific architectural detailing. The work set out to describe the villa and its gardens with the idea of inviting the imagination to wander through its spaces.

It was important to address the issue of the reality of this villa, a place with a history and a future. Although I was not interested in providing blueprints for "the functional and formal recuperation of the existing buildings, the construction of the ruined ones, and the replanning of the gardens," as the prospectus urged, it was nevertheless necessary to come to terms with the history and essential character of the place, and decide what it means today. As the original villa complex was a full-blown 18th-century humanist endeavor, intended as much as a museum as a place to live, it expressed a contemporary obsession with ancient history. What then to explore today? Should one recreate a recreation of the past? Rather, I chose to take the extant buildings - the villa itself, its guest wing, the stables - and describe them with poetry. I also chose to erect one new building, a long greenhouse stretching half the width of the property, in homage to the greatest aspect of the villa's past, the famed Sala Botanical Gardens. The gardens were redesigned in a contemporary language, a language with relation to patterning and color. Overall a view was taken to recurring themes in my own work, of domesticity, so that the new Farsetti becomes a personal expression of living, rather than a place about public display and formality.

The central theme to the exploration of the Villa Farsetti is the notion of the place where one dwells - the home. House and garden are explored as distinct but connected ways of life. House is the ultimate sheltering of oneself and one's dreams. Garden is one's response to, and one's attempt to artificially recreate, nature. What is important about both places is that they are man-made, and so are controlled expressions of the human spirit in the process of defining a way of life. What these tapestries attempt to define, however, is not so much the framework - the architecture - but the way that a frame may mirror the life it shelters.

That the images are made in cloth is not incidental. Certainly cloth's function as the lining between man and his surroundings is long-standing. The relation of the image to the cloth is very important, as in the end one is presented not only with the image, where the mind may dwell, but with an object, a length of cloth, which will affect the quality of one's dwelling. The images, along with the sense of space, the picture-plane, must be in harmony with the experience of the object itself.

To make the images seem as integral as possible with the cloth plane, a system of building using warp and weft as horizontal and vertical axes is employed. The warp is accentuated with natural striping, then used as bare skeletal bones upon which to build. The sense of building the images makes a logical connection with architecture, but the work speaks not only of architecture - the articulation of buildings - but also uses those buildings to point to the life within.

Refitting the Rialto Market

Ben Nicholson

Few visitors are unaware of the bend in Venice's Grand Canal that peels around to the Rialto Bridge. On the convex side of this curve lies the Rialto Market, now a filled-up place that has spilled from the market buildings into wire cages that squat around their edges. For the inhabitants of Venice, the market is a place to buy fruit and meat; for the tourists it is a decelerated terminus of a pellet blast that originated in St. Mark's, embedded itself in the Rialto Bridge, and ended up at the Rialto Market.

Venice works well with tourists; it is vibrant with coagulating voyeurs who fill up the cafes and streets; a well-choreographed set of "extras" who pay their way. This is the city's *Ipso Facto*. Traditionally, the Rialto was the fourth corner of Venetian life, sharing its place with the Doge, the Arsenal, and the church. Rialto signified commerce: now it is little more than a revetment against which tourists are stopped dead-tired, amongst whom are dispersed the extra savvy Venetian shoppers. This uneasy mixture of expectant tourists and the side-stepping local inhabitants calls for a diaphanous resolution for the market.

The refitting of the Rialto Market must magnify the clamor of daylight mercantile intrigue, and, once the din of the trading subsides, this secular place has to open to the nocturnal amblings of the fitful wanderer. To do this the market is made into a shopping place that, when closed, turns chameleon-like into an envelope inhabited by the cool stare of structures that promote nocturnal reverie. After clearing the site of everything except the two palaces and two churches, the project is positioned as a collection of nine parts that are mutually reciprocal. When walking down the steps of the Rialto Bridge the sight seen is akin to a drawing room in which buildings in conversation are carefully placed between metamorphic furniture.

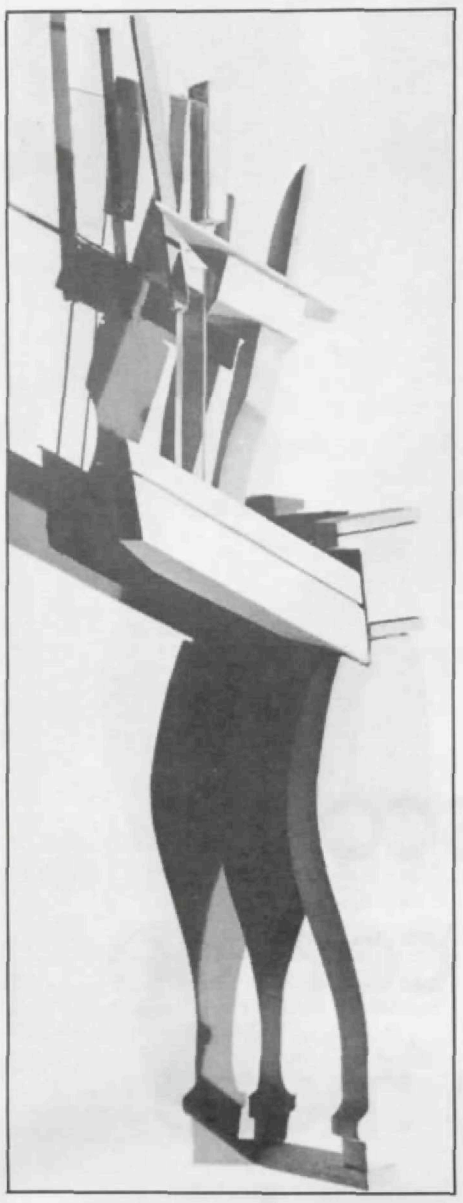
To the left is the retail fruit market. It is designed with the understanding that the city is revealed to aliens either by methodical and prejudicated map reading or a headlong run into its mass. Maps traditionally show an inflexible journey; the headlong run is composed of fragile memories which, when compiled, give a cerebral-cartographic picture of the city. This fruit market is unchartable, but nevertheless it is coherent to the savvy resident. The rest of us must ask the orange sellers for directions.

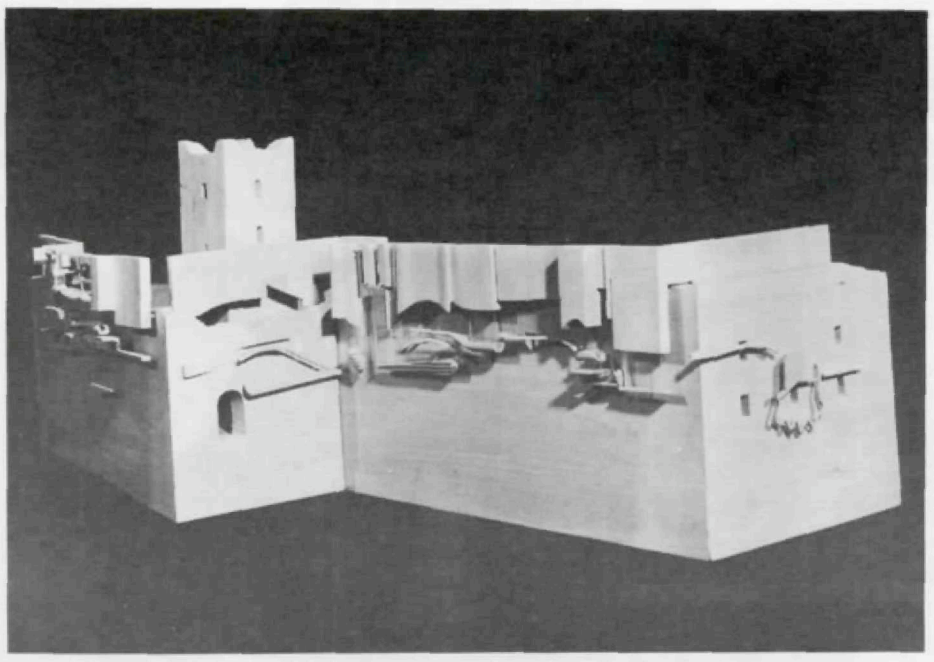
In the middle of the scheme is a large, metal storage shed that houses 13 bilevel aluminum kiosks which are dragged from their storage shed to sit awkwardly in the square. When in the square they open their panels diurnally to proffer merchandise; nocturnally they close up to make metal-tight figures which act as the policemen of reverie. When the kiosks vacate the glove-tight shed, it is open for the daily traders to do their business in.

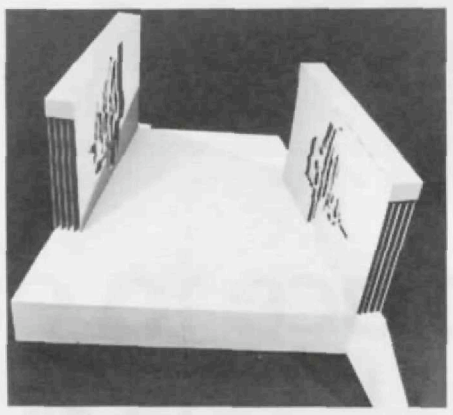
To the right of the market and running nearly the length of the waterfront is the wholesale fruit warehouse. At ground level it is an open structure that has a series of portcullis-like wire cages which drop from the ceiling for security. In times of the seasonal floods, these cages lock on to pallets and lift the goods above the water level. The flexings of the façade, composed of brassy forms, impose themselves deliberately onto the office space, allowing an office to become by chance a host to an impediment of unusual dimensions, around which the activities of daily life continue to take place. The mechanics of the generated façade are designed to allow for the eye and mind to be in constant agitation, for flow and counterflow to be at an equilibrium.

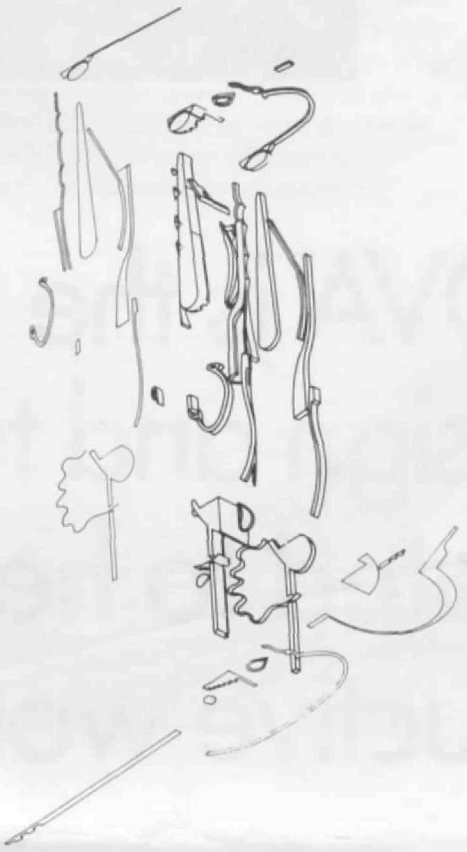
Behind the kiosks' storage shed is the market's bank. Its ground floor is vacant save for tubular, periscopic business dispensers that retreat into the body of the building to be protected from flood and crime. In the ceiling of this lobby is the uplifted vault supported by Giacommetian caryatids; in the roof of the bank are offices and places for commercial intrigue. Wedged into a thin line between the bank and the wholesale warehouse is a row of 12 stores that dispense goods and immaterialities. Part billboard, part mahogany furniture, these merchant centaurs, with the goods they sell, pull baggages of memory. The 12 stores, plastered with heads of heroes, heroines, and moral dogmas render pricelessness freely to the shoppers.

Walking through the alley made of the centaur shops, the second square of the









Projects for the Venice Biennale from William Taylor's studio, University of Houston. Left: *Model after Giorgio de Chirico's "The Mathematicians," Gary Chandler.* Top: *Juliet Castle, Michael Mars.* Above: *New plaza between the Romeo and Juliet Castles, Gary Chandler.* Right: *"Harlequins," Michael Mars*

Rialto Market is reached. Wedged between the fish market and the bank stands the ice machine, 14 feet high. It folds and unfolds its louvres; the nervous breaking and making of ice resonating throughout the market. Located throughout Rialto are miniature versions of this ice machine that act as glacial braziers, cooling the hands and feet of weary pedestrians and dispensing small packets of water crystals.

The market has three remaining loci. Along the waterfront are the light barges that sit squat to the land and water; these pointless material fixtures herald the market to canal traffic. In the market square sit three automata that serve as alarms, measuring relative ground subsidence and warning inhabitants of impending floods. Finally, sitting off from the project in the canal is a solitary stone box used as a *forcola* morgue. As each gondola is scrapped, the *forcola* is severed from the boat and placed in this morgue in the stream of the Grand Canal.

The plan of the market was developed in sympathy with the extraordinary conditions of the place, for there are palaces and churches on the site that cannot be disturbed without doing violence to the city. These buildings are at different angles to each other for there exists no grid in the modern sense. The site is bounded by the irregular curve of the canal; the buildings pressed close against each other to induce near-claustrophobia. Venice is a place that questions the usefulness of the site plan; the proximity of things allows for limited manipulation and too many stories abound about places for there to be wholesale upheaval.

In the face of this, the market was conceived as a place of metamorphosis, where something is removed only to be replaced by something more appropriate in program and spirit. This plan repairs itself so as to keep its fabric intact. The city has an indelible self-guilt for there will always be some residue of a building, always the knowledge that once someone did violence to a place and this record can never be erased.

The great observer of Venice, Adrian Stokes, remarked, "Why this satisfaction, this value, in one thing expressed in terms of another? Because it characterizes all human process, all thought and action and emotion. To live is to substitute."

Building Fiction/ Fictional Buildings

William Taylor

The three projects presented here are selected from the body of work which my studio submitted to the Venice Biennale for exhibition. To my mind, there are two distinct efforts to be seen. The first was to be a scientific one, involving the interpretation of various 20th-century paintings. It was undertaken with practically no reference to the historical situations and problems proposed by the Biennale and was therefore free to exist as work in itself. It did not defer its existence to a future state. It was today's work, a built fiction, not a fictional building.

Mark Wilson (Accademia Bridge), working within the idea of "bridge," selected as a starting point de Chirico's *Double Dream of Spring*, a painting which contains a perceptual bridging of two different realities. Through the use of drawing (plans and sections of the painting) in a scientific way (the science of imagination) the work presents itself as an investigation into the nature of reflection; of two reciprocal realities which are pivotal about the horizon or "water-line." Although the project deals with "bridge" on a fundamental (experimental) level, it does not become a project in the conventional sense of architectural problem-architectural solution. The work (drawings and model) presents an idea; it does not represent an application.

In a similar way the work of Gary Chandler (Romeo and Juliet Castles) and Michael Marrs (Romeo and Juliet Castles) during the first semester concentrated on the idea of "duality" through their investigations of certain works by de Chirico (Chandler) and Picasso (Marrs). Like Wilson's project, the work presents itself as scientific, having to do with concrete and imaginative inquiry and having nothing to do with application (The Romeo and Juliet Castles). It was only during the second semester when we began to "apply" these objects of inquiry to the "problems" put forth by the Biennale, that we began to sense a feeling of disbelief in the studio. It became increasingly difficult to be self-critical about the work, because the terms or the actuality of the work was no longer in the studio. Nor was it in Venice, as it might have been if we really believed we were responsible for making architecture on one of those various sites, i.e., a commission. We became aware that we were operating with a constructed reality; the non-reality of imagined solutions to imagined problems which is the conventional basis of studio projects.

At the Biennale exhibition itself there were also two distinct approaches to be seen. Some few works presented themselves as "real," that is they were drawings and objects concerned with the question of architecture, and as such, they were not hypothetical. They were not representational of things at other scales and in other places for other reasons. Architecture can be made in a thimble, if one has good eyes.

On the other hand, an unfortunately large portion of the Venice Biennale Exhibition presented the latest and largest, if not the last, opportunity to see the "state of the art" in project-making. The art of creating imagined solutions to imagined problems is taken to a point of development which points to its own oblivion. After viewing 40-odd renditions-solutions to any one of the problems given as the basis for this exhibition, one cannot help but be struck by the futility of it all. It is no longer possible to engage architecture in this way, just as it is no longer possible to engage religion through a stylized Christianity. It simply is no longer believable. These projects accept neither the reality of building nor the reality of objects in themselves as concrete moments of inquiry. They are based on the premise that representation is real enough. It is tragic that this sort of endeavor is what almost entirely constitutes the education of an architect. A student is given a problem which doesn't exist and is asked what he would do if it were his problem, if he *were* an architect. Naturally the student's first question is not "what can I do?" but "what does an architect do (in situations like these)?" and "how does he do it?" Immediately the student is trapped in the no-man's-land of disbelief. His role is not real, the problem is not real, and the work will not be real either. The truth is continually deferred. No attitude toward *making* is developed, only the skills of description.

Deprived of the reality of the object (or drawing) in time, self-criticism is reduced to an appraisal of composition and technique, and the terms of the student's visual appraisal can be nothing but a comparison with what is understood to be "appropriate" in architecture. And for that, of course, we look to the past, to someone else's idea of what looked right.

True science (the science of imagination), on the other hand, is not interested in what can be seen in history, but rather in what cannot be seen. The conventional examination and utilization of history never separates artifacts from their supposed original intentions or set of beliefs (a set of beliefs which are, of course, no longer valid for us today). That is exactly what the scientist in architecture seeks to do. He recognizes that the things we make which acquire visibility "carve a gap" (Daniel Libeskind), that is to say those things we make which aspire to the quality of art are never only the projects of our intentions. They come to visibility more as "strangers" than as executed ideas. Therefore, the scientist takes as his inspiration the gaps of history, those distances between the artifacts which we inherit and their original intentions. He seeks to readjust the trajectory of history. He never sees himself as a "resultant" of history, as do most of the Biennale projects, but rather seeks ways to cause the future through the creative contemplation of those things which were *not* intended.

History should be of real interest only to those who understand they are inventing history; for the others, it is merely a scrapbook. Since the scientist believes the world and its arts are still open to a fundamental reinterpretation, he is not interested in refining goals, nor in ends. "The possibility of the invention (and realization) of a fictional future as opposed to an idealized one" (Peter Eisenman) is what interests the scientist as architect. The denial of goals, and the acceptance of the necessity of fiction (not fantasy, because fiction is hard work) forces one to accept the fact that the beginnings of one's work (in the "gaps") are, to a degree, arbitrary, guided only by personal interests and passions. An inclination to philosophy abhors assignments. By the time questions can be formed into an assignment they are no longer valid. Science is not interested in what is known, but in what is not yet knowable; it is not interested in what has been said, but what is as yet unsayable. The scientist in architecture seeks to build what is not yet buildable. He is interested in "building" fiction, not fictional buildings.

The Venice Biennale Exhibition, with the few exceptions mentioned, seems retrospective in character. It documents the end of the predominant convention of engaging architecture in a hypothetical way, through the self-deception of those types of projects which defer their reality to the anticipated operations of the profession. One cannot make buildings in school. What then are the real possibilities of architectural education? The practice of architecture in schools should be seen as being real in itself, the making of objects which are immediate and complete. The experience of inquiry through making is the important thing, not the habit of deferral.

Since (as a jeweller) Brunelleschi revealed a marvelous genius, his advice about buildings was in great demand. - Mannetti (Biography of Brunelleschi) ■