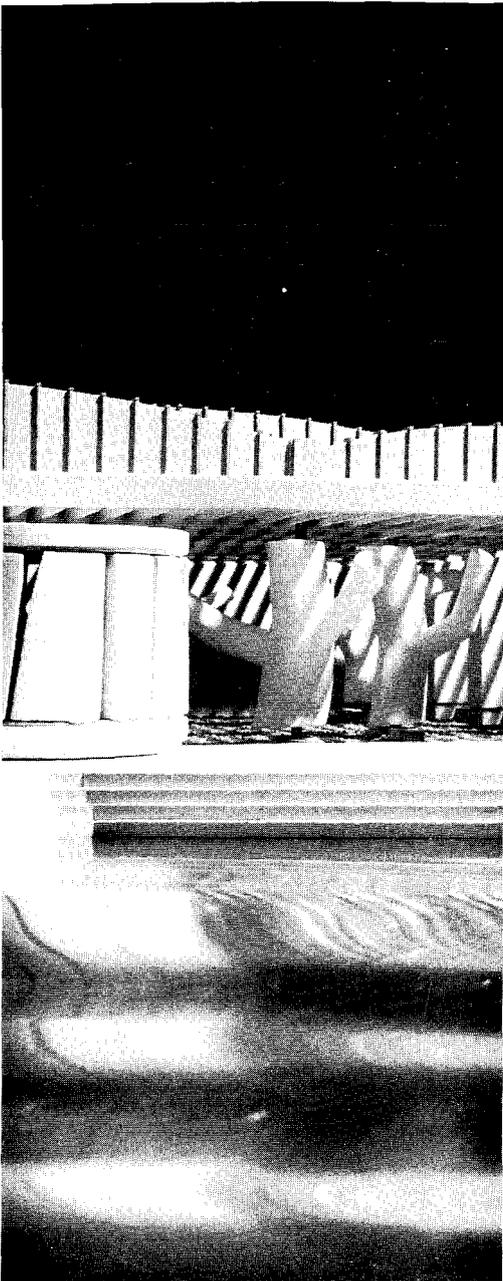


A Municipal Columbarium for the Island of Madonna del Monte

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RANDALL OTT
University of Arizona



VENICE FACES A BURIAL CRISIS

For centuries, the bodies of Venice's dead have been placed on the island of San Michele, located just a few minutes by boat from the city proper. Not only has burial on this "island of the dead" become increasingly costly given the fact that high ground water conditions force the usage of large, above-ground mausoleums, but the island itself has now reached a state of intense and insoluble overcrowding. Many families are being forced to seek burial away from the waters of the lagoon in Mestre, Venice's sprawling suburb on the mainland *terrafirma*.

Such conditions have led to an increasing use of cremation and columbarium burial, even among the tradition-bound, older families of Venice. Relatively affordable niche interment on or near Venice offers a way of maintaining at least some of the poetry of that specially chosen Venetian way of life—a way of not only living upon the waves, but of dying and being laid to rest upon those waves as well. These realities are the inspiration for this theoretical project for a Municipal Columbarium to be located on the minuscule and now abandoned Island of Madonna del Monte.

THE CUT TREE

Trees, especially large, mature trees, are a rarity in the manmade, mostly paved environs of the Venetian lagoon. Vegetation, where it occurs, is often limited to small, private gardens, locked behind high brick walls in the crowded, warren-like inner precincts of medieval Venice. For the average Venetian, then, a tree in a public place becomes something of symbolic import—often providing the only indication of natural relief within the hard confines of the city. Carefully positioned and tended, often with its opening in the pavement trimmed with marble or some other precious stone, a tree becomes one of the most meaningful objects in the civic fabric.

The death of one of these old, august, and deeply familiar trees in a small neighborhood plaza has a significance for all the local inhabitants that far transcends the mere loss of welcome shade. With the death of such a tree a lone symbol of nature—of life itself—disappears from view, and everyone knows that it cannot be recovered in its full maturity for many, many years. Such sentiments have led to the selection of the cut tree as a peculiarly Venetian emblem for the new Municipal Columbarium of Madonna del Monte.

