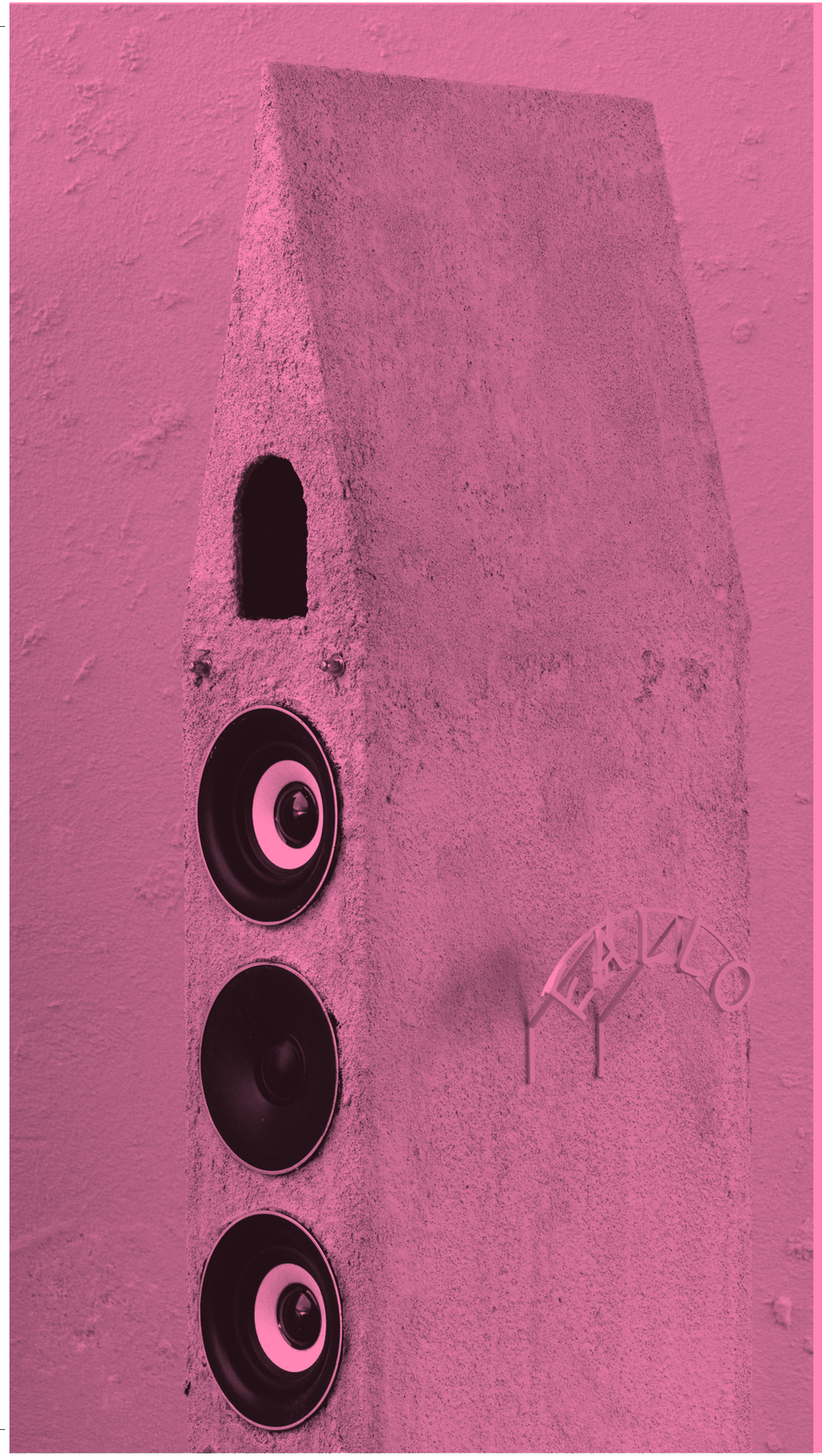

"We are in 2068 and throughout the world students have regained control of what is left of universities."

When asked to imagine the future of art schools, Parasite 2.0, a collective of architects and designers at the crossroads of architectural conception, scenography and the visual arts, began with this thought. With a leap through time, tasting more like the distant past.

Perhaps this scenario went through their minds as they walked through the studios, galleries, pathways, terraces and gardens of the Villa Arson, a school which encourages its students to appropriate the spaces and to make them come alive.

Dedicated since the mid 1980s to a type of experimentation where everything becomes hybrid and intermingled, the Villa Arson is several things simultaneously. Both school and art center, building and garden, 18th century villa and "outstanding contemporary building", made of raw concrete and stones from the Var.

In such a context, Parasite 2.0 conceived *Gently Brut* as a series of specific interventions distributed around the original villa and the architecture created by Michel Marot in 1960, considered to be one of the most singular examples of brutalism in France.

As the title of the exhibition suggests, the interventions are carried out in opposition to the architecture and embody its contradictions: the roughness of the concrete is softened by the use of textile, the brutalist gray by colored pigments, the monumental scale by human scale, and the rigorous conception by the spontaneity of the creative gesture.

This dialectics between the preexisting building and the works of art added on to it symbolically leads us to another kind of dialectics: that between various generations of students and the institution. Thus Parasite 2.0 has imagined students taking over Marot's project, gradually modifying it by adding works, protesting both against the institution and the architecture.

In a sketch from 1955, Michel Marot represented the Italian village of San Gregorio as one of his references for his conception of the Villa Arson. The architect somewhat attempted to reproduce the complexity of an old town, with its social network. But there is an essential time element which differs between an old town and a new project built from scratch: the absence of history of the latter. The layers of complexity of a self-developed village are the result of a stratification of actions, events and actors, which can only occur over years, or even ages. The layers of history are what transforms an architecture into a *locus*.

By fantasizing and questioning future activities, the barriers or potential contamination between architecture and the visual arts, Parasite 2.0 implements what philosopher Henri Lefebvre might have defined as "obsolescence of the space to the advantage of time": returning its very transience to the site.

Parasite 2.0 is a collective of architects and designers based in Milan. Founded in 2010 by Stefano Colombo, Eugenio Cosentino and Luca Marullo, the collective explores the status of human habitat in a hybrid environment intermingling architecture, visual arts and scenography. It has worked and collaborated with the Milan Triennial, the International Fashion Fair in Copenhagen, Ikea, Missoni, the Terraforma festival, Sunnei and the Venice Architecture Biennial, amongst others. Parasite 2.0 has also taught at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, at the NABA Nuova Accademia Belle Arti in Milan, for the program MADE and, since 2022, has been teaching regularly at the Design Academy in Eindhoven. In 2016, Parasite 2.0 was awardedthe YAP Young Architects Program prize by the MAXXI museum.

www.parasiteparasite.com

villa arson

Agenda

- February 29 2024
  6pm
  Opening

- Every day of the exhibition
  3 pm
  Meeting around the exhibitions

Students on a mediation course at Villa Arson will create guided tours of the exhibitions, sometimes with performances, evoking their personal interests in relation to the artistic issues of the program.
Free admission.
No reservation needed.

Practical information

Exhibitions opened every day (except on Tuesdays) from 2 to 6pm and from 2 to 7pm in July and August
Closed May 1.

Villa Arson is a public institution of the ministry of Culture and a legal member of Université Côte d'Azur. It is supported by the City of Nice, the Alpes-Maritimes Department, the Region Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Villa Arson is a network member of Ecole(s) du Sud, BOTOX(S), Plein Sud, d.c.a, ANdEA and ELIA Art Schools.

Image *Composition of stress and balance n. 1*, Parasite 2.0, 2023
Text Vittorio Parisi
Design In the shade of a tree
Printing Perfectmix-Photoffset

nice

parasite 2.0

Gently Brut

01.03–25.08.24

Galerie du patio, terrasses et jardins

En

Curator
Vittorio Parisi

Vittorio Parisi How would you define Parasite 2.0? As an architect's office, an artist collective, a trio of friends, or all three? And most of all, what does Parasite 2.0 do?

Parasite 2.0 A trio of friends, that's a nice definition! It's the first time someone describes us like that. Over time we've defined ourselves in various ways, from an architects collective to a design studio. Today we think we are a conception studio [*progettazione* in italian, editor's note]. Obviously, we intend as wide a definition of *conception* as possible. We don't want to be bound by the limits of a professional practice. We want to be free to continue to experiment, and to meet with new challenges. What does parasite 2.0 do? It conceives! On various scales and in various contexts, while concentrating on a great diversity of objects. We find that labels are an anachronistic necessity in an increasingly mobile and fluid world.

VP Since this is not the first time it happens to you – in an interview for the online magazine Exibart, you mention that your first application as young architects was for an artists residency – how do trained architects and designers end up doing a contemporary art exhibition?

P Precisely because of what we mentioned in the previous answer. As we progressed in our studies, we realized that the tools available for architectural conception didn't necessarily have to be limited to the world of construction or urban planning. From the start, we felt the need to explore the relationship between living beings and the spaces they inhabit from a wider point of view. We naturally turned towards the world of contemporary art. The themes of our research are ideally suited to this specific context, where ephemeral architecture and installations are privileged means of expression.

VP The previous question was deliberately ambiguous, and actually implied another question: according to you, at what point does it no longer make sense to differentiate contemporary art from architecture?

P As soon as one is no longer limited to functional, economical, technical or aesthetic considerations. For example, we feel that Michel Marot's project for the Villa Arson was more than a reflection on architecture and its aesthetic/functional potential. It was also the idea of a giant inhabitable sculpture.

VP Any exhibition has to deal with a space. This may seem trite, but it's truly an ontological condition: any exhibition is first and foremost the space where it is held, so much so that Brian O'Doherty said, concerning the modernist white cube, "we see not the art but the space first". But if the gallery space is the first thing we see, paradoxically it is also the first thing that disappears, because of its role as an asepticized setting and as a temple where everything is designed to celebrate the sacred aspect of the work of art. Or rather: the space *as architecture* is what disappears. I don't know if you share this feeling.

P We do share it, yes. But at the same time we feel that the architectural setting has an enormous influence on the works and their production. A work can be interpreted in different ways according to the space where it is installed. For example, think of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, created by Frank Lloyd Wright. The specificity of the spiral ramp has become a fundamental element of the museum, with exhibitions created exclusively for this space. It wouldn't be possible to move an exhibition to another space without radically rethinking its installation. The works and the space which houses them are constantly communicating. They coexist. Perhaps it is up to the visitor to decide which of these two elements is more important.

VP It is as if artist and curator had to make an effort both epistemological and imaginative: they have to momentarily suspend the barrier separating the world of architecture from that of the visual arts, and to consider them as a theoretical and practical continuum, a single organism. How do you interpret the notion of site specificity?

P Let's say that the vocation of our work is always to envision the objects in relation to the space where they are presented. As you said yourself, this process helps us to temporarily eliminate boundaries and categories which often become cages. We feel that site specificity is a challenge for any practice, it is a sort of call to confront one's approach as a designer to constantly new and unique constraints and scenarios. During this voyage one has to constantly question one's own practice in order to move ahead. So therefore, architecture also includes the visual arts, and whatever else you like. At this stage everything has become contaminated.

VP So, where does Michel Marot's work stop, and Parasite 2.0's intervention begin ?

P One might ask, where does Marot's project stop and the gardener's project begin? For obvious reasons the latter intervenes even through the slightest changes. Buildings suffer from the wear of time and of the people who inhabit them, if they are not mummified. It is interesting that the Villa Arson, first as a school and then as an art center, is permanently at the center of this contamination process. During one of our first visits inside the space, we met with a specific intervention by Dan Graham. If we hadn't been told that this was one of his works, it could very well have been part of Marot's initial project. In contrast, the relation between our intervention and Marot's architecture will "terminate" at a specific moment: the moment when the installation is taken down. It aims to create a contrast with the pre-existing situation, and is presented as a post-humous addition, an obvious superfetation. The intervention is written into the context, while also declaring itself as decidedly foreign.

VP Designing an exhibition at the Villa Arson not as an exhibition space but as an architectural site, is to imagine an aesthetic and symbolic dialogue with all the components of Michel Marot's project: the reinforced concrete, the stones and vegetation that intermingle to enliven a rather singular organic brutalism, laid out horizontally on a hill like the fortified villages in central Italy that inspired Marot. This hybrid landscape includes passages, forms, ridges and volumes which invite us uninterruptedly to gaze, walk, become lost, find one's way again, and of course create. The challenge of site specificity seems all the greater and more fascinating when the architecture with which the work of art must interact reveals itself to be particularly cumbersome and singular...

P Let's try to imagine the moment when Marot first inspected the site. It is as if the project were created at the back of this hill and of the old garden where the villa was laid out. Some of the paths, passages, small meeting places, were probably already there, perhaps hidden by hedges, marked by rows of trees or rocks. The spaces are so porous and organic that they seem to arise from the site itself rather than from an architect's pencil. The spatial complexity is also very conducive to the creation of meeting places, whether large or hidden. If one reflects that the project was confronted to the preexistence of the old Villa, the specificity of the site becomes really cumbersome. However it is strange to see that the natural landscape and the panoramic view seem to have been at the center of Marot's preoccupations, whereas the villa itself seems to have been almost ignored. For instance there is very little formal aesthetic dialogue. It is as if Marot had simply placed the red villa on his brutalist platform.

VP The starting point from which you give free reign to your imagination for this exhibition reveals a dystopic aspect: "We are in 2068 and throughout the world students have regained control of what is left of universities.". But you do this based on Marot's reflection on the Villa Arson's main vocation, which he conceived as a place where artists and students could build their own space for creation. Was this the feeling you had when you visited the Villa Arson and its spaces, the students' studios and the exhibition galleries?

P We had the feeling that it was a very free and open place of experimentation. Students also seem to benefit from a degree of independence in the use of the spaces, with studios transformed by the addition of structures or extending outside, with the possibility to install their works temporarily in corridors for quick picture taking. The Villa Arson is certainly a unique place. As soon as we started imagining an independent group of students beginning to change, contaminate, and transform the building, we immediately imagined a future in which this could really happen, where institutions would have almost renounced their control, including universities. So that our interventions, even through their aesthetic aspect, remind us somewhat of the intersection between auteur architecture and informal design, which is characteristic of contexts where control has been loosened.

VP According to you, what is the main difference between an architect-designer's way of conducting a project and an artist's way of doing research? According to your experience, what is the contamination potential between these two worlds?

P Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that every architectural conception is confronted to a bill of specifications. An architect-designer may convey deeper abstract meanings on the conception of a building, but he or she must start by dealing with frequently more boring and less culturally interesting aspects. For instance, the intervention must be economically viable for the investor and must enable him or her to make the investment profitable. It must be able to stand without collapsing on the people in it. It has to be livable and comfortable. In short, it has to function. On the other hand, a work of art does not have to be connected to the wastewater plumbing, except in very specific cases. Architecture is governed by norms. If in trying to respect a certain concept we need to build a stairway which does not conform to these norms, we can only do it illegally. So to illustrate what we are saying, we feel that an architect's culture is much more pragmatic. Which does not mean that there is no potential for contamination. We mentioned Dan Graham earlier, an architect/artist whose history is full of contamination, both ways. Insomuch as we are able to judge our own work, our approach to conception is viscerally linked to a form of pragmatism which comes from our training as architects. We have always felt the need to contaminate it through other more theoretical types of research, perhaps closer to the world of artistic research. Here we are certainly confronted with two interpretations of the world through different tools, and such contamination can only enrich these interpretations on both sides.

VP If we were to ask Parasite 2.0 to create the art school of the future, where would you start?

P If we were to create the school of the future, perhaps we would start by having a dialogue with today's students, or even by creating an inter-generational and diverse team. But it is hard to predict the future, considering how fast the world we live in is changing. To describe this exhibition project, we decided to start with the following sentence: "We are in 2068 and throughout the world students have regained control of what is left of universities." No more architects or designers, just projects arising autonomously without the hierarchies which characterize processes of conception. What would become of designers and architects in a completely self managed world? What would become of us in such a Primitive Future?