

Architecture Biennale.

Empty pavilions, retreat into the virtual - but in the arsenal the big questions can still be grasped with the senses.

BY SABINE V. VOGEL

S the channels, the vaporetta are almost empty, and some of the prominent five-star hotels around St. Mark's Square remain locked. Venice is still standing still. And that even on the opening days of the 17th Architecture Biennale, in which 63 countries are taking part with their pavilions, plus around 110 teams of architects at the central exhibition! Originally planned for spring 2020, the biennale will now begin very quietly. Not even that was certain until a few weeks ago, but those in charge in Venice insisted.

Even so, some countries decided not to open their pavilions. The Canadians only promise those iconic urban landscapes that can be guided to Instagram from the QR code. Australia also announces a QR code on the closed gate as a link to the Internet. The Czech Republic is wordlessly locked. Switzerland has postponed any kind of official opening until September. Austria opened, but without a state representative. Tickets for invited guests are rare, the number of press people has been drastically reduced. This has the wonderful effect that the Giardini can be hiked through relaxed during the three opening days. The hotels do not double their room rates during these days as they usually do, but offer special discounts.

In this strange situation, the central question that curator and architecture theorist Hashim Sarkis posed for the Biennale three years ago takes on a whole new meaning: "How do we want to live together in the future?" First of all, climate change and migration. To put it another way, there are now completely different topics: How many office buildings do cities still need in view of home offices? How can green spaces be expanded? And how can the spread of investor apartments be stopped, which are not used for living but only for investment? He wanted to incorporate such social issues with "additional offers", Sarkis had explained at a digital advance press conference, with films, symposia and even an "expansion in the direction of dance".

No chance without a smartphone

Are face-to-face events even possible in this pandemic situation? Many country pavilions had planned some. In the Korean pavilion, cooking and discussion should take place in the "Future School" - now everything is just a bizarre backdrop. The German pavilion is far more radical: the rooms are completely empty. The "Team 2038" - a group of architects, artists and scientists - wanted a fictional look back from the future in 2038 to today. This is now only possible digitally: Via a link on the website 2038.xyz, you can create an avatar, virtually wander through the rooms,



Tree embraces stone: "The Listener" by the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone. (Dorothea Bensch)

Looking in Venice man the future of building

Watch films and even chat with other avatars. Without a smartphone, however, you are lost at this biennial!

The Austrian pavilion under the slogan "platform urbanism" fits perfectly. Discussions on site were also planned here. Now we can study videos and photo-text collages - which only works to a limited extent in view of the cumbersome subject: platforms are "mediators who bring different parties together," explained the curators Helge Mooshammer and Peter Mörtenböck in the Press conference. These platforms include online shops, gig works and dating apps that would now shape our city.

We only get access if we disclose our data. Their thesis is that we would give up control of our lives through such offer packages. But what does that have to do with built architecture? The answer can be found in the extensive catalog.

While the architectural visionaries in the country pavilions are unanimously dreaming of participatory building and joint projects, the central exhibition in the Arsenal takes us on a sensual tour with clear questions: How can architecture help with other living beings

Life? How do new materials change building? Can architecture help people rediscover their relationship with nature? Surprisingly sculptural, starting with bodies as doors, the exhibition slowly leads through large installations to architectural models.

Life forms in dialogue

The Turkish artist Refik Anadol proposes a monstrous, entropic, 3-D printed architecture made of liver cells. Superflux present their banquet "after the end of the world" with cutlery made from found organic and garbage materials. There follow suggestions for refugee camps, "living alone and yet together" until the hospital of the future. Even laypeople can follow the topics excellently here. Although the questions are not finally answered, one thing cannot be overlooked: architecture is no longer just a question of occupying space, but a process that includes many forms of life in dialogue.

Or as the sculpture by the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone, "The Lister", impressively shows in the water in front of the ship's garages: the tree clasps a stone with its branches - a symbol of the unifying of the unimaginable.

Music Society: World stars and new voices

The new director, Stephan Pauly, brings singers from all genres, but also Baselitz and Haneke into the house.

"Subscriptions can be bought worry-free!" With these words, the new Musikverein director, Stephan Pauly, presented his first own program, with which he committed himself to "continuing the tradition", but also a new "distinctive, strongly curated" event series of events comes into focus.

The subscribers can choose from 72 concert cycles in which, as usual, the famous names of the classical business are gathered. Pauly points out that all major international organizers assume that normal operations in cultural life will be possible after the summer. If not, they will know how to improvise, in many cases they will be able to offer alternatives and, in an emergency, refund the ticket price.

The numerous star guest performances from Riccardo Muti to Christian Thielemann are embedded in new forms of presentation, which - for example under the motto "A glass with... "Or" artist portrait" - convey encounters between audience and artists.

The integration of new music already consistently pursued by Thomas Angyan will be continued. 18 Austrian premieres can be found in the program as well as 19 world premieres - including novelties by Olga Neuwirth, Georg Friedrich Haas and Beat Furrer.

In focus: Schumann and Brahms

In contrast, Daniel Barenboim and his Staatskapelle Berlin concentrate on symphonies by Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms under the motto "Composers in Focus", while the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Boston Symphony are realizing a Richard Strauss project under Andris Nelsons, and the pianist Leif Ove Andsnes presents Mozart's Viennese works from 1785 and 1786 with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

The "Musikverein Perspectives" are new, each of which confronts music with other forms of art in a four-day focus: Michael Haneke and Georg Baselitz are the first. There is also a cooperation with the Albertina with a music installation in its own Baselitz room.

Stephan Pauly does not want to do without the extensive children's and youth program of the house, which is being expanded with a separate format for under three-year-olds. Society now really covers all music needs - and hopefully stirs up new ones as well.

Audiences that have not (yet) been reached are also sought in the Brunnenpassage, with which they collaborate, for example for "Viennese voices": In June 2022, talented singers from "various genres" will be presented in the Golden Hall. So it is definitely not only Schubert that is sung there... (sin)

Schubert, Schumann, Liszt: An evening in the moonlight

Concert hall. Jonas Kaufmann and Helmut Deutsch with a recital of romantic night scenes and gripping drama.

BY WALTER WEIDRINGER

For lovers of the soft and gentle, the highlight of the evening might have been the finely woven, dark pianissimo gold of the penultimate of four encores, the floating cantilenas from Schumann's "Mondnacht": Jonas Kaufmann's voice showed, as always, faithfully caring pianistically supported by Helmut Deutsch, once again from one of their best sides. In general, the celebrated encores were rather lyrical miniatures, which the composers of the program allowed the composers of the program to review again. After Liszt's "It must be something wonderful", in whose harmony the pain of love always resonates, there was

was able to rest over all the peaks about twice. In Schumann's "The Soldier", for example, where already contributed to the reasons for her youth the narrator is forced to fustilize his beloved comrade: In general, the songs op. 40 are mostly based on other texts with terrifying content. Kaufmann then wallowed in drama, if required, in a selection of Liszt's German songs: Helmut Deutsch, who kept humming along, proved anew how much meaningful dignity and distinctive impetus a song pianist can convey without leaving the deserving supporting role of "companion" to fall. The famous vowel discolouration and some slightly raised top notes of the baritone tenor should at least be seen by the opera-savvy Kaufmann fans in the audience

Believe it or not, instead of being accepted as a shrug of constraints: loyalty is not just an empty delusion.

Speaking of which, the evening had started unbalanced. But what would be balanced and moderately tempered about Schubert's monumental setting of Schiller's "Bürgschaft" with its great, noble feelings and constant dramatic twists and turns? Kaufmann gave the tyrant's first speech a sarcastic undertone, but the frequently requested parlando sounded gnarled and brittle, the piano throaty. Only gradually did the voice seem to wake up completely - like the human side of Dionysus.