

Mercier & Associés  
presents

# Gianni Pettena

## RADICAL WORKS

In 2011, the Mercier & Associés gallery will present two exhibitions of Italian radical architecture : the first will open May 27 and 28 with a retrospective of the works of Gianni Pettena. A selection of installations, videos, furniture, designs and photographs will present his experimental work as architect and designer.

Next fall, a second exhibition will be dedicated to the works of Ugo La Pietra, another important figure of Italian radicalism.

Radical architecture, which concentrates on the aspect of « thinking » rather than that of « doing », was directly influenced by several artistic movements, particularly by the imagery of Pop art, the spatialism of Lucio Fontana, and the attitude of Arte Povera which gave preference to the creative act to the detriment of the finished work.

Gianni Pettena is one of the leading personalities of the Italian radical movement along with Archizoom, Superstudio, UFO, Alessandro Mendini, and Ugo La Pietra among others. During the 1960s and '70s, the movement brought together architects from Florence, Turin and Milan who joined to found, in 1973, Global Tools, a counter-school of architecture and design which strongly recommended a reevaluation of the fundamentals of architecture and of established models.

The works of Gianni Pettena are at the confluence of art and architecture. He creates his own, different artistic languages ; according to him, it is necessary to work in parallel fields destined to transform space. Critic and teacher, he defines himself as an anarchist (*l'Anarchitetto*, Editions Guaraldi, 1972). In the domain of « non-design », his interests turn to convertible structures. A good example is the *Rumble* (Edition Gufram, 1967), a large, multi-fonctional couch, a sort of micro-environment more adapted to the space it occupies than to human beings. A model of the *Rumble* will be exhibited along with the *Babele* (Edition Gufram, 1969), a table-sculpture with movable tops that makes reference to the primitive forms of a tree.



Rumble Sofa Gufram Edition 1967



Wearable chairs 1971



Tumbleweeds Catcher 1972



Ice House I 1971

Early in the 1970s, Gianni Pettena is invited to the United States as an artist in residence. There, he creates happenings such as the *Wearable Chairs* (1971), a series of folding chairs which students wear on their backs, a project by which Pettena inverts the relationship of man to the object : it's not the chair which acts as a support for the human being but the human being who acts as a support for the chair.

He also experiments with works akin to Land Art where art and nature are closely associated ; his encounters with Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson and the writings of James Wines will have a durable influence on his work. His pursuits concentrate on a view of the environment that accentuates a predominance of a nature which dictates the rules.

A series of photos and designs presented at the exhibition illustrate this theme, notably the ice covered houses in Minneapolis (*Ice House I* and *Ice House II*, 1971-72) where the space constructed by man, an anonymous cube in the city, « returns to nature ». Likewise, the Salt Lake City trilogy with the *Clay House* (1972), an ordinary house hand-covered in a thick coating of clay ; the *Tumbleweed Catcher* (1972), desert brush imprisoned on a tower in a highly urbanised zone ; or *Red Line* (1972) assimilated to a re-looking of the city limits.

With the project, *About Non-conscious Architecture*, Gianni Pettena explores man's place in the apparently empty space of the deserts. An emptiness that is merely illusion for it is made up of natural monuments in dialog with the context.



Clay House 1971

This exploration of environmental architecture will result in *La mia casa all'Elba* (My House on Elba Island). In 1975, the artist buys a fisherman's cabin which he transforms with material recuperated on the island and makes into a « work in progress » (a video and a scale model demonstrate this physical transformation of the habitat).

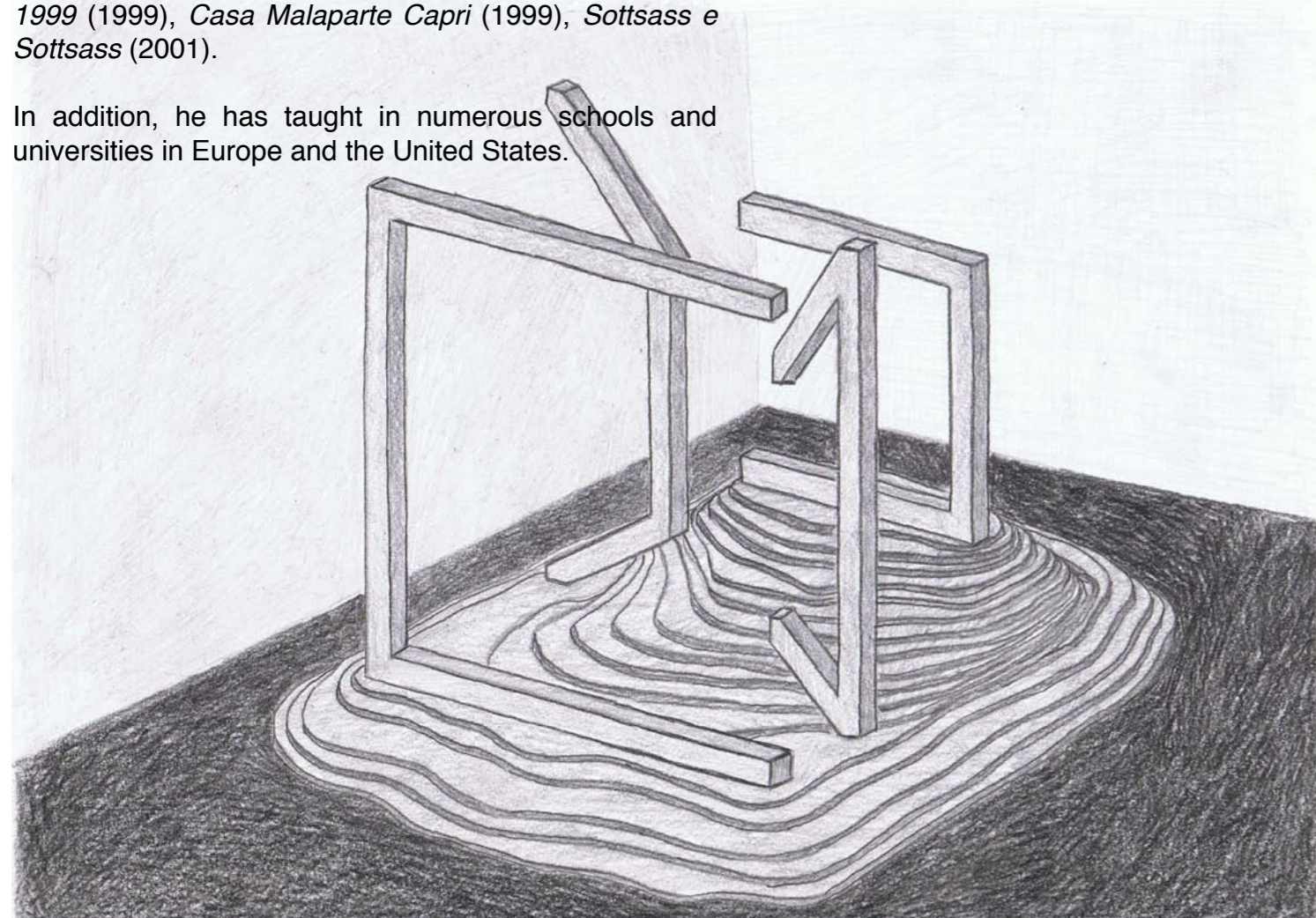
In the following decades, the artist pursues an exploration of the relationships between art and architecture, notably the notion of spatial perception. With *Archipensieri* (*Archithoughts*, 2001), he conceives a project in the form of an anamorphosis made up of elements free in space which require an intellectual pursuit on the part of the spectator leading to a more attentive view of the environment. Gianni Pettena will create an original configuration of this project for the gallery, accompanied by scale models, designs and videos.

Along with this, Gianni Pettena contributes to the major reviews of his time and participates, as well, in numerous exhibitions (The Milan Triennial, 1973 ; The Venice Biennial, 1978 and 1980). Architectural critic and historian, he is the author of monographs, essays and texts on *Richard Meier* (1981), *Superstudio* (1982), *Hans Hollein* (1988), *Archipelago-Architettura sperimentale 1959-1999* (1999), *Casa Malaparte Capri* (1999), *Sottsass e Sottsass* (2001).

In addition, he has taught in numerous schools and universities in Europe and the United States.



Maison Elba, outside and inside views 1975-2011



Projet Archipensieri 2001-2011

## BIOGRAPHICAL LANDMARKS

- 1940 : Birth in Bolzano, Italy
- 1968 : Architecture degree from the University of Florence
- 1971 : First prize at the *Trigon* competition in Graz (*Grass Architecture* project)
- 1971-72 : Professor in the United States (performances in Minneapolis and Salt Lake City)
- 1972 : One-man exhibition at the John Weber gallery, New York  
Publication of *L'Anarchitetto* (Editions Guaraldi, Florence)
- 1972 on : Professor at Florence's School of Architecture
- 1973 : Co-founds *Global Tools*
- 1975 : *Mia Casa all'Elba*
- 1983 : *La Citta' invisibile, architettura sperimentale, 1965-1975*
- 1996 : Exhibition at the Venice Biennial : *Radicals, Architecture and design 1960-1975*
- 2002 : Retrospective : *Gianni Pettena, le Métier de l'architecte / Il mestiere dell'architetto*, organised by the Frac Centre, Orléans, France

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Gianni Pettena will attend the opening.

Presentation of documents and written works by and about Gianni Pettena including a book on the *Rumble* (Editions La Pionnière in French, Italian, English) in a limited edition of 150 copies.

Opening, Friday May 27 and Saturday May 28, 2011 starting at 2:00 PM.

Exhibition until the end of July ; Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 2:00 – 7:00 PM

The Mercier & Associés gallery specialises in 20th century architecture, design and documentation (designer and architectural furniture, agency archives, designs, scale models, books, reviews, photos)

- First group exhibition in November 2009 : *Architecture Principe revue / Anne Barrès / Les frères Baschet / Guidette Carbonell / Pierre Digan / Architettura Radicale / Gianni Pettena / Ugo La Pietra / Jean Maneval / Jean Prouvé / Guy Rottier / Gustave Tiffoche / Groupe Totem / Utopie revue*
- May-September, 2010 : *The Baschet Brothers / Who are you Polly Maggoo ?*
- November 2010-January 2011 : *Guidette Carbonell 1960-1980, Ceramics, Tapestry, Murals and « 1% for Architecture » projects*

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> High-definition photos available on :  
[www.mercieretassocies.com/presse](http://www.mercieretassocies.com/presse)

> YouTube videos on :  
[www.youtube.com/mercieretassocies](http://www.youtube.com/mercieretassocies)