

# CURATOR'S STATEMENT

*Studio KO, Karl Fournier & Olivier Marty*

*Architects, founders of Studio KO*

This installation is an invitation to sit at the table of history. To step aside and to take time to pause from the ever-accelerating progression of the world.

In order to illustrate this Biennale's theme of *The Laboratory of the Future*, we wished to welcome the human being at the heart of all architectural practice.

With this in mind, we gave twenty-five architecture students from the Ajou University in Tashkent the opportunity to participate in a collaborative workshop, a journey through their own history, from the Qalas of Karakapalstan to the glazed domes of Bukhara through the modernism of the Soviet era.

It became a story of encounter and transmission in which we were no more than couriers, awakening the consciousness of the students who already carried deep within themselves the knowledge of who they are and from where they speak.

In the way it is carried out and constructed, the project could be inscribed in a pre-Enlightenment Universalism, that of the great merchant voyages between Venice and Central Asia, on that long path linking the West and the East.

This journey together through time and space was an opportunity to address many themes that are close to our hearts and that we consider universal enough to share with everyone. It was therefore as much a question of context as of materiality.

Accompanying us on this journey were architects Jean-Baptiste Carisé and Sophia Bengelara from our studio along with several artists whose practice reflexively questions the world: film director El Mehdi Azzam, visual artist Miza Mucciarelli, and photographer Emine Gözde Sevim.

Together, from different backgrounds, we experienced immersion, shared discoveries, questions, and discussions; we broached parts of history until we could ask ourselves to begin conceiving architecture.

Thus, while walking through the ruins and listening to the historian and archaeologist Irina Arzhantseva's erudite presentation of the Tolstov expedition, many of the students, when asked to explore a scenography for their national pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale, arrived at the form of the labyrinth, confirming our initial intuition.

It is a structure reduced to its most abstract expression, with a potent evocative force and an allegorical capacity to describe our time.

Then it was a question of thinking about building, and everyone was offered a game of brick assembly and modular composition. The result was an abundance of blocks, reliefs, stairs, shadows, and patterns. This was the time of the material, of Uzbek bricks and the skilful mixtures enamelling their contours under the patient eye of the master ceramist from Bukhara, Abdulvahid Bukhoriy.

Meanwhile, in Tashkent, in the arctic cold and with little fanfare, a 1:1 scale prototype of the project was built, a labyrinthine structure of wooden formwork planks, a palisade unravelled into space.

In an unsettling analogy, we chose to house it in the Imperial-era Diesel Station, the future Centre for Contemporary Arts, because of its striking resemblance to the pavilion of the Arsenale in Venice, separated by several centuries and thousands of kilometres.

This back and forth from observation to thought and from thought to hand, this trial and error, this experimentation with things, is precious and fundamental, because it initiates the making of a project; it allows for the unexpected to emerge. These are the tools of the architect. But, in the end, after the critical sieve of the eye and the conscience, what is left?

An architectural installation that confronts commonly accepted temporal boundaries, builds unexpected bridges between eras, and attempts to deconstruct, to unbuild, the opposition between archaism and modernity. A form that proves nothing about architecture.

A structure of which one does not know whether it is ephemeral or pre-existing; whether it is made of brick remains from Venetian construction sites that sometimes open up, leaving a passageway, an interstice where a piece of copper oxide from Central Asia is nestled.

It is an opaque path that projects at its core a film that is the embodiment and impressions of our moments of sharing and creation.

At the exit, two moments are highlighted as an echo of the experience. First, a model that offers the necessary vantage point for understanding; a view above the labyrinth. And second, a light table that reveals traces, fragments, drawings, student research, failed attempts, and anomalies; we call them relics.

And if the magic works, sometimes all that remains is a memory, the impression of opacity, the fleeting disturbance of feeling lost; the comfort of a fortress, the surprise of a shard of radiant turquoise in the dark.