

Latvian exhibition in the  
9<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition  
La Biennale di Venezia

Arsenale di Venezia / Artiglierie - Spazio Lettonia  
Calle della Tana / 30122 – Castello / Venezia

September 12<sup>th</sup> – November 7<sup>th</sup> 2004  
h. 10.00 a. m. – 6.00 p. m.

Organizers – The Latvian Architects Association  
Co-organizers - Arte Communications

**“Cultural and Historical Metamorphoses on the Baltic Sea Coast. Latvia”**

The work of the architect in a historic city is similar to that of the surgeon during an operation. Both need good preparation, but an element of risk and the choice remain. City planning documentation and patient's X-rays are equally authoritative and anaesthetised. Patient's medical history and analysis of city face or topography allows us to see the essential. Irrespective of anamnesis- the self-assessment of Latvian architecture and the objective clinical diagnosis - the land is where it is - on the Baltic coast – at crossroads between the West and the East, the North and the South of Europe. Its geographical position and changing political borders have always affected Latvian life, culture and architecture.

This is the second official participation of Latvia in the 9<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition. In 2002, following the keynote “Next” of the Biennale, the design of the Latvian National Library by Gunnar Birkerts was exhibited. This year the Latvian exhibition consists of three parts - “Rīga historic centre metamorphoses as reflected by corner buildings”, “Rīga suburb Maskavas forštate” and “Metamorphoses of Port Promenade in Ventspils” that are united by a common concept developed by the design office “Pieci ezeri”.

“Latvia’s metamorphoses” is a story about two ports – the capital Rīga and Ventspils. Rīga historic centre is UNESCO World Heritage site. However, this time the city shows two sides of its face - the bourgeois centre and the working class Maskavas forštate (Moscow suburb). Ventspils is an old town with a huge and important port that stretches into the body of the city for a few kilometres, offering a dynamic industrial panorama from the Old Town. The part of the Old Town along the Venta river - a closed military area during the Soviet times – has been shaped into an impressive public space.

How do you intrude surgically into the urban fabric of the old historic centre? How to do it in various places of the city, which can be ranked from satisfactory to critical. The goal is to freshen up the city’s face without losing its originality or cultural heritage. Plastic operations might not be enough, as the diagnosis shows the city centres suffer from tissue defects. Part of the old, yet second-rate housing is unusable and block interiors are often abandoned. The damaged areas can be infiltrated with *cancerous growth* – supermarkets – and their metastases can create thrombosis of the transport arteries. But maybe this is only a neurological reaction to the investor stimulation? These are issues of Latvia today, answers to which are sought in competitions and pleinair workshops of various levels.



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