

Fields, Objects and Edges: A New Building for the University of Venice School of Architecture

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Venice, this city that rests on such indeterminate foundations is a place of oscillating and often contradictory forces. The building, and the larger urban site created as the existing port is decommissioned, manifest these unresolved forces and become integral additions to Venetian public space. By interlocking public and semi-public space this project joins two communities: the staff and students of the University of Venice and the population of a city in which these university personnel are vibrant participants. Hence, Venetian space spirals up into the project. A public passage passes through the facility, rising three and a half meters. It is from its highest point that students and staff enter the architecture complex. Here, also, institutional and urban paths cross.

Along the edge of the lagoon, the site is edged by a road for maritimeservice vehicles. This path connects public passage into the existing promenade of the Zattare. Benches flip up to become a wall when port security demands. A grass plain slopes up this edge. The traditional impromptu sunbathing of Venetian youth finds a place and flaneurs have a temporary destination. At the top of the incline is a boardwalk. Sloping away and facing the interior labyrinth of the city is a tree canopied area for idling in hot weather.

Like two children's toys sitting on a sand castle, the clean lines of the classroom and faculty office wings rest on a rising, rotating base. The convolutions of typical Venetian space enter the complex and provide primary access to all the spaces of the building. The

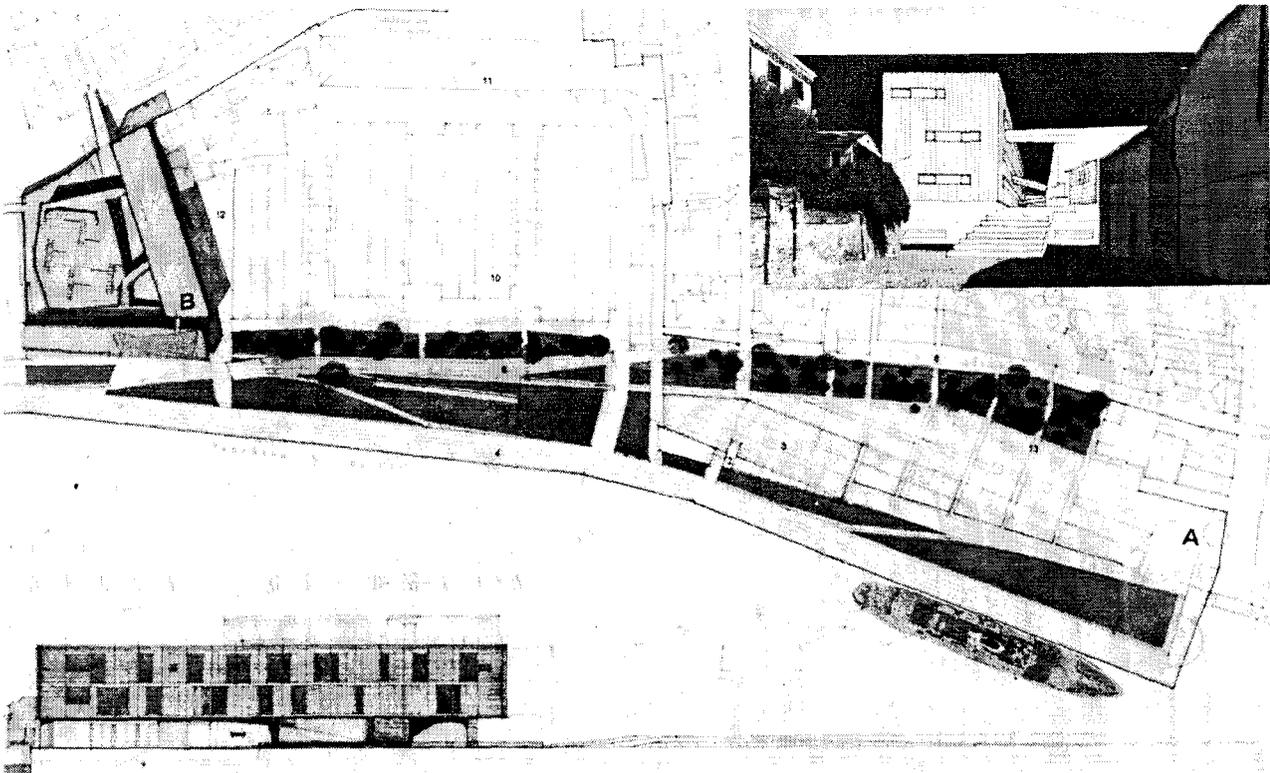


Fig. 1. Site plan and principal mosaic glass facade from *canale giudecca*. Above right. view from *campello oratorio*

auditorium roof becomes both stair and campo, forming a locus for the various lives of school. This space is also a south-facing outdoor theater, with bridges at multiple levels linking to classrooms and the existing architecture facilities in the Cottonificio.

The concrete, load-bearing base holds the semi-public functions of the new building. The classroom bar is a lead-coated, steel-frame box. The office bar fronting the Giudecca bridges the public passage along the southern face of the site. These spaces are sheathed in glass, behind which adjustable wooden partitions allow light, air, and views to be controlled, providing ventilation and comfort. The front facade reflects the joints between the Tiziano skies and scintillating waters of all Venetian compositions. The position of the site makes

this facade the visual terminus of the Zattere, framed by the port of Venice and sublime industrial profile of Marghera beyond — a profile that it will reflect and refract, abstracting the myriad colors of Venetian time.

The new architecture faculty becomes a center of gravity for the university campus that is forming in western Dorsoduro. Teeming with the communities of university and city, external social space melds ambiguously with interior circulation. Thus, as always, Venice turns in on itself and blurs the border between canal and calle, bridge and walkway, public and private, professor and student, clouding the distinction between reflection and reification, between the teaching of architecture and the life of the city.

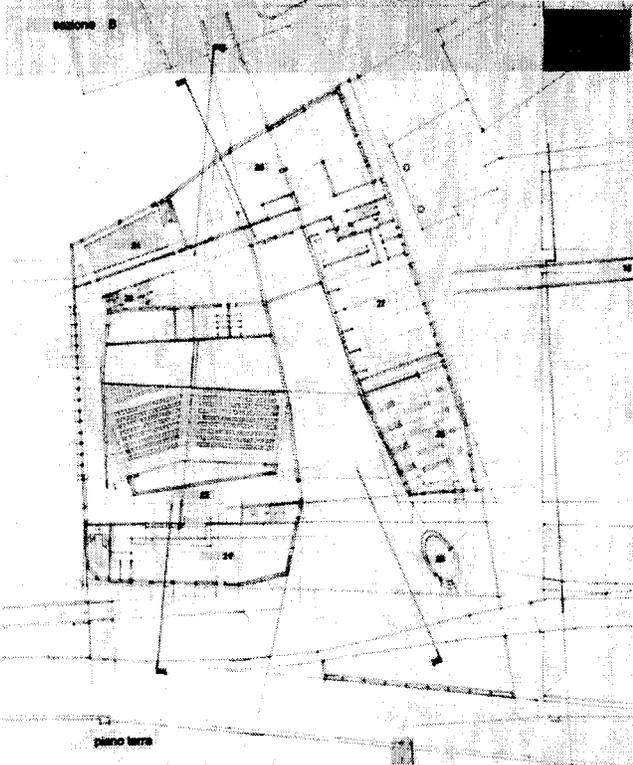


Fig. 2. Plan, ground floor level.

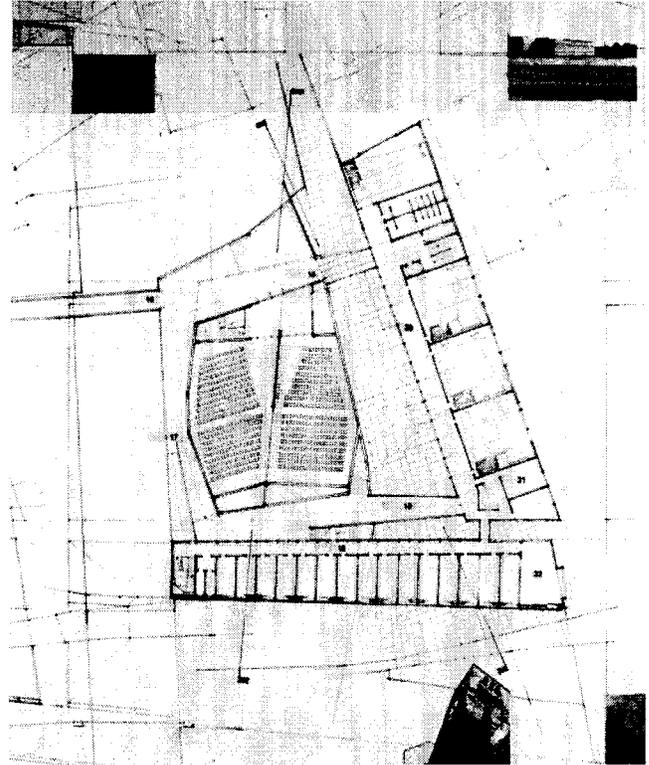


Fig. 3. Plan first floor level

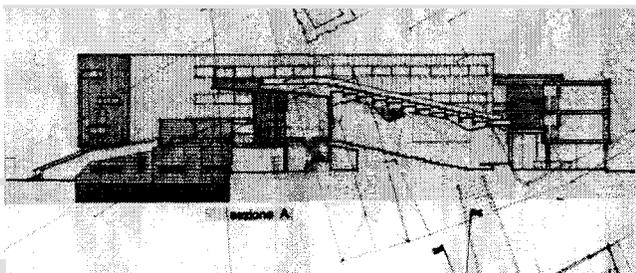


Fig. 4. Principal section through auditorium, showing bridge and ramp section, classroom building beyond.

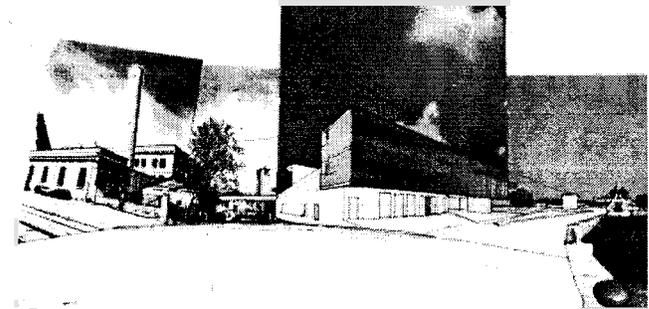


Fig. 5. View of principal facade along new public zone of the Zattere