

EXHIBITION GUIDE

The Decorators and GOIG

Transformations of the city.
Bath: a re-contextualized, re-scaled,
re-enactment, 2017

In 1968, the student revolts impeded the opening of the 14th Milan Triennale, an exhibition which included Alison and Peter Smithson's installation 'Transformations of the city'. Inspired by recent changes to the city of Florence, the work explored notions of urban permanence and decoration considering how the city is transformed by every day events.

The Decorators and GOIG have collaborated to reactivate this line of inquiry, yet turn the spotlight on the city of Bath. Concerned with how public space is occupied and understood, they explore the multiplicity of different representations of the city through the figure of 'the visitor'. The visitor could be the student, the tourist or one of the many different temporary residents who inhabit the city. Our perception of the visitor is pivotal in informing our understanding of the contemporary city and is a critical issue not least in how we manage the growth in tourism.

The Smithsons took inspiration from a number of sources encountered in everyday life – popular culture, advertisements, bric-a-brac, asking for the 'ordinary things of life to be considered the stuff and decoration of the urban scene' (1952). GOIG and The Decorators echo this approach, assembling a snapshot of contemporary everyday life, posing questions on the monumental and the ephemeral, the physical and the digital and the permanent and impermanent heritage of Bath.



Transformation of the city,
Triennale di Milano,
Alison and Peter Smithson
1968

The installation is a faithful recreation (at scale 1:2) of the Milan display and includes references to the original core elements. The content has been actualized, answering the same questions Smithsons asked of Florence, but from a contemporary point of view focusing on the city of Bath.

‘The Wedding in the city’

The original installation depicted the festivity of a wedding. The wedding was understood as a ritual event that activated the public space of the city. The bride and groom and their guests were dressed with futuristic clothes designed for the occasion. In Bath’s contemporary context, the wedding has been supplanted by a hen party, one of the activities promoted by Bath’s tourist office. Today, the outfits are for a futuristic gender-neutral commitment party.

‘City as decoration of the region’

The main centre island, as shown in the Triennale, represented an idealistic vision of the city. On the floor, models of monuments from Renaissance Florence were surrounded by a green landscape, while suspended on top of it was an aerial view of the city. The Decorators and GOIG have chosen to depict the city of Bath through maps drawn by the Smithsons for their publication *Walks within the Walls*, 1969, where the key sites are identified through souvenirs of the city. Floating on top of it is a real time projection of a digital data geo-localized on the city of Bath.

‘Life’s decoration of the urban scene’

Hanging above the space, on the perimeters of the room are more “invisible decorations”. The original installation depicted: rain, clouds, cars, buses, façades, festivities, shopfronts, shop bags, advertisements are echoed but in this contemporary context acquire different connotations, particularly in Bath, where the car once seen as a positive technological innovation, has become an ecological and logistical problem for the city.

For the Triennale, the Smithsons collaborated with students from the RCA to develop different parts of the exhibition. In the Edge, The Decorators and GOIG wanted to keep the collaborative approach and invited students from the London College of Fashion, Central Saint Martins and the Architectural Association to participate in the project.

Biography

The Decorators: The Decorators is a multidisciplinary design collective founded by Suzanne O’Connell, Xavi Llarch Font, Carolina Caicedo and Mariana Pestana. With backgrounds in landscape architecture, interior architecture and psychology, The Decorators work on spatial design projects that aim to reconnect the physical elements of a place with its social dimension. They employ a methodology that builds on the social and cultural makeup of a site to create new experiences that can prompt interaction or shape communal memory. They support this by designing infrastructures for social interaction. These include physical elements that choreograph and set the stage for a multitude of possible uses. Their clients include local authorities, museums, curators and brands, and their work ranges from context-specific engagement strategies and public realm landscapes, to exhibition design and interactive interiors.

GOIG: GOIG is a young architecture studio founded by Pol Esteve and Miquel Mariné and based in Barcelona and London. The studio works on permanent and temporary spatial projects. It has designed both public and private spaces working with different mediums; from traditional construction techniques to video. GOIG has an eco-conscious approach to space (social, material, economic ecology) while looking for the joy of inhabiting. GOIG believes in the future.

Credits and thanks

Original idea and design (Triennale Milano, 1968): Alison and Peter Smithson

Reinterpretation (The Edge, 2017): The Decorators and GOIG

Paper costumes ‘Hen Party in the City’: Egle Andrius (London College of Fashion)

Video projection ‘City as decoration of the region’: Max Čelar (AA School of Architecture)

Wall prints ‘Life’s decoration of the urban scene’: Shamiso Sithole (Central Saint Martins – UAL)

Production design: Caterina Pereira (AA School of Architecture)

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Image credits: courtesy of Bath Preservation Trust and Bath and North East Somerset Council.

¹Alison and Peter Smithson, ‘The Charged Void: Urbanism’ (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005) pp32

²Alison and Peter Smithson, ‘Ordinariness and Light’ (London: Faber & Faber, 1970) pp11