

La Biennale di Venezia

17th International Architecture Exhibition



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How will we live together?

Theme of the Biennale Architettura 2020

We need a new spatial contract. In the context of widening political divides and growing economic inequalities, we call on architects to imagine spaces in which we can generously live *together*:

- *together* as human beings who, despite our increasing individuality, yearn to connect with one another and with other species across digital and real space;
- *together* as new households looking for more diverse and dignified spaces for inhabitation;
- *together* as emerging communities that demand equity, inclusion, and spatial identity;
- *together* across political borders to imagine new geographies of association;
- and *together* as a planet facing crises that require global action for us to continue living at all.

The architects invited to participate in the Biennale Architettura 2020 are encouraged to include other professions and constituencies—artists, builders, and craftspeople, but also politicians, journalists, social scientists, and everyday citizens. In effect, the Biennale Architettura 2020 asserts the vital role of the architect as both cordial convener and custodian of the spatial contract.

In parallel, the 17th Exhibition also maintains that it is in its material, spatial, and cultural specificity that architecture inspires the ways we live together. In that respect, we ask the participants to highlight those aspects of the main theme that are uniquely architectural.

The year 2020 has often been referred to as a milestone on the path to a better future. Many nations and cities have devised a “Vision 2020.” The year is now here. We look to the collective architectural imagination to meet this momentous occasion with creativity and courage.

Unpacking the Question:

The theme of the Biennale Architettura 2020 is its title. The title is a question. The question is open:

How: Speaks to practical approaches and concrete solutions, highlighting the primacy of problem solving in architectural thinking.

Will: Signals looking toward the future, but also seeking vision and determination, drawing from the power of the architectural imaginary.

We: Stands for first person, plural, and thus inclusive (of other peoples, of other species), appealing to a more empathetic understanding of architecture.

Live: Means not simply to exist but to thrive, to flourish, to inhabit, and to express life, tapping into architecture’s inherent optimism.

Together: Implies collectives, commons, universal values, highlighting architecture as a collective form and a form of expression.

?: Indicates an open question, not a rhetorical one, looking for (many) answers, celebrating the plurality of values in and through architecture.

The question, “How will we live together?” is at once an ancient one and an urgent one. It is also as much a social and political question as a spatial one. Aristotle asked it when he was defining politics, and he came back to propose the model of the city. Every generation asks it and answers it differently. More recently rapidly changing social norms, growing political polarization, climate change, and vast global inequalities are making us ask this question more urgently and at different scales than before. In parallel, the weakness of the political models being proposed today compels us to put space first and, perhaps like Aristotle, look at the way architecture shapes inhabitation for potential models for how we could live together.

Five Scales

The Biennale Architettura 2020 comprises works by 114 participants with equal representation of men and women, and coming from 46 countries with increased representation from Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

In addition to the invited participants, the 2020 Biennale also includes a series of research stations that support the Exhibition, developed by researchers from universities around the world.

The Biennale Architettura 2020 is organized into five scales, three in the Arsenale and two in the Central Pavilion. Projects range from the analytic to the conceptual, the experimental, the tested and proven, and the widely deployed.

Scale 1: Among Diverse Beings (Arsenale)

- Designing for New Bodies: Addressing changes in the perception and conception of the human body.
- Living with Other Beings: Foregrounding empathy and engagement with other beings.

Scale 2: As New Households (Arsenale)

- Catering to New Demographics: Responding to changing compositions and densities of households.
- Inhabiting New Tectonics: Exploring technologies that enable innovative housing construction.
- Living Apart Together: Expanding possibilities of the apartment building as a collective housing typology.

Scale 3: As Emerging Communities (Arsenale)

- Engaging Varied Forms of Civicness: Investigating novel ways for communities to organize themselves spatially.
- Re-equipping Society: Proposing new forms of social equipment (parks, schools, hospitals, ...).
- Coming Together in Venice: Imagining the future of Venice.
- Co-habitats: Showing how we do live together in... Addis Ababa, Al Azraq Refugee Camp, Beirut, Hong-Kong, India-Pakistan corridors, Lagos squatter settlement, New York, Prishtina, and the Rio-São Paulo area.

Scale 4: Across Borders (Giardini, Central Pavilion)

- Transcending the Urban-Rural Divide: Mitigating the growing social and economic differences between global cities and the global hinterland.
- Linking the Levant: Negotiating sharp political divisions in the Levant region.
- Bridging Infrastructures: Exploring how infrastructural design can provide trans-regional connectivity.
- Protecting Global Commons: Bringing the architectural imaginary to endangered treasures such as the Poles, the Amazon, the Oceans, the Indo-Pacific Region, and the Air.

Scale 5: As One Planet (Giardini, Central Pavilion)

- Making Worlds: Anticipating and calibrating the future of the planet.
- Uniting the Nations: Marking the 75th anniversary of the United Nations by revising and expanding its spatial scope.
- Changing Designs for Climate Change: Presenting solutions in face of global warming.
- Networking Space: Connecting between Earth and outer space.

The grounds of the Arsenale and the Central Pavilion at the Giardini will include several large installations that relate to one of the five scales.

The grounds of Forte Marghera will feature projects devoted to children's play, by five architects and an architectural photographer under the subtheme: "How Will We Play Together?".

Towards a Renewed Agency for Architecture

The Biennale Architettura 2020 is motivated by new kinds of problems that the world is putting in front of architecture, but it is also inspired by the emerging activism of young architects and the radical revisions being proposed by the profession of architecture to take on these challenges.

Architects are conveners. This is inherent to what architects do. Architects synthesize and coordinate among different fields and professions and represent them in front of their clients. They are the custodians of the contract. But beyond that, architecture suggests possible social organizations through the way it arranges, sequesters, and connects spaces. It also shapes the monuments, the memories, and the expressions of societies and groups, creating a common language with which they debate and communicate their experiences and cultures.

Architects today are rethinking their tools to address the complex problems at hand. They are also enlarging their table to include around it other professionals and citizens. To effectively take on the responsibilities being presented to them, architects are extending one of their most important roles, as hospitable conveners of other forms of expertise and expression.

But more than ever, architects are called upon to propose alternatives. As citizens, we mobilize our synthetic skills to bring people together to resolve complex problems. As artists, we defy the inaction that comes from uncertainty to ask "What if?" And as builders, we draw from our bottomless well of optimism to do what we do best. The confluence of roles in these nebulous times can only make our agency stronger and, we hope, our architecture more beautiful.

Hashim Sarkis