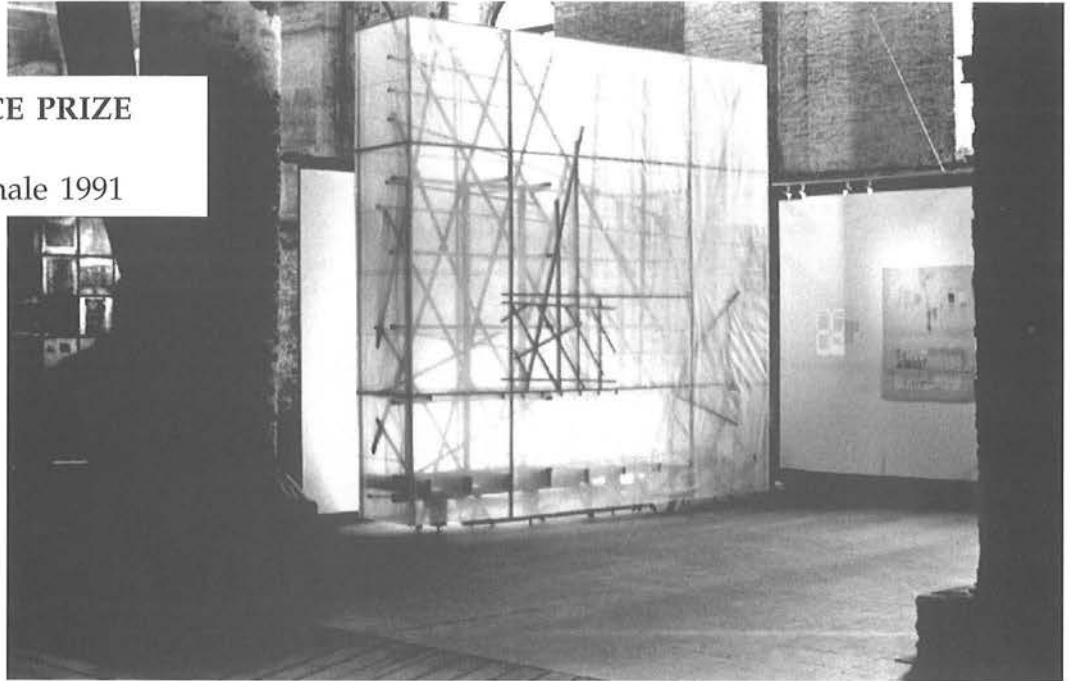


*Installation of the Auckland School
at the Fifth Architectural Biennale, Venice.
(Photo. Chris Adams.)*

THE VENICE PRIZE

Venice Biennale 1991



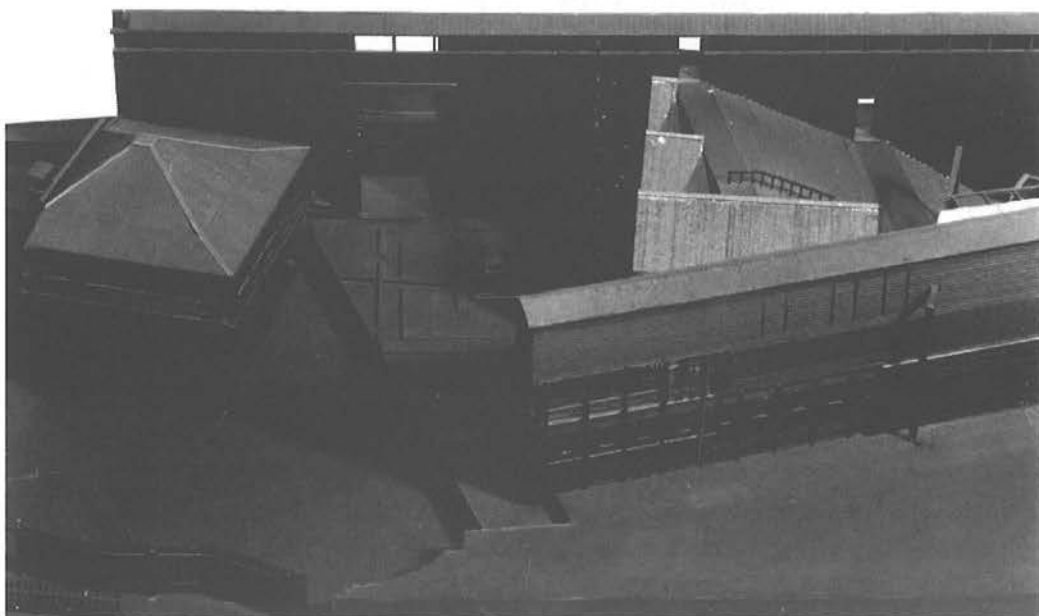
The Venice Prize, a competition for Schools of Architecture, was mounted for the first time at the Fifth Architectural Biennale in Venice. A prize was awarded for the best installation showing current architectural research directions. Forty-three schools from around the world were invited to prepare exhibitions. Exhibiting schools were selected not only for cultural diversity, but also for the different social and historical conditions in which their students are educated for the profession. The Director of the Biennale, Francesco Dal Co, wanted to offer an initiative to students and teachers from centres of international debate with established lines of communication, and also to those of us from the margins who had never had such an opportunity to participate.

A prestigious jury comprising Ignazio Gardella, Hans Hollein, Arata Isozaki, Richard Meier and Franco Purini unanimously awarded the prize to the University of Auckland Department of Architecture.

Architecture to a Fault.

La Biennale di Venezia 1991 Settore Architettura "Venice Prize"

The Department of Architecture, University of Auckland, New Zealand



Design project model, The Architecture of Exile—Belinda Ellis. (Photo. Lynn Logan.)

Fault, faltering, faulting is a critical theme in this selection of recent work from the Auckland School. The work was selected to show what can happen to architecture that has been authorised by an 'archaeology of theory' when the ground itself, the land, culture, and civilisation is discovered to be shattered, shaken, faulted. Theories of design in this school as elsewhere had been founded on totalising phenomenologies of space, land-form, region, back-ground, etc., where these contexts were assumed to be a pure, unsullied land. The original and continuing violence within and beneath the landscape was either denied, re-

*Design project model, "Nimesis"—
Fraser Cameron. (Photo. Lynn Logan.)*

sisted, ignored or reduced to the picturesque. Critical archaeology discloses a glaring fault in former theories of paradise.

Here we speak with architecture as with prophecy. The culture itself is at fault, a bi-culture—Europe and Polynesia, empire and

its other—not simply and merely divided, but an intimate and deep-founded grinding-together of peoples, an architectonic fault-line of pressures and upheavals, a seismic folding of languages, forged in the intense heat of fault.

When Empire reached this strip of land at the southern end of the world, a torn straggle of islands on the edge of the Pacific Plate, a crumpled strip of white fish-flesh torn from the realm of the sea, he faltered in the course of conquest. 'Man alone' hesitated. He revealed uncertainty in his progress. He felt exposed on the indefinite edge of the face of empire, unsure how to proceed beyond the horizon of the subject. Like Kokoschka's everyman, swallowed in emptiness, he felt compelled to invent his idea of society. He faltered upon the question, "What architecture is?"

Civilisation arrives here as representations of the centre. A local reading of theory simulates but always distorts the original. (Another reading of semiotics, another version of deconstruction.) The slippage between the original and the copy produces an uncanny quality 'almost the same but different,' that is often noted. This difference again, this misrepresentation of the architecture of civilisation is 'our fault.' The nineteenth century beginnings

were themselves representations—of nature, history, the primitive hut, the subject. At every turn we are caught between strata of (mis)-representation.

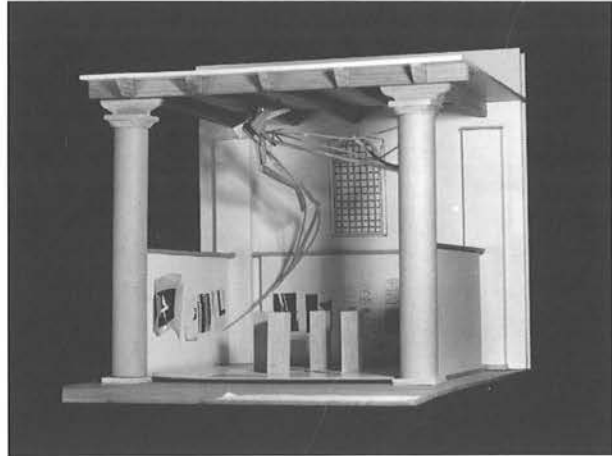
At first, with a colonial perception of wilderness, remoteness and natural wealth, imperial architecture tried to produce a faultless cultururation, not to expose too much the shabby workings of conquest and exploitation, but to imitate the European picturesque in the farmstead and the city. Later, particularly in the post-war period, this imitative tradition faltered before its own image of 'tabula rasa.' Architecture developed a passion to re-work the blank slate of the house, to re-invent the farm shed, to discover a regional identity which could be 'without fault.' Auckland architecture was a paradigm of the modern, Utopia in its place, on the edge of the empire of ideas. But still it faltered. The modernist clean slate cannot itself be simply effaced nor by-passed, but rather it must be interrogated. The Lyotardian project of 'elaboration of the initial oblivion' would mean here a 'working through' of the historical processes which led to the cleaning of the slate, allowing the repressed material to show

Venice Biennale winners (from left) Andrew Barrie, Helene Furjan, Glenn Watt, Mary Jowett, Richard McGowan, Chris Adams, Stephen Auld.



through, archaeologically cutting through its bland surface.

The aesthetic research direction which is illustrated in this selection of recent design work has little to do with a critical regionalism or with the empire of the picturesque. The work has been likened to a cloud, the 'long white cloud' of mythic arrival, or the uncanny ephemeral cloud in which Damisch found fault with the body-centred perspective. It is a tenuous ethereal thing, like the tattered white ghost of a cloak, a 'white mythology' drawn across the surface of building, the silent cloud of unknowing, which averts its face from the fault as it floats gracefully over the shaky surface of the ground. The work displays little fascination for technology, the final stitching together of a coherent aesthetic - for how can you stitch a cloud?



*An early model study.
(Photo. Lynn Logan.)*

It would be a mistake to describe this work as superficial. It is not clever, tongue-in-cheek, street smart. It is often derivative, unashamedly so, quick to acknowledge its sources. It does not waver any more at mere imitation. But if it is like waves, there is also an undertow. If it is clouds, we also smell the heat of thunder. We detect a deep-grinding energy which causes the paper to crease and smudges the line. This architecture 'to a fault' embraces the fault itself into the body of its own text.

We notice a fault in all this work, that it is introverted. There is no context, no urban fabric, no geological ground, no horizon. Or is the ground itself, faulted, corrupted and imperfect, drawn into the text itself? We have not yet found an answer for this question. This is

architecture 'to a fault,' faltering, opening itself to fault. As it opens new ground for New Zealand architecture, we are also made aware that there are not the means at hand (traditional, theoretical, metaphorical or even mythical) with which to amend the fault which architecture exposes.

Michael Linzey

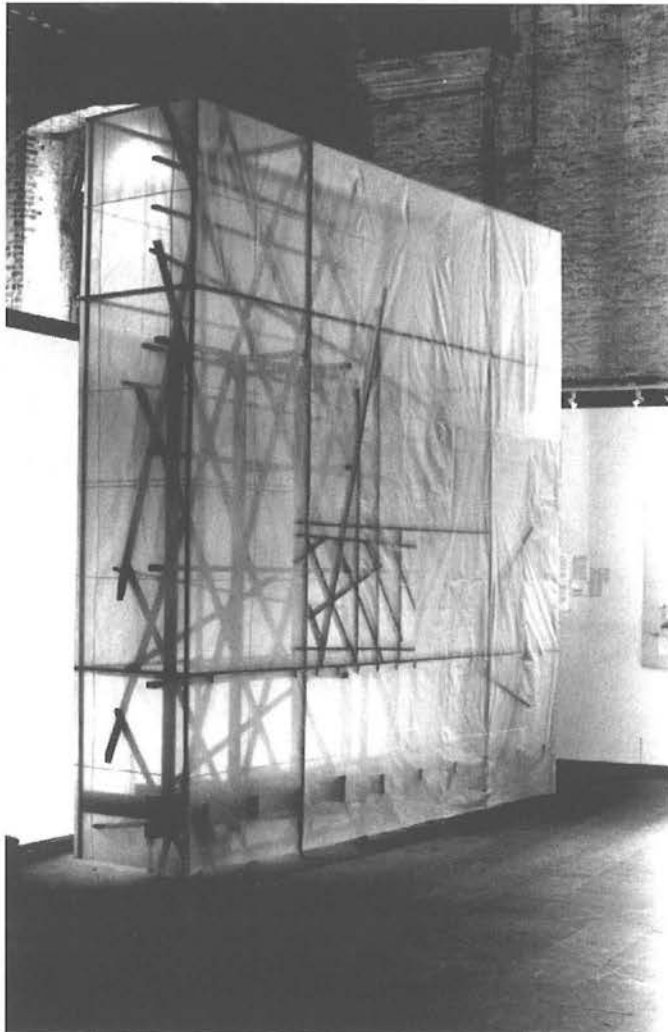
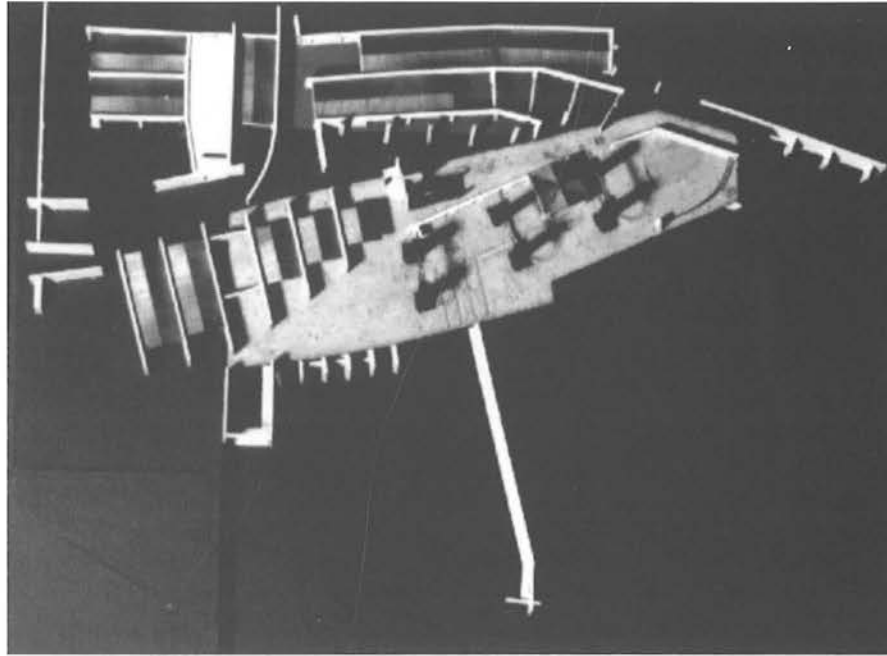


Photo. Chris Adams.

Crossed Lines: Drawing threads from the 1991 Venice Prize



*Design project for a Navigation School—Fraser Cameron
(Photo. Lynn Logan)*

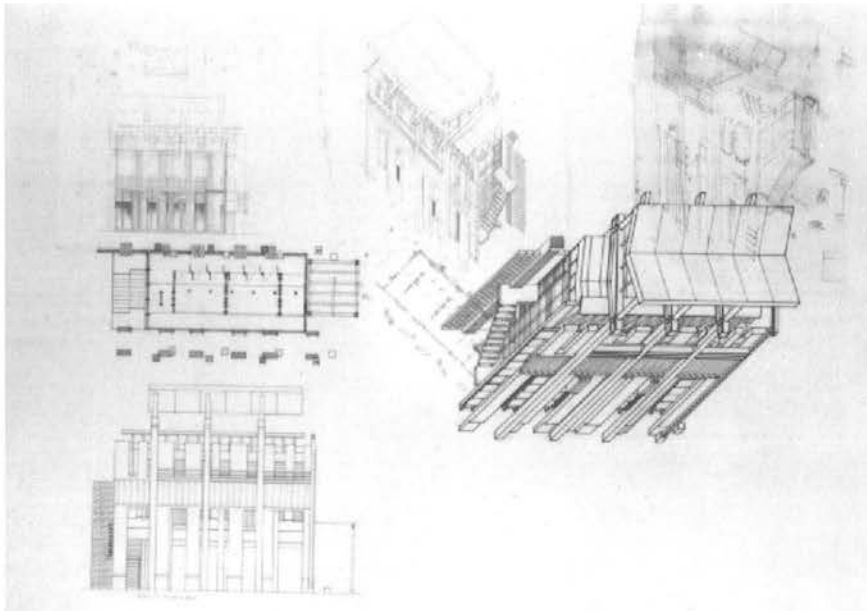
The winged sculpture by Massimo Scolari marked the entrance to the Corderie dell'Arsenale which housed the student exhibition. It both made and marked an arrival, a wooden and steel glider, crashed but intact, settled on a ruined wall.

The installation awarded the 'Venice Prize', by the School of Architecture at Auckland University, was a collection of drawings and models linked both literally and figuratively with a construction of wood and paper. This delicate 'object' was somewhere between a kite-like full-scale model and a complicated wall fragment of uncertain origin. Hovering between definitions, this object resisted definition, resisted being placed, and indeed resisted settling

in this place: hovering, barely connected to the floor by tenon pins.

These objects figure the beginning of Icarus's flight: that heady desire to rise above all constraints, "to fly above our corporality with fantasy."¹ But Scolari's glider also reminds us of the failure of that desire, "impossible constructions" for an "inhuman aspiration."² His landing, like Icarus's, brings us firmly back to earth, weighting the flight of fantasy with the gravity of the real, "that primordial aspiration to the lightness that our freedom has not been able to concede to us."³ The world-wise wooden ruin is pinned to the earth, heavy in the knowledge of its own limits.

The Auckland student installation was composed from a working drawing laid out on the floor which was connected by the extension of a set of co-ordinate cross-axes that literally crossed the drawing (an arbitrary marker of centre-lines designated by the maximum length of cargo on a jet plane to Venice, a literal cross-section), to both this object, and to the exhibition of works (drawings and models), organising their display. The object was con-



Jeremy Leman, "House for Freud's Dora" (reinterpretation of the Auckland Pioneer Women's Memorial Hall.) (Photo. Lynn Logan.)

structed from two sets of light, prefabricated framing (the 'one' based on local domestic vernacular, defined by the *NZ Standard 3604 Code of Practice for Light Timber Frame Buildings*; the 'other' based on a Micronesian navigation map, figure for an-other architecture), crossed through each other, severed at the cross-axes, marked with crosses at their truncated ends (with lead inserts that 'traced' its origins in drawing) and finally covered in tissue paper crossed with a 500mm grid.

If, as a fragment, the framed construction of the Auckland School bears witness also to the descent of that tragic flight, it is as yet unaware of defeat. It presents the young face of the school, naively eager, like a kite straining at its ties, resisting the gravity of the limits that bind it. And yet it is aware of these limits: the construction is indeed 'framed', caught in the play of representations that is architecture in this place. Representing the condition of a school of architecture, it is confined always to the 'drawn'. Drawn on the floor and papered, its status hovers between construction and drawing, resisting presence in the act of presenting itself. At the limits of both, it exists as barely anything more than a "a strange light", an inner glow that "reveals the unconditional within its own limits; the light of the invisible within the visible."⁴

It is the 'strange light' of the ephemeral gaze of the angel, the modern angel of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. Scolari's glider, too, is such an angel. Together, they watched over the thresholds of architecture—the place of the schools in the Biennale. But unlike Klee's angel which, for Walter Benjamin, is driven backwards over the wreckage of the past, towards the future, by the storm of progress, these angels are static: "The air seems not to breathe and everything is arrested for an immobile instant."⁵

And in this stillness these objects are figured as enigmas: the glider amongst its ruins, the framed wall fragment, ancient cloak, or kite; both are at once so heavy that they would sink into the surface, speaking of "the weight of the wall, the construction of the architecture;"⁶

and so weightless that they could “at a certain point become as light as a cloud and vanish”⁷, speaking of “the aireal lightness of the flight”⁸. It is an enigma that sees these objects unable to be pinned to a stable meaning, unable to be grounded, just as the framed ‘object’ resists the pins that would tie it to the floor.

The installation treads the fine line between an archaeological fragment and a tourist trophy, a souvenir of a ‘South Seas paradise’ and the myths of its country. The white cloud of Aotearoa is at the same time the pure white of a white mythology: the blinding glare of the *tabula rasa*, the clean screen, of orderly, white tissue cladding signifying the unrepresentable, blank landscape that, like C.D. Freidrich’s painting, *Wayfarer Above a Sea of Cloud*, attests to the colonial desire to ‘discover’ that there is nothing (already) here. But this ideal, this ‘clouded’ view that would conceal an existing architecture in a sea of mist, itself already resists the colonial gaze that constructs it: a cloud cannot be re-presented, it resists the perspectival projection that defines and records the gaze, and thereby renders impotent the claim that centres this gaze, as the averted face of Freidrich’s wanderer also testifies. Writes Franco Rella of both Freidrich and Scolari’s paintings:

A strange world is this, in which nothing is diminished by perspective; a world in which objects lie parallel, equidistant from each other; so to speak, in an unterminated space—rendered infinite by its own confines.⁹

Where the tissue screen blurs the two framing systems into a shadowy, indistinguishable synthesis (the colonial enterprise that sees its other(s) assimilated- consumed and concealed), the surface is no longer the clean white of colonial *tabula rasa* but is etched by the marks and traces of a repressed architecture. It is a move that ‘unveils’, not so much in order to reveal what it hides, as to lay bear the fabric of the veil, to locate within it the working-over that sees its other(s) assimilated, consumed and concealed, that renders the ‘bi-’ of bi-culture as rend, a double cut, that allowed within the white mythology the possibility of cross-section,

of interstitial details, fleeting glimpses that resist a totalising view, a mastering gaze, hints at a crossing or weaving of figures of culture that move past and through each other, like the faulted landscape, shaking each other to the foundations, and contaminating each in a sliding trajectory.

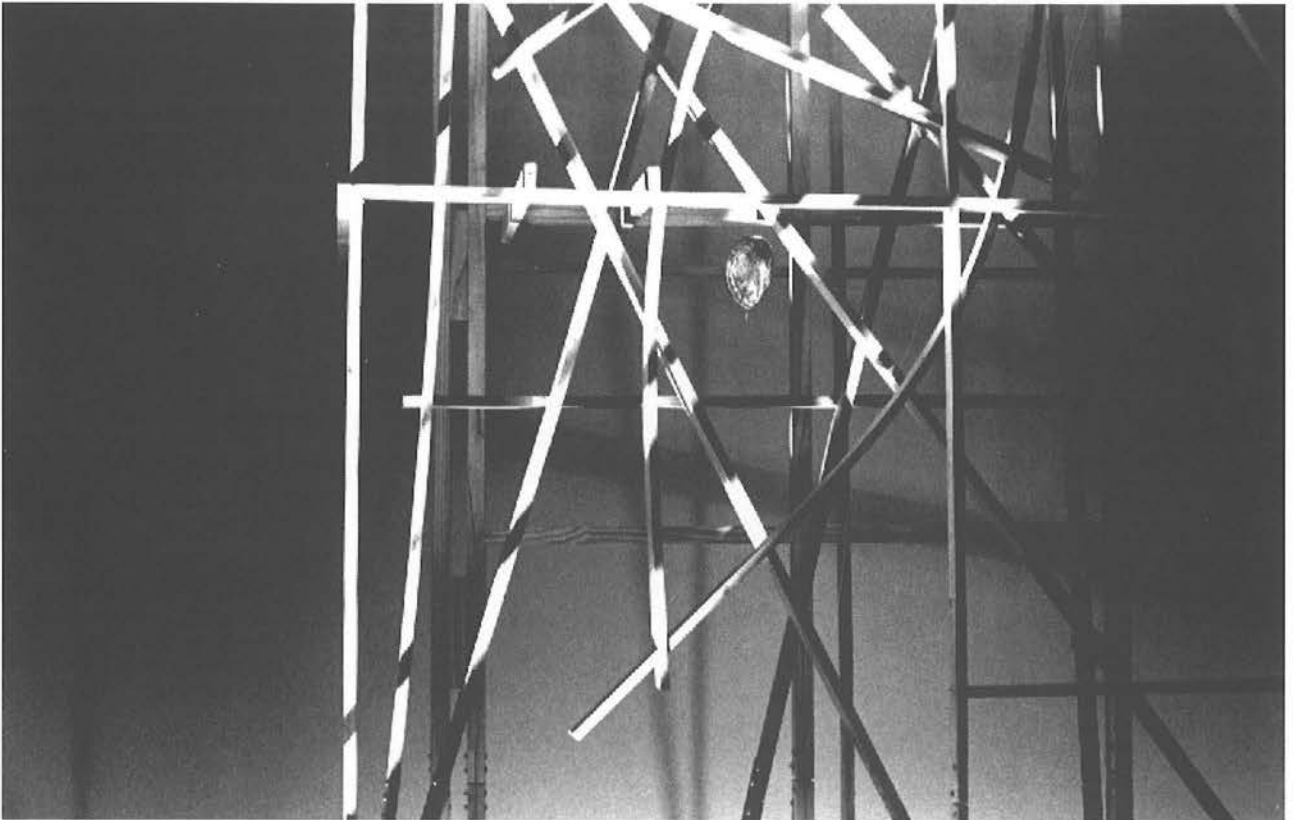
Here, if it is the edge that speaks, it is an edge that, paradoxically, speaks with the authority of an empty centre: an edge too anxious, too edgy, to speak of itself. An edged figure from the edge of the world, it hedges the edge of its site. "Like an intact catastrophe that redeems the accident beyond common sense"¹⁰, it speaks of the enigma of the threshold, of the limit.

Helene Furjan

Notes:

- 1 Massimo Scolari, 'L'ingresso alle Corderie dell'Arsenale', in the catalogue to *Quinta Mostra Internazionale di Architettura*, (Milan, Electa, 1991), p. 40.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Franco Rella, 'The Gaze of the Argonaut', in *Hypnos*, Massimo Scolari, p. 18.
- 5 Ibid., p. 12.
- 6 Scolari, op. cit.
- 7 Rella, op. cit., p. 10.

- 8 Scolari, op. cit.
- 9 Rella, op. cit., p. 14.
- 10 Scolari, op. cit.



*A detail of the Auckland University installation under construction.
(Photo. Chris Adams.)*



Winged Entranceway to the Architectural Exhibition—M. Scolari. (Photo. Chris Adams.)