Pavilion of Switzerland at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition –
La Biennale di Venezia

«Incidental Space»
A project by Christian Kerez

Commissioners: Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia – Marianne Burki, Head of Visual Arts;
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Exhibitor: Christian Kerez
Curator: Sandra Oehy

Press conference: Thursday, 26 May 2016, 3pm
Opening: Friday, 27 May 2016, 4pm
Exhibition: 28 May to 27 November 2016

Le sens du mystère, c'est d'être tout le temps dans l'équivoque, dans les double, triple aspects, des soupçons d'aspects (images dans images), formes qui vont être, ou qui le seront selon l'état d'esprit du regardeur. Toutes choses plus que suggestives, puisqu'elles apparaissent.
Odilon Redon, *À soi-même, journal (1867-1915)*, Paris, 1922, p. 97

The Biennale Architettura is more than just a venue where the status quo of architectural production is put on display and celebrated. It is a state of exception and its spatial distance from the location from where one usually works allows us to critically interrogate architecture's everyday conditions. Although, technologically speaking, more is possible today than ever before, architectural freedom has been greatly limited by a monumental level of regulation. In this context, the project «Incidental Space» by the architect Christian Kerez is intended as fundamental research. As part of the Swiss contribution to the Biennale Architettura 2016, its aim is to investigate the possibilities – technically, as much as in our imagination – of how to think, build and experience architecture differently.

At the beginning of this discussion, Kerez declared architectonic space as a postulate: architecture can be presented through the medium of architecture itself. It is from this point of departure that Kerez builds a space as an architectonic project in Bruno Giacometti's Swiss Pavilion. This space is an experience that takes place in a particular location and proves its legitimacy there. It stands as an assertion, a thesis of itself, and does not refer beyond itself to another space or movement.

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The project sounds out the borders of what is presently architecturally possible: how can one use the medium of architecture to think about an abstract and simultaneously complex architectonic space? How can one illustrate and produce such a space?

In the process of form finding, questions on the necessity of a design distant from artistic authority emerge. Through the coupling and sequencing of craftsmanship and digital processes, utilizing various technical translation assistants, a detail-rich architectonic space appears, which reveals the greatest complexity possible. The space exists simultaneously in various conditions of aggregation of a cloud of data, all of which are of equal value and reciprocally condition each other. As there is no portrait presented, it is not visually simple to decode. It overwhelms the viewer through a multiplicity of possible readings, producing, in its material presence, a moment of resistance that stimulates reflection.

The current reality is that the field of architecture demands intensive exchange between research and architectural practice, as well as interdisciplinary collaboration among architects, engineers, art experts and specialists in digital production possibilities. The task of architects time and again must be to provide food for thought and to set themselves new frontiers that change received notions of and about architecture.

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Notes for editors

Christian Kerez, the exhibitor
Swiss architect Christian Kerez, born 1962 in Maracaibo (Venezuela), will be responsible for the Swiss Pavilion exhibition at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Kerez studied at ETH Zurich and has been teaching there as Professor of Architecture and Design since 2009. Recently, Christian Kerez received international praise for his proposal for a commercial tower building in Zhengzhou, China, and a large-scale social housing development project in Brazil. In Switzerland he has made a name for himself with the construction of a new school in Leutschenbach. The compact building is characterised by huge steel lattice formwork and a top-floor gym offering a panoramic view. The load-bearing structure, material and spatial concept form a unity that is both clear and complex. The conceptual stringency of Kerez's designs also becomes apparent in his «house with one wall», a two-family home in Zurich-Witikon formed from a single slab of concrete.

Kerez seeks to enable a new spatial experience that can only be brought about by architecture. Within the design process, he combines fundamental considerations with the question of how a specific architectural concept can make a worthwhile contribution to the everyday.

Sandra Oehy, the curator
The «Incidental Space» exhibition by Christian Kerez at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia will be curated by art historian Sandra Oehy. Together with the general commissioners Alex Lehnerer and Savvas Ciriacidis, she curated the German contribution «Bungalow Germania» for the 14th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, in 2014. From 2010 to 2013, she was Co-Director of Van Horbourg, an artspace for contemporary art in Basel and in Zurich, and also worked as an independent curator. Oehy has realised group and solo exhibitions with artists including Armin Linke, William Forsythe, Simon Denny, Stan Douglas, HR Giger, Rico Scagliola/Michael Meier, Bas Princen, Pennacchio Argentato and Quinn Latimer. She studied History of Art, Political Science and Sociology at the University of Zurich. Since 2014, she has been a member of the cantonal art purchasing committee in the canton of Zug.

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Pro Helvetia is mandated by the Swiss Confederation to promote artistic creation in Switzerland, contribute to cultural exchange at home, promote the dissemination of Swiss culture abroad and foster cultural outreach. It is responsible for Swiss contributions to the several editions of Art and Architecture biennials in Venice. Switzerland has taken part in the Biennale Architettura since 1991 and the Art Biennale since 1920.