

Paolo steers a clever course

respond to Matteo Salvini in Italy (and Donald Trump in America and the Brexiteers in Britain.)

Baratta was President of the Biennale from 1998 to 2000 and regained the office in 2008. In his role, over the last decade, Baratta has exhibited the finely attuned responsiveness to shifts in the political and cultural atmosphere developed over a long career spent in close proximity to power. Under his leadership, the Venice Architecture Biennale has tacked between theory and practice, thought and work, criticism and social engagement. The course corrections made from one Biennale to the next are signaled by the selection of the event's director, the person who decides the Biennale's theme and acts as its public face.

Which brings us to 'starchitecture' and 'stararchitects'. The obvious manifestation of the Architecture Biennale's pirouetting around the issue of relevance is its relationship to architecture's star

John Walsh

All Italian institutions are influenced by politics and patronage and the Venice Biennale, which runs the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions, is no exception. The presidency of the Biennale is a prestigious position and the Biennale has often been a contested site in

Italy's politico-cultural landscape. It may become even more so in the wake of the collapse of the established parties of both the right and the left and the rise of assertive populism and chauvinist nationalism.

Biennale President Paolo Baratta is an adroit navigator of the shifting currents in Italian politics, and international art and architecture. A Milanese engineering graduate who became an economist and banker, Baratta held ministerial posts in centre-left Italian governments in the 1990s and then smoothly transitioned into corporate roles. Baratta is, then, a consummate insider; he survived the implosion of the scandal-plagued Socialist Party and a decade of Berlusconi's crony politics and has benefited from the corporatisation of Italian state infrastructure assets. He is the sort of adroit and successful technocrat anathematised by the resentful constituencies who



system. On the one hand, the Biennale benefits from the profile of a celebrated director, and from the professional heft such a figure brings to his – or, more occasionally, her – role. On the other hand, celebrity has its downside. Since the onset of the GFC, which coincided with the start of Baratta's second term as Biennale president, 'starchitecture' has been perceived to be part of the problem. 'Stararchitects' are associated with extravagant projects commissioned by autocratic Middle Eastern or Asian governments and, in Western democracies, by very wealthy individuals or law-unto-themselves multinational corporations. The uncomfortable truth revealed by these liaisons is that members of a profession that tends to be liberal in its social and political views and that habitually advocates for the common good is quite prepared to serve the global elite. Unless you



Cover **Early morning on the Grand Canal, Venice**, looking towards the dome of the basilica of Santa Maria della Salute, with the Giardini in the distance. Photograph: David St George.

Left **Somewhere Other'**, an exhibition by Australian practice John Wardle Architects staged in the Corderie building in the Arsenale as part of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. Photograph: La Biennale di Venezia.

Far Right **Swiss Pavilion, Giardini, 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale**. Photograph: La Biennale di Venezia.

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against gender discrimination in architecture staged during the Biennale Vernissage in May 2018 by a 'flash mob' including such prominent female architects as Benedetta Tagliabue, Odile Decq, Farshid Moussavi and Jeanne Gang.

The selection of Farrell and McNamara, partners in the Dublin-based practice Grafton Architects, was politic in another sense as well. In selecting a theme for the 2018 Biennale and issuing invitations to contributors to their own curated exhibitions in the Arsenale and the Giardini Central Pavilion, Farrell and McNamara set themselves against the mean-spirited and chauvinistic political tenor of our times, and also, to some extent, against the neo-liberal economic order that has provoked populist discontent in many Western countries.

Freespace is the title Farrell and McNamara gave to the 2018 Biennale, a seeming riposte to the regnant belief that everything has a price, and everyone is first and foremost not a citizen but a consumer. So far, so promising, but a title that is convincing enough at first hearing becomes more equivocal under mild interrogation. This is not unprecedented: titular opacity is something of an Architecture Biennale tradition. (The bar for meaninglessness may have been set by Kazuyo Sejima's *People Meet in Architecture*.) Partly this may be explained by the awareness that a Biennale name can only indicate direction, not destination. It's a rubric that must somehow stretch across the inevitably heterogenous exhibitions staged in the Biennale's national pavilions.

That said, there were issues that flowed from concept to content with *Freespace*. What does the expression mean? Not to be too pedantic about it, but ambiguity is inevitable when one word that can be read as adjective, adverb or verb is elided with another word that is itself inherently elastic and imprecise. Is 'freespace' unowned space or publicly owned space? Unused space or leftover space? Accessible space or un surveilled space? Or is 'freespace' an injunction, a call to liberate space from private possession? The various semantic permutations of 'free' and 'space' were, of course, intentional and at one with the with the tolerant tone of the 2018 Biennale.

What Farrell and McNamara, who are good people as well as fine architects, were promoting in – and beyond – the 2018 Biennale was architecture that exhibited "a generosity of spirit and a sense of humanity". What they produced was a rather bloodless Biennale that demonstrated the strength of their humane values, but also the limitations of a liberal critique of the context in which architecture is produced. International architecture's humanist wing was well represented in *Freespace*; there were projects by Renzo Piano and Rafael Moneo, Alison Brooks, Niall McLaughlin and Alejandro Aravena, and numerous Irish and Iberian architects. In raising the issues of 'freespace', albeit inconclusively, the 2018 Biennale made a case for decency. The question is whether tolerance, reasonableness and generosity are

sufficient counters to the bullying, mendacity and willful disregard for the common weal that, around the world, have been promoted from personal vices to political virtues.

The 2018 Architecture Biennale may have lacked righteous anger or urgency but, as always, there were numerous exhibitions that provoked reflection. Once again, the massive Corderie building in the Arsenale overwhelmed many of the exhibitions staged within it. Tentativeness is ruthlessly exposed in the 300-metre long masonry structure, a 16th century survivor of Venice's shipbuilding heyday. One of the exhibitions that best stood up to its surrounds was a large-scale fragment of Flores & Prat's Sala Beckett theatre in Barcelona. Mario Botta's well-produced entry was a circular cabinet of curiosities featuring images of buildings and their inevitable inhabitants – big bugs. Rafael Moneo's exhibition focused – and why not? – on his wonderful Murcia Town Hall, accompanied by some text, that in terms of the Venice Architecture Biennale, was positively pellucid: "Free space appears when architecture recedes, in spite of its physical presence. There are moments when we are able to enjoy a sense of pleasure and personal freedom unfettered by architecture."

In the national pavilion-land of the Giardini, the Russians – always interesting – mounted an exhibition about those defining Russian spaces: train stations, and the vast steppe traversed by the railway tracks. The Swiss had fun with – and won the Golden Lion for – an exhibition that played around with the scale of domestic interiors, and the Greeks, in the School of Athens, drew upon the formative 'free space' of classical antiquity, the public arena for philosophic discourse. The Israelis examined the fraught subject of shared space – that is, shared, and contested, by different confessional communities – in Jerusalem



have a hide as thick as Patrick Schumacher, the libertarian controversialist now heading Zaha Hadid Architects, or Lord Foster, the UK's most famous architect, you're going to be aware that this contradiction is awkwardly close to hypocrisy.

The last three iterations of the Venice Architecture Biennale illustrate all these things: the sensitivity of the Biennale organisation and its president to the current cultural climate; the oscillations between high concept and practical engagement; the treatment of 'starchitecture'. In 2014, the director of the Biennale was Rem Koolhaas, one of architecture's out-and-out stars, and perhaps the profession's most self-consciously intellectual practitioner. Koolhaas called 'his' Biennale *Fundamentals*; rather ironically, the 'starchitect' director, in response to criticism within and without the profession of architecture's grandiosity and wastefulness, made a stand not just against 'starchitects', but also against architects. His own commissioned exhibition focused not on buildings, but on their constituent parts: floor, wall, roof, window, corridor, etc. As for the exhibitions mounted in the 65 national pavilions, curators were invited to address, under the theme of 'Absorbing Modernity', the story of their country's architecture in the century since 1914.

In retrospect, Koolhaas's Biennale looks like a giant exercise in mansplaining. Not for nothing, as *The Architectural Review* recently pointed out, was Koolhaas a journalist before he was an architect. After Koolhaas's back-to-basics clearing of the decks,

what next? You could practically hear the clicking of the Biennale's zeitgeistometer; the time was right for action, not diagnosis, and the man to provide it was Alejandro Aravena, a Chilean architect whose practice includes innovative (and well-publicised) community housing projects. The choice of Aravena as director of the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale was timely; he became even more a man of the moment when, not long before the opening of 'his' Biennale, to which he gave the agit-prop title *Reporting from the Front*, he received international architecture's most prestigious award, the Pritzker Prize.

Aravena is a proponent, if not always a practitioner of, architecture from below. In appointing him as director, and thereby including many like-minded practitioners in the 2016 Biennale, Baratta preempted criticism of the event's remoteness from real issues. So, again, what next? One Architecture Biennale characteristic that was becoming an issue, especially after the testosterone rush of the 2014 and 2016 Exhibitions, was the predictable gender of the director. Of the 15 Architecture Biennales staged since 1980, only one, that staged in 2010, had a female director (the Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima). This was becoming embarrassing, and Baratta, in another move that soon seemed prescient, selected as directors of the 2018 Architecture Biennale Yvonne Farrell and Shelly McNamara. As the #MeToo movement gained momentum Baratta had cause to congratulate himself for this decision on many occasions, not least of them during the protest

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and the West Bank. (Some nations don't have to go searching for issues to address). Australia's exhibition presented an inverted take on indoor-outdoor flow: the interior of the new Denton Corker Marshall pavilion was inhabited by plants while images of houses played on the walls. To achieve this effect 10,000 native seedlings had been transported from Australia to the Ligurian resort town of San Remo, from where, once grown, they were taken to Venice. It was a lot of palaver, and you did wonder, just a bit, whether it was all worth it.

The most equivocal national exhibition was the British pavilion curated by Caruso St John. The exhibition, called *Island*, was inspired, reportedly, by a passage from *The Tempest*: "Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises; Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not." Did *Islands* give delight, or did the exhibition, to cite another of Shakespeare's works, signify nothing? Caruso St John didn't install anything in the UK's permanent Giardini pavilion. Instead, they constructed a temporary viewing platform on top of it. That was it, apart from an urn from which tea was served in the afternoon. Make it of it what you will, it was suggested to visitors; Britain's Biennale presence could be about "climate change, abandonment, colonialism, Brexit, isolation, reconstruction (or) sanctuary." It was also literally 'free space' (once you'd paid 25 euro to get into the Giardini, that is), and from it you could certainly get good views of the gardens and the lagoon.

But really? You could understand why an exhibition that appealed to some as a droll example of English wit was also viewed with exasperation as a lazily indulgent piece of English smart-arsery. Visitors from places not in the club of countries with permanent pavilions in Venice's Giardini could be excused for viewing the UK exhibition as a particularly gratuitous exercise. Perhaps a Brexit reading was the most logical interpretation of the exhibition: Europe – it's just not worth the effort.

So, it's farewell to the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. At the end of the year, Paolo Baratta released the name of the director of the 2020 Biennale. It's to be Hashim Sarkis, a Lebanese architect who is dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and principal of his own practice, which has offices in Boston and Beirut. This pivot to academia and to the Arab world was announced with Signor Baratta's customary emollence: "With Hashim Sarkis, La Biennale has provided itself with a Curator who is particularly aware of the topics and criticalities which the various contrasting realities of today's society pose for our living space". Hmm, that should about cover everything; the Venice Architecture Biennale 2020 – I'm looking forward to it already. ●



REVIEW

VATICAN CHAPELS

John Walsh

The most anticipated of the exhibitions at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale was probably that mounted by the Holy See. It was the first time the Vatican had staged a national exhibition at the Architecture Biennale and the occasion had all sorts of resonances, not least, for the historically minded, the long and complex relationship between Rome and a city that always did Catholicism its own way. As any visitor to Venice will quickly appreciate, the citizens of the Serene Republic loved churches, but they regarded them as *their* churches, not Rome's. In Venice's centuries as a great European power, uppity clerics in the city were quickly reminded of where their primary loyalties lay (and it wasn't to some Borgia pope).

Now that neither Venice nor the Vatican are significant temporal powers, the two entities can relax in each other's company and enjoy their shared fondness for tradition and ceremony,

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and the pleasures of aesthetic patronage. When you think about it, it's a wonder the Vatican took so long to participate in the Venice Architecture Biennale. (The Holy See staged exhibitions in the Venice Art Biennale in 2013 and 2015).

The impulse to enter a Vatican exhibition at the 2018 Architecture Biennale seems to have come from the exhibition's commissioner, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture. Ravasi, who was appointed to his position as the Catholic Church's cultural commissar in 2007, and who has therefore survived the transition from conservative Pope Benedict to more liberal Pope Francis, seems to enjoy his role, with its echoes of the great – if not always holy – Renaissance

tradition of Cardinal-patrons of the arts and architecture. He puts himself about – in early 2018 he joined Anna Wintour and Donatella Versace at the opening of the New York Met's exhibition *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, and his tweeting activity has included valedictory remarks upon the deaths of Lou Reed and David Bowie.

On the Vatican's Venice exhibition Ravasi worked with curators Francesco Dal Co, an eminent Venetian architecture critic and historian, and Micol Forti, director of the Vatican Museum's contemporary art collection. The topic selected for exhibition was, logically enough, a particular type of ecclesiastical architecture: the chapel. *Vatican Chapels*

was expressly inspired by the famous Woodland Chapel (Stockholm, 1920), designed by Gunnar Asplund. Dal Co and Forti commissioned architects to design 11 temporary structures for placement in a wooded area, now owned by the private Cini Foundation, on San Giorgio Maggiore, the island that's the site of Palladio's great Benedictine church of the same name.

No pressure then. A contemporary chapel built for a secular event in a museum city saturated in Catholic history is an interesting commission. Do you have to be religious to design a building with a spiritual purpose? Evidently not. Francesco Dal Co has admitted he is not a believer, and he never asked any of the chapels' chosen architects if they were, either. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Dal Co said Cardinal Ravasi never interfered with the selection of architects, or the design of their chapels. The only thing he asked was, "But are there any crosses?"

Well, there are, in one form or another, in nearly all of the chapels. Dal Co cast his curatorial net widely, although many of the contributors came

from Catholic cultures; he got chapels from Andrew Berman (US), Francesco Cellini (Italy), Javier Corvalán (Paraguay), Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats (Spain), Norman Foster (UK), Teronobu Fujimori (Japan), Sean Godsell (Australia), Carla Juaçaba (Brazil), Smiljan Radic (Chile), and Eduardo Souto de Moura (Portugal). Another building, described as a 'pavilion' but also chapel-like, was a kind of information centre that exhibited Asplund's drawings for Woodland Cemetery; the building, one of the cutest in the exhibition, was designed by Venetian architects Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel.

What was good? The catholic array of chapels was sufficiently diverse to satisfy a wide range of tastes, but I liked Teronobu Fujimori's entry which was, unusually, a fully enclosed building that was the most chapel-like of the buildings on display. Carla Juaçaba's chapel, which set up a simple relationship between a cross to look at and a bench to sit on, was the most essentialist, and perhaps the cleverest, design in the garden. Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats designed a 'morning

Buildings from *Vatican Chapels*, the Holy See's exhibition at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale:

Left Chapel by Carla Juaçaba.

Above Chapel by Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats.

Right Asplund Pavilion by Francesco Magnani and Traudy Pelzel.

Photographs: La Biennale di Venezia.



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Rāpaki Marae

Jade Kake

We shelter under the trees, shuffling our feet, waiting to be called on to the marae. We gossip amongst ourselves, pointing in awe at the skylights atop the whare tīpuna. The near impossible sense of lightness, of newness. The weather is clear. The sun blazes down overhead. The sea sparkles. Tino pai tou rā – it is a good day.

The whare tīpuna faces east, towards the rising sun. A kuia appears within the doorway. She stands, her back ramrod straight, eyes forward. She appraises the crowd serenely. When her mouth open, the world falls out. We move forward, a rising tide, in response to the call of the kaikaranga. I feel the same way I always do, this simultaneous sense of an almost unbearable lightness and weight. I straighten my back and walk slowly and steadily forward. We pause on the ātea. I listen to the response of our kaikaranga, the exchange back and forth, their words twisting and binding together. Mostly, I listen to the sound of my own breathing, and my beating heart.

We start moving again, and before I realise it the thread is broken. We take our shoes off at the door, and shuffle inside. Some kawa remains the same. I shuffle in behind a row of other women and stand in front of my chair. I wait for the hau kāinga to sit before I do the same. As I sit on my comfortable chair in the second row of the manuhiri side, I listen as the whai kōrero speak in te mīta o Ngāi Tahu. In my own limited way, I try to puzzle out the things that are different from home, and those that are the same. I hear about the rangatira Te Rakiwhakaputa, and how he laid down his rāpaki to claim the whenua for his people. I learn that the hapū and whare tīpuna are named for his son, Wheke. I think about my tūpuna Hautakowera, renowned for wearing a dog-skin cloak, and from whom our hapū gets its name.

As I think about this, I look around the interior of the whare. I try to do this discretely. The carvings are the colour of sand. I don't know what the timber is, but it reminds me of beechwood. Or maybe it's the same as always, and I'm just not used to seeing it so naked. The kaikōrero describes some of the stories and tūpuna and stories depicted in the whare, and I wonder silently who the tohunga whakairo responsible for bringing these stories to life are. Later I learn that the carvers involved were Riki Manuel, an uri of Ngāti Porou, and Fayne Robinson from Ngāi



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chapel', conceived as 'an excavation in a wall', an installation that had a ruin's calm. Many people liked Eduardo Souto de Moura's design, a roofless chapel enclosed by chunky marble walls. If chapels are meant to encourage morbid speculation, then this one fitted the bill, but it didn't really seem to get into the spirit of a structure in the woods. Sean Godsell's chapel did, although one visitor remarked that it reminded her of a barbie pit in an Aussie municipal park.

The self-consciousness of the chapels was probably unavoidable in an age when belief and religious observance are not part and parcel of daily life. *Vatican Chapels* was a votive offering to architecture, not the Almighty, and if it did prompt spiritual sentiments, they were of the pantheistic variety – the best thing about the exhibition was its sylvan setting. On an autumn afternoon, with the sunlight and water's glare filtered by trees, the grounds of the Cini Foundation had the peace of a (monkless) monastic garden. The private garden the chapels occupied is spacious, so the exhibition never felt crowded. The site's aspect helped, too. It faces south into the lagoon, and nature, not north across to San Marco, and civilisation. It is yet to be decided, but the chapels might remain on their exhibition site. Let's hope so: in contemporary Venice, this is as close as you can get to the *vita contemplativa*. ♦

COMMENT

BEING IN VENICE

David Sheppard

Having been a member of the NZIA Council when it decided to participate in the event, I was curious to visit the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014 to see New Zealand's inaugural exhibition. This was my first visit to the Biennale, and I was bowled over by the

host city, the venues, the sheer size of the event and the range of interesting and compelling work presented by the 65 participating nations. Beguiled by the Biennale, I returned, with my architect son in 2016 and again in 2018. Each occasion offered a fantastic immersion in contemporary architectural thought and debate.

Lately, I have been reflecting on the Biennale, and on New Zealand's contribution to it, thus far. I'll try to summarise my thoughts. First, while the Biennale's designated director sets a theme for participants to address, there seems to be no directive that they do so. The theme may be decided quite late; to meet deadlines, many curatorial teams must start preparing their exhibitions prior to its announcement. At the three Venice Biennales I've attended the range of work extended well beyond the director's chosen theme. That said, those who worked to the theme generally responded on point and in interesting ways. Of the last three Biennales, I think the 2016 iteration directed by Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena, with its focus on social housing and aspects of climate change, was the most inspiring, and valuable. The theme proposed in 2018 by the Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, on the quality of space, also produced some excellent responses, but Rem Koolhaas' focus in 2014, on building components, was more nebulous.

Perhaps the most successful exhibits over the three most recent Biennales are those that addressed pressing current issues. At the top of the list would be those dealing with social housing, changes in lifestyle and adaptations to climate change. The most stimulating exhibits were certainly those that were deeply immersed in these matters. Among the nations that have stood out consistently are Spain, Mexico, Portugal, the Scandinavian countries,

Italy, Brazil, China and Japan. In 2018, the Spanish pavilion, in particular, was a veritable cornucopia of fresh ideas and projects.

In contrast, the offerings of several 'developed' countries were disappointing. These exhibitions included those of the U.S., UK, France, Australia and several East European countries. Except perhaps for the UK, these countries have consistently failed to fire at recent Venice Architecture Biennales. Their venues may be excellent and well placed to visit, but I think their content and response to the Biennale theme have been noticeably missing.

The UK pavilion, not an easy building to bring alive, had been completely stripped out for the purpose of 'celebrating space and opportunity'. But it hardly stimulated thought or discussion, and was particularly dull in comparison to the spirited



and thought-provoking exhibits of Spain and Mexico, and with Germany's 'unbuild' celebrating the downfall of the Berlin Wall and an elaborate study by the Americans of designs for President Trump's wall along the United States southern border. (God forbid!)

While it would have been satisfying to see New Zealand at the Biennale for a third time, and becoming a regular contributor, the decision to not attend in 2018 was necessary. I think it gives the Institute of Architecture the opportunity, free of pressure, to investigate how it might participate again, sometime. It is evident to me that it is not only New

Zealand that is up against the costs of being in Venice; in 2018, the exhibitions of some countries seemed significantly more modest than in previous Biennales, if they were there at all. Perhaps some of the nations that were there might have been better to take a break, rather than mount a thin presentation hampered by a lack of funding.

Certainly those countries with a strong and stimulating presence were those supported by their governments. Finland, for example, similar in size to us, is there, Biennale after Biennale, and with its own pavilion by Alvar Aalto in the heart of the Giardini. Finland's subject theme in 2018 was public libraries, which the country evidently supports strongly.

New Zealand has an interesting and proud history of social housing and community support and development. Our two ventures at the Venice

Biennale to date have been excellent displays of high quality architectural design. Perhaps our next exhibition might be more focussed on social concerns. And perhaps the Government might be convinced to support such an exhibition, and contribute to the costs of New Zealand's representation at the world's key architectural showcase. Let's investigate a return to the Venice Architecture Biennale, before we forget the lessons of our recent participation. ♦

For more information about the Venice Architecture Biennale see labiennale.org.

Left In the Nordic pavilion, 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale. Photograph: La Biennale di Venezia.

Above Jade Kake at her marae, Pehiāweri, near Whangarei. Photograph courtesy of the author.

Tahu, and with whakapapa links to Rāpaki. I think about our bare wharehui at home, Te Reo o Te Iwi – the voices of the people who courageously rallied together to protect our marae from sale in the 1980s – and the wānanga we have been holding more recently to decide which stories to tell through the carvings that will soon adorn our whare.

In between the poupou, the tukutuku panels are in vibrant pastel colours; greens, purples, yellows and blues. I've never seen anything like it. It's so beautiful I feel overwhelmed. Tears spring up. I quickly brush them aside. I look up at the ceiling. The kōwhaiwhai paintings on the heke depict local kaitiaki, local manu. I try to identify the birds and plants. Some I recognise, some I don't. Again, I wonder who the artists are. Later I find out Whaea Reihana Parata – from Rāpaki, from here – is the weaver responsible for overseeing the tukutuku panels. The painter remains unknown to me.

Shafts of light fall down from the skylight. It is the most beautiful marae I have ever been to.

When the kōreo has concluded, we harirū with the hau kāinga. We exchange hongī, kihi, warm hands, gentle chitchat. I look each person in the eyes directly, pause for a moment, and move on. I try not to hold up the line. At the conclusion of the harirū I give myself permission to loiter, chatting and laughing with other women. Before long, we receive the call for hākari. Haere mai ki te kai e te manuhiri e.

As we transition between the whare tīpuna and the wharekai, we enter an interstitial space. There are comfortable chairs, and it's a place where I imagine during hui kaumātua can retreat and be comfortable. I think of our cold, south-facing whare at home, our open walkway to the whareiti and the wharekai. I think of our kaumātua, who must feel the cold deep in their bones at winter time, even in the 'winterless North.'

As we move into the wharekai, the space is almost unbearably beautiful, and again, I want to cry. I think about our wharekai at home, Te Reo o te Ora, and the pool of water gathering underneath it, hindered by poorly laid drainage systems and decades of heavy use since then. Here at Rāpaki, high, windows open up to the north, filling the space with light. The kitchen is modern, well-equipped. The island style bench reminds me of something seen only in glossy magazines, showcasing the palatial homes of the wealthy. I have never been to a marae like this one. The adjacent dining room opens onto a bright, spacious timber deck. I eat my lunch and look out over the harbour. I can smell the salt in the air, and the breeze is gentle and caressing.

After my lunch I walk back through the kitchen, through the lobby, turning left and out the door to the northern side of the complex. I walk along a covered walkway that leads to the ablutions, and once again am impressed by the planning. The separation of functions feels natural, comfortable. Tika. Āe, yes, that is correct. The wharepaku is a semi-open pavilion, connected but with a material separation,

clad in a rich and handsome timber, the darker tone perhaps differentiating between which is tapū, and that which is noa. Or perhaps the reasons are more pragmatic in nature. As I wash my hands in the basin, I can't help noticing the quality of the fixtures. I think about our ablutions block at home, in desperate need of renovation.

I walk outside, and in the quiet of my own company for the first time I really notice the main outdoor area. It doesn't form part of the ātea – that's separate – rather it is a communal space between the carpark and the buildings. The landscaping is careful, considered. It engages design elements and strategies more often seen in public squares and plazas. The area is paved, terraced, with areas articulated for garden beds. Trees sit neatly in laser-cut metal tree boxes, the patterning and rich redness highlighting and complementing exterior elements of the complex. Timber inland concrete benches provide spaces to pause. From this vantage point, the buildings in the complex open towards the sun, like sunflowers. Even the wharenuī, closed by design, opens up through the use of a spectacular skylight along the ridge. I think about our marae at home, our less formal landscaping, and our more recent, humble improvements to make our spaces more accessible with new concrete pathways, decks and railings.

As I stand at Rāpaki, marvelling at this beautiful and loved new complex, I feel a sense of joy and pride, envy and sadness. It isn't just the quality of the materials and finishes. It's the less tangible elements, the spaces that are purpose built for us, for our tikanga and our kawa. The carvings and artworks depicting our narratives, our heritage, our literal and direct ancestors. The sense of pride and rangatiratanga embodied by these buildings that provide a living link to the past and allow us to imagine our future. Buildings designed to uplift the mana of our own people, and to enable us to manaaki our manuhiri.

When I set foot on my marae once again, I think about all the things that I've seen and learnt. The sun is shining. A breeze runs over the harakeke and through the boughs of the oak trees. I hear the laughter of my whānau carry on the wind, coming from the wharekai, I think. I am so grateful for this place. My tūrangawaewae, a place of peace. I think about my great-great-grandfather in the urupā. The whare karakia that was 100 years old the year that I was born, and the oak trees that were planted around the same time. I am grateful for all that we have, and sad for all that we don't. I dare myself to imagine that we too could have what they have at Rāpaki. That what has been achieved there, is also possible here. Perhaps, I tell myself, I will be the one to take our marae into its next phase, like a midwife ushering in new life. ●

This essay was the winning entry in the 2018 Warren Trust Awards for Architectural Writing.

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REVIEW

EX LIBRIS
Objectspace, Auckland,
24 November 2018 –
3 February 2019

John Walsh

Auckland not-for-profit gallery Objectspace ended its programme for 2018 with a small photographic exhibition, accompanied by an excellent publication*, about three spaces that have no future, the libraries in the University of Auckland's Schools of Architecture and Planning, Fine Arts and Music. In a move that prompted protests on campus, media coverage and some critical comment, the university, under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Stuart McCutcheon, last year decided to close the specialist libraries. It's impossible to say what the long-term effects of this decision will be, but university bosses are probably safe to assume that, given the turnover of student cohorts and the limited attention span of the media, the controversy will soon fade, even if memories of the démarche, and the parts played in it by various university figures, will endure for rather longer.

The die was cast for the libraries by the time Auckland architectural photographer Sam Hartnett's exhibition *Ex Libris* opened at Objectspace on 24 November, and so the show, and its catalogue featuring 15 essays (by librarians and University of Auckland architecture, art and music students and former students), served as a valediction. It was a poignant goodbye; the exhibition's dozen photographs were more likely to evoke pathos than anger. There was nothing glamorous about Hartnett's shots. In its exhibition description Objectspace noted that the photographer was "captivated by the human patina" of the three libraries. In Hartnett's photographs the libraries all looked much the same: well-worn, a bit scruffy and down-at-heel, even neglected. As Objectspace put it: "[Hartnett] finds clefts dug in the doors of the Architecture Library by passing fingernails; a patch of carpet reputedly rubbed out by the heels of a long-serving librarian; graffiti and crumbs in a carrel."

As a condition report, *Ex Libris* was pretty damning. If you'd prefer an animal analogue, the

Architecture, Fine Arts and Music libraries looked like old dogs for whom swift dispatch would be a merciful kindness. In the more brutal context of corporate managerialism, the libraries presented themselves as easy targets for a neo-liberal kicking. The question posed by Hartnett's photographs was not 'why were libraries closed?', but 'how did they get this way?' Their material state, as captured in the photos – they looked like rooms in houses awaiting estate sale – indicated years of making do and steady decline. The libraries, evidently, were nowhere near the top of the university's priorities. Each year, they got shabbier and as they did so, closure presumably became more tempting to contemplate.

Looking at the broader picture, the alternative to managed decline or termination could have been the development of a strategy for modern, fit-for-purpose creative arts libraries, or as former NZIA President Christina van Bohemen suggested, during the semi-public debate that preceded the libraries' closure, a single library that served the university's creative

arts disciplines. Such an exercise might have been an opportunity to develop a new library model – or adapt existing international precedents – that served the needs and abetted the performance of its various academic constituencies and engaged with wider professional and public audiences. There was, maybe, a window to consider doing something innovative, but that window remained firmly shut.

The course of the library closure saga was as predictable as it was regrettable. The university was defensive in its posture and unforthcoming about its intentions (it said HR considerations precluded public engagement), and in the media opponents of the impending closures at times indulged in that plaintive hyper-ventilation to which the liberal bourgeoisie is embarrassingly prone. (The urge to protect libraries, which throughout history have often been threatened by barbarians at the gate, is an understandable atavism.) Student protests on campus, though, were energetic and imaginative and the articulate passion of some of their spokespeople will, you would think, enliven future political debates in this country.



Left Photograph of the University of Auckland School of Architecture Library by Sam Hartnett, from the Objectspace exhibition *Ex Libris*.

Illustration by Icao Tiseli from *Mapping the Feke*, her highly commended entry in the 2018 NZIA Resene Student Design Awards.



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Rightly or wrongly, the protesting creative arts students saw the closure of 'their' libraries as an expression of the university's attitude to the humanities. Courses in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) are promoted heavily in the contemporary academy as the route to personal and societal prosperity. The arts disciplines – including 'creative' arts such as architecture – are starting to see themselves as poor cousins, increasingly vulnerable to cost-cutting reviews.

As the closure of the three specialist libraries shows, the advocates of the humanities find it hard to counter the 'rationalising' impulse of executives such as the University of Auckland's vice-chancellor. That is a challenge, for many people, in the modern economy, but you cannot afford to collude in your own marginalisation. The defenders of the libraries in *Ex Libris* regarded them fondly, but for years the libraries seemed to operate as cosy fiefdoms that preferred to be left to their slow decay, quiet backwaters from where little was heard, until it was all too late. That's not to say the people who ran them weren't conscientious or able, but in the end, the libraries had not made themselves indispensable. It wasn't just that they couldn't communicate their value to the university management; they didn't make the cost of their dissolution too high a price for the university to pay. And that's why the University of Auckland's Architecture, Fine Arts and Music Libraries are now ex-libraries. ♦

**Ex Libris: Regarding Three Libraries, Anna Miles and Lucy Treep (Eds), Objectspace, 2018. Available from Objectspace.*



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ANTHONY HOETE New Zealand Architect in London

with John Walsh

JW [Anthony, why did you get into architecture?](#)

AH I got into architecture by accident. Being Māori with a rural background, I guess I had an implicit interest in structures – social, political, economic, ecological. I initially went to Auckland University to study Law but then, attracted by other spatial structures, switched to architecture. Incidentally, my father has still built more structures on Motiti Island than I have abroad.

JW [What's your practice called, and why?](#)

AH WHAT_architecture. By simply asking 'what?' everything becomes discourse. Our office logo is an interrobang: both 'what!' and 'what?'. If process is the interrogative, then ought not the product be an exclamation!?

JW [What sort of work do you do?](#)

AH We operate in the fields of housing, education and culture. Architecture is more than building, however – it is primarily a form of information to be curated and played with.

JW [How do you get jobs/clients?](#)

AH By any means necessary. Good architecture requires a good client. I usually do a feasibility assessment quite early on. What is the ability of the project

to pay what fees? This requires some money (but not necessarily unlimited), a lot of aspiration and excellent communications to yield a great outcome. For example, we had this with the Villameter project in Ponsonby, a house we designed from London.

JW [What's the structure of your practice?](#)

AH Structured like a football team. Flat line, with administration in defence, design in attack and me trying to manage things from the midfield. I am not joking: our practice-based research was called Game of Architecture and, amongst things, looked at the value football offers architecture. Perhaps that has resulted from me working and being registered in the Netherlands. Ben Van Berkel [UN Studio], for example, loves football, and in the 1970s Rinus Michels pioneered the architecture of 'total football' with his famous Dutch national team (Cruyff, Neeskens, Rep, Krol, etcetera).

JW [What part of London is your office in? What's the neighbourhood like?](#)

AH I live and work in London Fields, an area of east London with as many mosques as churches. Two-thirds of the local population belongs to a minority ethnic group, that is, they're not white British. The area is changing with regeneration manifest as gentrification – an emergent chai-latté urbanism!

JW [What's good about life in London?](#)

AH Diversity of ethnography. Inclusivity of gender. British humour. The Premiership.

JW [What London buildings – new or old – do you like?](#)

AH Historically, I have always loved The Fake Club, in Camden Town. The perversity of its 'Tudorbethan' vernacular intersected by modern

railway infrastructure mocks architecture. More contemporaneously, I like the Manhattan Loft Gardens in Stratford, East London. [Architect: Skidmore Owings & Merrill.] With its jenga block section and its restrained façadeism I am reminded of my favourite architect, the awesome Willem Jan Neutelings. Architects, of course, are not supposed to declare their admiration of their contemporaries, lest we dilute our own genius.



JW [How do you see your career progressing?](#)

AH Ideally by becoming more the developer-architect. Philip Johnson once quipped that to make great architecture either marry wealthy or become a developer.

JW [I have to ask about Brexit. Thoughts?](#)

AH New Zealand had its Brexit in 1973 when the UK abandoned its Commonwealth partners for the EU. New Zealand then went onto form new trade relations, with Asia for example, but this won't happen to the UK which will fall into increasing isolationism. It is remarkable that a nation with a history of empire has forgotten that the European project was first and foremost a social project. Football knows this, as UEFA (1954) preceded the EU (1957). ♦

Above Manhattan Loft Gardens, London. Photograph: Manhattan Loft Corporation.

EDITORIAL

JOHN WALSH

Welcome to *Tāpoto – The Brief*, a new publication of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. *Tāpoto* will be published three times a year, and will appear, bound but detachable, as an insert in *Architecture NZ*; it will also have a life as a standalone publication.

About its name: well, architects are familiar with the term ‘brief’ – nothing they do happens without one – and our new title is a slim volume. *Tāpoto – The Brief* is a literalism, in two languages. One meaning of ‘tā’ is to print or publish, and one meaning of ‘poto’ is short; we may as well be upfront about the brevity of our publication. But we have a dozen pages, and we have them all to ourselves.

The Institute thanks AGM and its parent company BCI New Zealand for printing and distributing our magazine. *Tāpoto* is in *Architecture NZ*, but not of it: our publication is produced by us, and we – the New Zealand Institute of Architects, that is – are responsible for the content and design of the title.

For the Institute, *Tāpoto* is an opportunity to publish some of the material generated by and through our programmes and activities. In this issue, for example, there’s a discussion of the Venice Architecture Biennale, such a big commitment for the Institute in 2014 and 2016, and the winning essay from the 2018 iteration of the annual writing competition we run with the support of the Warren Trust.

But the content of *Tāpoto* will not be confined to the Institute’s affairs. We want to appeal to those outside the profession as well as those within it. And so, we’ll cover a wide range of architectural matters for readers who believe, or maybe would like to think, that architecture matters. ♦

Correspondence is welcome; submissions will be considered.
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

TIM MELVILLE

The New Zealand Institute of Architects exists to represent the interests of its members, aid them in their practice and advocate for the cause of architecture in New Zealand. As the profession has grown, the economy expanded and building become more complex, the activities of the Institute have increased, sometimes, it seems, exponentially.

Membership of the Institute, which reflects the demography of the profession, stretching from students and graduates to registered architects and senior practitioners, now stands at around 4,500, and comprises nearly 700 practices.

The Institute produces material its members use every day. It organises a programme promoting professional development and another assisting graduates prepare for registration. A peer-reviewed awards programme across the Institute’s eight branches sets the benchmark for architecture in New Zealand, and annual Student Design Awards acknowledge the talent of the next generation of the country’s architects.

The Institute puts a lot of effort into engaging with the government, often in concert with industry partner organisations. Our advocacy, which is always a focus of the Institute, has particular urgency in the second year of a government – only one year to the next election! – committed to measurable progress in areas such as housing, education and infrastructure development.

Consistent with the Institute’s determination to communicate the value of good design and promote public understanding of architectural issues, it runs a nationwide Festival of Architecture, and puts out a range of architectural publications. In another time – and the Institute has been around since 1905 – such activity might have

been regarded as our Learned Society responsibility.

Besides our usual activities and programmes, we’re currently focusing on several initiatives. Externally, we’re promoting the role of design in Government programmes such as Kiwibuild, and greater and more consistent protection of important heritage buildings. For ourselves, we’re building on the kawenata or agreement between the Institute and Ngā Aho, the organisation of Māori design professionals, and pursuing the Diversity Agenda which aims to increase female participation and progress in the architecture profession.

So, we’re doing a lot, within our means and with the indispensable voluntary assistance of our members. This publication, *Tāpoto*, will indicate the range of our interests and activities – in brief. ♦

CONTRIBUTORS

Anthony Hoete is a director of London-based WHAT architecture Ltd and Game of Architecture Ltd. His work was included in *Future Islands*, New Zealand’s national exhibition at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale. **Jade Kake** (Ngāpuhi, Te Arawa, Whakatōhea) is a Whangārei-based architectural designer, writer and housing advocate. Her prize-winning essay in the 2018 Warren Trust Awards for Architectural Writing is included in *10 Stories: Writing about Architecture, Vol. 4* (New Zealand Institute of Architects, 2019).

Tim Melville is President of the New Zealand Institute of Architects, and an Auckland-based principal of Warren and Mahoney Architects. Formerly, he was a founding co-partner in the Auckland practice RTA Studio. **Icao Tiseli** is a student at the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning; her entry into the 2018 NZIA Resene Student Design Awards was one of two highly recommended projects in the competition, which is contested by final year students from New Zealand’s three Schools of Architecture. **David Sheppard** is a director of Sheppard & Rout Architects, the Christchurch practice he formed with the late Jonty Rout in 1982, and a former President of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. **John Walsh** is the Communications Director of the New Zealand Institute of Architects; his latest book is *Auckland Architecture: A Walking Guide* (Massey University Press, 2019).

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