



Greetings from Beijing—

An architecture report

Greetings from Beijing, or rather *The first architecture Biennial – Beijing 2004*. Curious travel notes from an even more curious architectural biennial. The diary of Stefano Mirti, Simone Muscolino and Luca Ponceolini.

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A2 The Biennale is divided into nine sections. These go from A1 (*Infinite Architects*) to A9 (*The ecological building / Theme park design digital exhibition*). The only problem (if we want to be really fussy) is that these nine sections are in nine different parts of the city, a city that through the eyes of the visitor seems fraught with terrible difficulty. So, the result is that of having the perfect device for generating post-situationist drift. You get in a taxi, try and decipher a map, in the hope of not getting too lost. At the same time you have the absolute certainty that you will definitely get lost. The first times that we got lost it was great, a chance to see places that were just as interesting where we wouldn't have gone off our own bat. But in the long run a bit tiring... In practical terms this means that these notes do not refer to the whole Biennial, but just the part that we saw.

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Harvard GSD

The design school from Harvard was present in the section Brain Cells. Great expectations for what should have been one of the most strong and important exhibitors. Two days before a fax arrived, asking the Chinese to paint their area pink. Extraordinary.

Great expectations. That were disappointed, because in this pink space nothing will be presented. An unfinished building site (the pavilion), and empty space and two raw concrete walls painted pink. Very conceptual. Well done, there's nothing to say. Not even Cocteau would have pulled out a rabbit like that from the hat.

Hong Kong

The Hong Kong pavilion is great, the route designed by Laurent Gutierrez and Valerie Portefaix is low key and essential. You enter, you go round an mdf labyrinth, you see the things you've got to see, few frills, no blobs. A clear simple, intelligent installation. Wham Bam, well done.

The coloured neon lights on the outside walls (with the resulting reflections on the water of the water lily pool) give a final touch of niceness to the whole thing. The only fault (well maybe its not a fault), after a few days we remember the installation quite well, whilst we can't remember anything about the work on show.

Italy

The Italian pavilion stands out most for the room of mirrors by Andrea Branzi. From a generational point of view its really annoying to have to say (once more) that the top Italian designer is our father's age. However, there's not much you can say, that's how it is.

The A12 group present beautiful photographs (of a labyrinth project at Otterlo that is even more beautiful). Avatar from Florence expend themselves with great generosity, working like mad during the whole event. Rome confirms itself to be the most interesting place on the whole peninsular. Work is presented by Laboratorio Nomade on Corviale, projects by Ian+ for Catalunya, by MaO on the theme of play. They are all really good designers that carry out high quality work but in the end, Branzi seems to come from another planet.

Five sides of mirrors, the sixth side open, with a projector that makes an image explode into infinity. It's amazing. Once again Archizoom beat everyone hands down. Luckily Superstudio stayed at home.

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