

# La Biennale di Venezia 19<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition

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## **Intelligens**

**Natural. Artificial. Collective.**

### **1. TITLE**

The title of the International Architecture Exhibition is usually announced both in English and in Italian. In 2025, it will be condensed into a single word for both languages via the common Latin precedent: *intelligens*.

The title *Intelligens* is linked to the modern term “intelligence,” but it also evokes a wider set of associated meanings. In fact, the final syllable, “gens” is Latin for “people”. A new, fictional root emerges, suggesting a future of intelligence that is inclusive, multiple, and imaginative beyond today’s limiting focus on AI.

### **2. STATEMENT**

The 19<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition will be about the built environment and the many disciplines that shape it. Architecture is at the center, but not alone. It is part of an extended sphere that integrates art, engineering, biology, data science, social and political sciences, planetary systems sciences, and other disciplines - linking each and all of them to the materiality of urban space.

The built environment is one of the largest contributors to atmospheric emissions, placing architecture among the main culprits in the degradation of our planet. As the climate crisis accelerates, must we resign ourselves to this role, or are we still able to offer solutions, substantial and non-cosmetic, effective and quick to achieve?

The Exhibition will search for a path forward, proposing that intelligent solutions to pressing problems can take many forms. It will present a collection of design proposals and many other experiments, exploring a definition of “intelligence” as an ability to adapt to the environment with limited resources, knowledge, or power.

Objects, buildings, and urban plans will be arranged along the axis of a multiple and widespread intelligence - organized as **natural, artificial, collective**, and combinations of the three. While some ideas are destined to fail, others may point us toward redemption.

The Exhibition will cast architects in the role of “mutagens” stimulating natural processes and sending them off in new directions. Learning from many sciences, this exhibition hopes to accelerate the transformation of the present through fearless trial and error, and to find a better future in the process.

### 3. SECTIONS

INTRO. Venice's vulnerability to the climate crisis is well documented. However, the city also showcases the potential of leveraging diverse forms of intelligence. The cycling tides scour its canals on a daily basis, offering a natural method of sanitation. The electromechanical power of the MOSE (Experimental Electromechanical Module) shields the lagoon from “acqua alta,” representing an ingenious—if not permanent—technical remedy to sea-level rise. And the collective ingenuity of citizens has found new living solutions through coordinated action. For centuries, the world has embraced the myth of the salvation of Venice—could Venice offer us recipes for salvation instead?

NATURAL INTELLIGENCE. Architecture, whose original function is to shelter human beings from the natural elements, now relies on nature to reorient practice. The return of greenery to our cities is one of the most effective ways to combat extreme temperatures. Natural materials can store carbon and avert further emissions through insulation. Biomimicry reminds us that the best designs are the ones that have evolved over thousands of years. Will we ever be able to design a building as smart as a tree?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. Vast networks of connections and sensors connect our metropolises, creating a digital infrastructure that embraces the entire Earth. Despite their own energy consumption, these technologies may be used to mitigate the environmental impact of urban development. Driven by interacting feedback loops, the built environment may evolve to respond like a living organism. At the same time, artificial intelligence is poised to destabilize the traditional role of architects. How will the profession change when generative models can produce construction drawings from simple text?

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE. Since the beginning of time, architecture without architects has been finding sustainable solutions—communal action shaped by the pressure of the environment. Collective intelligence is a story of adaptation—working with nature and not against it. Think of the Machiya of Kyoto, the Dogon cliff dwellings on the Bandiagara plateau, the Trulli of Alberobello—or the vast spectrum of “informal” settlements that drive urban growth today. How can we bridge old and new to leverage the endless possibilities of collective intelligence?

END. What if it's already too late to mitigate the accelerating climate crisis? What if it is impossible, in order to save our species, to continue inhabiting the surface of the Earth? An alternative perspective may lie just out of reach, in the limitless expanse of space where geoengineering concepts, 3D printed housing, orbiting space stations, and atmospheric satellite networks populate an interstellar future. Viewing our planet from afar, we might reflect on the debt we owe to the Earth. Is space exploration the ultimate frontier for our intelligence, or simply a distraction from the real challenge - solving our problems down below?

## 4. METHODOLOGY

**TRANSDISCIPLINARITY.** Architectural projects will be collaborations between multiple professionals, with the objective of advancing scientific knowledge whenever possible.

**LIVING LAB.** As the Central Pavillion at the Giardini will be under renovation in 2025, it will be replaced by a number of special projects that will leverage Venice and the outdoor areas of the Biennale Exhibition venues as a Living Lab, merging interacting forms of intelligence.

**SPACE FOR IDEAS.** At a time of crisis, we need to embrace a collaborative approach to design. As of May 7, 2024, a public venue for the submission of ideas will be open on the website of La Biennale, fostering an expansive heterogeneity of voices, visions, and suggestions.

**CIRCULARITY PROTOCOL.** The Exhibition aims to set unprecedented goals for circularity. A Circularity Manifesto will be developed to define clear directions and a new standard for the future of cultural events.

## 5. NATIONAL PARTICIPATIONS

Inspired by the engaging results of the 14th International Architecture Exhibition (2014), we hope to reintroduce a degree of coordination and coherence with the theme of the main International Exhibition among the National Pavilions.

We encourage the represented countries to address the common prompt of "One place, one solution", showcasing how local ingenuity can address our time's existential challenge—a challenge that can only be tackled in a cooperative manner, reflecting a multiplicity of approaches.

Around the world, cities and territories are rapidly evolving in response to climate change. Navigating pressing issues from rising sea levels to urban heat islands, from extreme weather events to the protection of vulnerable populations, local communities across the globe are at the forefront of innovation in the built environment.

Celebrating natural beauty or engaging with traditions, these solutions are exciting in their specificity, yet they may offer insights that can be transferred elsewhere. If every country brings one success to the table, together we can assemble a global kit for adapting to the future.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

INTELLIGENS develops the knowledge and capacities that help us evolve, lest we succumb to a burning planet. INTELLIGENS loves nature, millions of years of building, destroying, recycling—trial-and-error evolution. INTELLIGENS acts, generating a new repertoire of solutions - ready for testing, feedback and safe failure.

INTELLIGENS bridges opposing camps in architecture: high-tech "smart cities" and low-tech "natural cities." It shares across disciplinary boundaries—spawning a hybrid

“architecture beyond architects.” It weaves together different scales, from the spoon to the city, from microchips to interstellar space. It spans the natural and artificial, promising a future of co-evolution between long-at-odd worlds. It emerges from outliers—covert intelligence disrupts the rules of the game when least expected.

Then there are failures of INTELLIGENS—to be studied, revered, and shunned.

## **7. POSTSCRIPT**

We dedicate the work of the coming months to Italo Rota (1953-2024), with whom we first embarked on this journey, and whose ideas we will carry forward.