Venice Biennale and the Canada Pavilion: Politics of Representation in the Gardens of Art

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Valentine Moreno was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where she obtained a BA in Photography, Art and Culture at Senac University. Moreno has worked as a cultural project manager, organizing contemporary art exhibitions, publications, and cultural events in partnership with museums and cultural centres. She was recently selected as the Venice Apprentice, assisting with the installation of the Canada Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale. She has received an M.A. in Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on the relationship between contemporary art practices and the museum institutional space. Moreno currently works at the Art Gallery of Ontario as Campaign Coordinator.

Abstract

Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale is the world’s oldest and arguably most prestigious international art exhibition, gathering artists, curators, and museum and gallery directors from more than one hundred nations to exhibit and discuss contemporary art. Although the Canada pavilion is neither a museum nor a gallery in traditional terms, seminal curatorial and museological practices are in its core. Throughout the years, the Canada pavilion has hosted innumerable exhibitions of several notable Canadian artists under the vision of influential Canadian curators. The pavilion has not only marked the history of Canadian art, but has also functioned as a meaningful encounter point between Canadian and international art - a window through which Canada shows to the world its national artistic and curatorial practices. Considering the significant role of the pavilion in the Canadian art history, this paper examines the pavilion’s impact and relevance to contemporary Canadian art and museology in the international scenery. Through the investigation of the Biennale and the pavilion’s history and development, the study explores issues of governance and management, understanding the pavilion as a national gallery-like structure wrapped in a broader political context. Additionally, the paper analyses the pavilion’s importance not only as window to showcase Canadian art but also national museological practices at an international level.

Introduction

Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale is the world’s oldest and arguably the most prestigious international art exhibition, where artists, curators, and museum and gallery directors from more than one hundred nations gather to exhibit and discuss contemporary art. Currently, thirty countries have permanent buildings in the Giardini Publici - a public garden built in the late eighteenth century (Di Martino, 1995), which has served as the traditional Biennale venue since the event’s foundation. While some countries have their own pavilions, including France, Canada and Russia, others rely on temporary spaces allocated for them by the Biennale’s organization at the Arsenale, the old Venetian navy fort and the second main Biennale venue. In addition, some countries are also assigned to exhibit at scattered places around the island, occupying palazzos (venetian mansions) and warehouses. The Venice Biennale
is considered the “mother” of this type of fashionable international art event (Allen, 2009), which has lately acquired “an hegemonic role in the scope of the western cultural politics” (Vecco, 2002, p. 9). The Venice Biennale is a fine example of a significant art venue that is neither a museum nor a gallery. Nevertheless, and similar to other contemporary art initiatives, such as urban interventions and site-specific temporary installations, the concept of the Biennale continues to carry in its essence seminal museological practices despite occurring outside the museum or gallery physical space, a phenomenon referred by art critic Arthur Danto as the ‘musealization of the public space’ (1998, p. 181).

Considering Danto’s reflection and the socio-political role of the event in the international artistic field, the first part of this study examines the history and development of the Biennale, aiming to investigate the event’s typology based on the establishment of national pavilions and its role on the dynamics of cultural representation. The second part of the paper analyzes the Venice Biennale, and most specifically, the Giardini and its national pavilions, as significant heritage sites and museum-type structures that are not museums in a traditional sense. This section explores the Biennale’s museological and exhibitionary practices, focusing on issues regarding the pavilions’ governance and administration, and most specifically on the case of the Canada pavilion. This pavilion was built in 1958 and it is technically a Canadian structure devoted to the display of Canadian art. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Gallery, who until recently were in charge of maintaining the pavilion, declared in March 2009 that they will no longer absorb the costs to maintain it. Accordingly, this final section attempts to examine the impacts of such a decision and its relevance to the practice of museology and contemporary Canadian art in the international landscape. Finally, the paper analyses the pavilion’s significance not only as window to showcase Canadian art but also its national museological practices.

International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

The origins of the Venice Biennale are tightly connected to the history of Venice itself and the desire to undertake an urban revitalization plan at the end of the eighteenth century, not unlike the manner in which biennales are conceived and implemented today. Having perished under the Napoleonic army in 1797, the lagoon-city ceased to be a wealthy republic and was handed to the Austrian command. At that moment the city lost its longstanding post as one of the most important artistic and commercial European centres and became “a peripheral province from both socio-cultural and economic perspectives” (Vecco, 2002, p. 21). Following eighty years of decadence and resistance movements, the city finally became part of a newly unified Italian monarchic state.

It was only thirty years after joining the unified Italy that the idea of organizing an international art fair was conceived as part of the city’s initiative to re-launch Venice as a cultural centre and recover the city from stagnation (Vecco, 2002). Author Bruce Altshuler (2008) argues it was the success of the many international
industrial exhibitions that occurred throughout the mid 1800s in Europe, and most specifically the Great Exhibition in London, 1851, that led to the implementation of international art exhibitions as a format to promote economic development. Accordingly, in 1893 the Venetian municipal council, which consisted of intellectuals, politicians and the city’s mayor, developed the foundations of the Venice Biennale. The council based their project on the successful experience of the Great Exhibition and the Monaco International Art Fair as a mechanism to boost the local economy at an international level. The council hoped that an international art exhibition would stimulate tourism, commercial trade and expansion of transportation systems.

Interestingly, the Venetian proposal consisted of executing the Biennale in commemoration of the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of King and Queen Umberto I and Margherita di Savoia (Di Martino, 1995; Vecco, 2002; Allen, 2009). Marilena Vecco (2002) asserts that this decision was made in order to enhance the marketing and publicity of the event and its subsequent success. Indeed, Di Martino (1995) states the first Biennale attracted 224,327 visitors, who in a period of six months viewed 516 works by 129 Italian artists and 156 international artists. Moreover, according to the author, the event was extremely successful, having generated profit from entrance fees and the sale of 186 works.

The Giardini Publici (Public Gardens), also known as the Giardini del Castello, a public park built during the Napoleonic occupation, was the site chosen to host the first Biennale and has been its traditional venue ever since. An old building existing in the Giardini was destroyed and reconstructed as the Palazzo dell’Esposizione (exhibition palace), designed by the Italian painter Marius de Maria (Di Martino, 1995). The first five Biennales presented Italian and international artists together at this main central pavilion without divisions or separations (Di Martino, 1995) until Belgium built its own separate pavilion in 1907. According to Di Martino, it was the Biennale itself that encouraged the participating countries to construct their own permanent pavilions as a strategy to simultaneously increase the weight of international representation and considerably decrease the municipal investment in the event. Until then, the Biennale was almost entirely funded by the Venetian municipality, which would absorb all the costs related to the event, including travel expenses of all national and international artists, curators and even artwork transportation. Having national pavilions instead of one single communal space meant that individual countries would be entirely responsible for realizing their own exhibitions. Consequently, with this ingenious move, the city managed to considerably expand the Biennale both in size and in international significance at the same time that it transferred to the participating countries the financial, organizational, and curatorial liabilities of their exhibitionary projects.

Although this shift demanded a considerable financial investment from the participating countries, it actually enabled the very existence of what is possible to precisely identify as “national exhibitionary projects.” Having their own individual physical spaces certainly allowed a curatorial autonomy to the national representations, a characteristic that continues to inform the spirit of the Biennale today. It is through their national pavilions that countries are able to showcase what is
most current and innovative in the arts as well as defining artistic and curatorial movements and trends. For instance, Di Martino (1995) asserts that Pop Art was affirmed as the current artistic trend with the Biennale’s grand award given to Robert Rauschenberg in the 1964 edition, an event that coincided with the death of Giorgio Morandi, symbolically representing the “end of a historic period and the arrival of a new season in contemporary art” (p. 58). National representation through the pavilions became so strong that in 1986 the Biennale’s organization established a prize to specifically award each edition’s best pavilion.

Such curatorial independence, nevertheless, was - and in many senses still is - only available to those countries with the means to bear the burdens of building and maintaining a facility in a foreign country, since the Venetian municipality would grant the land and each country would be responsible for its construction and maintenance (Di Martino, 1995). In fact, the chronology of pavilion-building in the Giardini reveals that the luxury of independent national representation was limited to powerful nations at that time, some of them still powerful today. Hungary, Germany and Great Britain built their pavilions in 1909, followed by France and Sweden in 1912, Russia in 1914, Spain in 1922 and the United States in 1930. These constructions initiated what author Jennifer Allen (2009) refers as “the drive to colonize the Giardini, a.k.a. the international arts race” (p. 8). Such statement could not have been more appropriate considering that practically the entire planet was either colonized, politically or economically dominated, or somehow oppressed by some of the countries mentioned above. Here, I am referring to Great Britain, Spain, Germany, France, and the United States, which were among the first nations to build their national pavilions. Consequently, their hegemony was not confined to the political and economic realms, since their influential participation in the Biennale rendered numerous first prizes to these countries. In this sense, “colonizing the Giardini” can be viewed as a symbolic extension of actual colonial and imperial practices of these countries in the political, economic and social ambits. Having a pavilion at the Venice Biennale assured powerful and dominating positions to those countries also in the field of arts, emblematically reaffirming their same positions in the global scenario.

Accordingly, it is possible to assert that the supremacy these countries exert in the world is reflected in the history of artistic representation within the scope of the Biennale. The politics of representation through an exhibition typology of national pavilions, however, entails the limited participation or even exclusion of other nations. Those countries were required to exhibit all together in the Palazzo dell’Esposizione, a fact that makes it difficult for those countries to develop and define their own national exhibitionary projects. Moreover, the participation of less powerful nations in the Biennale was rather minimal and sporadic, and intensified only in the second half of the twentieth century, in contrast to the frequent and long-term participation of the powerful states. For instance, with the sole exception of the United States, countries with a colonial past were only able to install pavilions after the mid-1950s, Venezuela being the first in 1956, Canada in 1958, Uruguay in 1960 and Brazil in 1964. Yet, the existence of most of these pavilions was only possible due to political treaties and other arrangements, such as the case of the Canada Pavilion, which was built by the
Italian government as part of Italy’s WWII reparations to Canada. Similarly, the Biennale granted its storage building to the Uruguayan government to function as its pavilion. In both of these cases, the Canadian and Uruguayan governments did not have to invest in the construction of their pavilions, enabling them to achieve a more solid national representation through a web of political, international diplomatic relations surrounding the world of art.

It is possible to assert that having a permanent pavilion at the Biennale would symbolically reaffirm and strengthen a country’s national and cultural identity within the symbolic scope of the art world. The Israel pavilion could be cited as one of the buildings that best embodies this idea. Israel was founded as a country in 1950 and constructed its pavilion in 1952, only two years later. It has been participating steadily in the Biennale since then. This fact suggests that having a pavilion in the most prestigious international art exhibition would be part of the nation’s larger actions to reassure its legitimacy as a country amid its unstable and controversial political situation. In contrast, a Palestine representation only happened once, in 2003 at the Biennale’s fiftieth edition, when two Palestinian curators that were already living in Italy were called to organize an exhibition on the subjects of Palestinian identity. The original ideal of the then Biennale’s Curator Francesco Bonami, of having a proper Palestine Pavilion, even if only a temporary one, was highly criticized. In the end, it was vetoed by the Italian government under the justification that the “state-financed Biennale is subject to ‘certain foreign-policy regulations’ - notably, that pavilions can represent only those countries officially recognized by Rome” (Hawthorne, 2003).

Another example is the case of the Romani people (Gypsies), who managed to participate only in the fifty-second edition in 2007 through the establishment of the culturally-diverse Roma Pavilion, which was canceled from this year’s edition only a couple of months prior to the Biennale’s opening due to political conflicts between the group and the Italian government.

Attesting to the Biennale’s regulation by foreign diplomacy reveals that the event’s typology as an international art exhibition is validated through political relations rather than through cultural and artistic ones, a system that consequently marginalizes and obliterates artistic representation of most developing countries as well of those of cultural groups and minorities that are not organized into nation-states. Moreover, this assertion is reinforced by the fact that governments themselves - usually through their foreign affairs departments, sometimes assisted by their cultural arms - own and administer the national pavilions. Such a situation imposes a series of ideological restraints on artistic and curatorial projects, considering that political and cultural agendas and priorities may not always coincide. As a result, several issues regarding governance and maintenance of the pavilions are introduced, including problems with funding and curatorial project organization, as the second part of this paper explores.

At this point, I would like to argue that it was precisely the pressure to open up space to a larger number of participating countries that led the Biennale to physically expand beyond the perimeter of the Giardini. In its forty-eighth edition in
1999, the Venice Biennale commenced a restoration program of the Arsenale, the old Venetian naval port, in order to establish new areas to accommodate part of the main exhibition as well as temporary national pavilions. Those, however, are not technically pavilions, consisting more of a dedicated room or space within a larger building. In addition to spaces in the Arsenale, which today is considered the Biennale’s second main venue, other participating countries are hosted in scattered places around Venice, such as palazzos, former churches, or warehouses to be used as temporary pavilions. Although this gesture increased the number of participating nations, the new countries are assigned off-site spaces usually not included in the touristic itinerary, besides consisting of spaces whose structures present innumerable challenges to the exhibition of art. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the public attendance of these off-site venues is small compared to the attendance of the Giardini, where all the official celebrations, including the event’s opening and VIP preview take place.

Finally, according to the official Biennale’s website, the current edition had seventy-seven national representations, the largest international involvement so far. Despite this evident increase, and the addition of recently formed or reorganized nations such as Estonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than two thirds of the total amount of existing countries are currently without representation, including most African, South American, and Asian countries, transforming the Biennale into an “imperfect United Nations for the art world” (Hawthorne, 2003).

**Canada Pavilion – orphan structure in the gardens of art**

As earlier noted, the Venice Biennale exhibition’s structure arranged by national pavilions creates uneasy relations between political and cultural interests, imposing a series of difficulties on the realization of the artistic and cultural projects. This section reflects upon the museological problematics regarding governance and maintenance of the pavilions, specifically focusing on the case of Canada’s pavilion. Although neither the Biennale nor the pavilions are considered museums in the traditional sense, I argue that seminal museological practices of management and exhibition-making are integral to their essence.

Executing an exhibition for the Venice Biennale is not much different from developing an exhibition for an art gallery or a museum. Just to mention a few similarities, artists and curators are selected; fundraising actions are taken, project planning and budgets are developed and managed, artwork is chosen, borrowed, insured and transported; the physical space is properly prepared to receive the exhibition; lights are adjusted; didactics including labels and text panels are developed; brochures and catalogues are published; press-previews and opening events are organized, gallery attendants are hired and supervised, and finally, everything has to be de-installed and transported back after the Biennale closes. In addition, most projects are usually executed by cultural institutions such as galleries (private or public) and museums, further enhancing the museological aspects of the project. Interestingly, despite these many parallels, the venues
themselves - the pavilions, which vary in size and architectural style (Bradshaw, 2009) - are mostly owned by the countries’ governments and not by the executing bodies. Nevertheless, if at one point in history governments invested in the construction of the pavilions for prestige and international relations, nowadays, governments world-wide have been drastically reducing cultural matters from their agendas and consequently from their budgets. As a result, the fact that the governments own the pavilion does not automatically imply that they have been providing the buildings with proper care and maintenance. Several pavilions are struggling with these circumstances, including the Canada pavilion. In such an awkward situation, what governing body is responsible for the pavilion? Who pays the electric bill? Who fixes the roof when it leaks? In the case of the Canada pavilion, none of these questions have a clear answer.

Canada has been participating at the Venice Biennale as a national representation since 1952, under the auspices of the National Gallery. Up to 1956 the country exhibited with the other non-owning pavilion nations at the Palazzo dell’Esposizione, but in 1958 the Italian government not only granted the land at the Giardini but actually built Canada a pavilion as part of Italy’s WWII reparations to Canada. According to Jachec (2007) Italy was among the countries most devoted to the promotion of cultural unification after WWII, spending greater sums on “fine art exchange than any other country” (p. 18). Moreover, considering the Biennale’s international prestige and the political intricacy that has governed the event since its foundation, the Biennale was perfectly suited to support the Italian government’s commitment to culturally reconnect a democratic Italy with the world in the post-WWII scenario (Jachec, 2007). Such arguments may be helpful to understand the growth of the Biennale in the fifties, as well as its efforts in facilitating the construction of pavilions in the Giardini, such as Canada’s. Unfortunately, the lack of sources regarding the circumstances surrounding the terms and transactions of the Canada pavilion’s construction prevents the possibility of a more accurate analysis of the pavilion’s origin.

Despite the haze surrounding the pavilion’s origin two characteristics uniquely define the building. The first is its distinguished architectural style. Designed by the renowned Milanese architecture firm BBPR, the small pavilion consists of an approximately two hundred and ten square meters structure made of red bricks, steel, glass and wood, forming a spiral shape resembling a snail’s shell (Bradshaw, 2009). The building encapsulates a living tree that stands practically in the middle of the pavilion. One of the most intriguing buildings in the Giardini, the pavilion, nevertheless, is not well suited to the display of art, as many artists and curators have stated throughout the years (Godmer, 2003; Fischer, 2009; Bradshaw, 2009). Its intricate shape creates a difficult space to work with, and its precarious physical condition, including frequent leaks, rotting wood, and structural corrosion, introduces further challenges (Bradshaw, 2009). Journalist Peter Goddard (2009) asserts that the inhospitality of the building is notorious, and he even proposes to tear down the structure as an artistic performance (p. 10). The second defining characteristic is the actual location of the
pavilion inside the Giardini. Interestingly, the pavilion was built in a cul-de-sac right between the British, the French, and the German pavilions, three of the most influential countries in world history as well as in the history of the Biennale itself, and obviously, in Canadian history. Although it stands out for its different style, the Canada pavilion is dwarfed by the imposing neo-classic structure of its neighbors, transforming the pavilion’s locality next to those of its two former colonizers into a bittersweet symbolic irony. If on the one hand Canada gained its independency as a country and won the prestigious and coveted right to have its own permanent pavilion in the Giardini, the juxtaposition of these pavilions metaphorically suggests that Canada will always be subjected to its colonial past, eternally searching for its own cultural identity amid those of its past founders.

These comparisons surpass the architectural realm and extend into the managerial sphere of these pavilions, specifically those of the French and the British. These two countries have a clear policy and mechanisms in place in order to care for and manage their pavilions, understanding them as an important aspect of their cultural activities in the international artistic field. They have each established a foundation exclusively dedicated to fundraising and administering the operational aspects of the pavilions (Bradshaw, 2009), leaving the curators and artists free to dedicate themselves to the development of their artistic project. In contrast, although Canada has been participating steadily in the Biennale since its pavilion’s foundation, the lack of clear pavilion governance and administration has been a problem since the beginning, and one that has been growing in severity throughout the years.

When the pavilion was constructed, it was immediately handed over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Gallery. Both organizations have been responsible for the pavilion ever since, although it is not clear which organ has legal ownership. Until 1986, Canada’s representation at the Biennale was exclusively organized by the National Gallery, meaning that besides providing funds for the pavilion’s maintenance, the institution also took care of the curatorial projects, which were developed by in-house curators (Bradshaw, 2009). In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade provided funding through Promart, the government’s cultural relations program. Finally, both institutions maintained a local coordinator responsible for the general pavilion’s maintenance. In 1988, a different model was proposed which allowed the participation of different institutions across the nation. The National Gallery partnered with the Canada Council for the Arts to transform the participation in the Venice Biennale into a nation-wide competition in which project proposals were submitted by the institutions and biannually selected by a peer-reviewed committee. According to Barbara Fischer, curator of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and the commissioner of the 2009 Biennale Canadian project, such a shift was highly positive for it enabled the participation of small and mid-size institutions from all Canadian regions, providing a richer and more diverse display of Canadian art in the international cultural setting (Fischer, 2009, in unpublished interview).
Nonetheless, if on the one hand the de-centralization of the Canadian Biennale projects promoted some sort of regional equality in artistic representation, on the other hand, it imposed on the selected institutions a heavy financial and administrative burden that was previously shouldered by the National Gallery. According to Fischer, this shift meant that nearly all pavilions’ costs were automatically transferred to the selected institution, including operational costs such as electricity and water bills, security, insurance, cleaning and salary of gallery attendants. All those expenses were added on top of the costs of realizing the exhibition itself (for instance, artist fees, artwork, staff transportation and accommodation, materials and tools). The National Gallery still provided the on-site coordinator with a salary, but it was relieved of the costs of services and materials. In other words, the new model suggests that the selected institution has to virtually maintain a second facility in addition to its own for the period of the project. Considering that institutions are struggling enough to maintain their own operations in Canada, a system that practically doubles their operational expenses and efforts cannot be functional or sustainable. As a consequence, the already understaffed and underfinanced institutions have to “hustle” in order to generate funds to ensure the realization of the exhibition, to the point of having the artists themselves selling their work with the specific objective of financing the project (Bradshaw, 2009), when in reality they should be paid to represent the country abroad. In addition, the intense fundraising needs and maintenance costs have become so demanding that commissioners and curators have to spend more time and effort on these activities than they do actually working on the curatorial project. Fischer stated that she spent seventy percent of her time fundraising instead of preparing the project itself (as cited in Bradshaw, 2009 p. 4). Therefore, without proper support, representing Canada at the Venice Biennale has become a burden rather than an enjoyable and constructive cultural and artistic exchange.

To worsen the circumstances, the current Conservative government announced in March 2009 the termination of Promart, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ cultural relations program (Bradshaw, 2009; Fisher, 2009 in unpublished interview). The National Gallery followed the Ministry and also declared its withdrawal from the Biennale, leaving the pavilion solely in the hands of the Canada Council for the Arts and the rotating selected institutions. These decisions were announced in March, only three months before the official opening of the 2009 Biennale. As government funding “has not met Canada’s need for some time” (Fischer, as cited in Bradshaw, 2009 p. 4) this news means that the issues the next commissioning team will face will be even greater than the ones already threatening a successful Canadian performance at the Biennale. On the other hand, having the Ministry of Foreign Affairs out of the picture could finally represent the divorce of politics and art affairs in the scope of the Biennale, which could yield a healthier environment for the display of Canadian art abroad. This, however, could only happen if some other responsible body comes forward to cover the empty spot left by the Ministry and the National Gallery. Fischer
suggests (as cited in Bradshaw, 2009 p.4) that the best option would be to follow the British and French models and establish a foundation to take proper care of the pavilion. On her viewpoint (2009, in unpublished interview), the Canada Council would continue to manage the entries and the peer-reviewed project selection, while the foundation would develop the fundraising actions, provide a budget for the projects and manage the pavilion’s operational side.

Another issue pointed out by Fischer (2009, in unpublished interview) is the lack of continuity from one project to the next. Because there is no governing body that centralizes administrative tasks, every two years the selected institution has to re-do the work that was already developed by the previous commissioning team, such as elaborating a list of key Italian and international arts professionals, official authorities and supporters; discovering the best suppliers on-site; recruiting and organizing foreign ushers and volunteers; dealing with the difficult transportation logistics in a city with no roads; and contracting staff to work abroad, just to mention a few items. According to Fischer, all those tasks are performed biannually and yet, the know-how needed to execute them is gained through “rough” experience and immediately lost after the end of each Biennale’s e because there is no place, physical or otherwise, in which this knowledge could be deposited, and serve as an insightful resource for the next commissioning team.

Although not a museum, the pavilion officially represents not only the work of the Canadian artists, but also the work of the Canadian museums and galleries that are responsible for commissioning the projects. In this sense, it is through the Canada pavilion that every two years artists, critics, curators, journalists, dealers, donors, collectors and museum directors are exposed to what is most contemporary in Canadian art and exhibition-making. Understanding this intrinsic relationship, Fischer did not measure efforts to transform the peculiar and problematic Canada pavilion into a proper contemporary art gallery. Fischer’s project for the Canada pavilion, Cold Morning, consisted of showing four recent works by internationally acclaimed Canadian filmmaker Mark Lewis, including a new film specially commissioned for the Biennale. Aiming to provide basic infrastructure to the exhibition of new-media art in a proper and safe environment for visitors and workers, Fischer incorporated extensive architectural adaptations into the project, which included replacing part of the pavilion glass wall, expanding the main gate to allow better people-flow, building an emergency exit (previously nonexistent), building movable temporary walls and cabinets, installing an air conditioning system and most importantly, building a reception area to better attend to the needs of visitors as well as those of the pavilion itself. Yet, despite her efforts, some structural problems (such as the lack of storage space and a bathroom) cannot be solved without a vast and long-term renovation, an endeavor that can only happen after the more pressing issues of governance and administration are solved.
Canada Pavilion - Encounter point

Despite the problematic issues regarding Canada pavilion’s governance and its physical structure, the building has been host to numerous exhibitions of notable Canadian artists spanning from Emily Carr to Michael Snow, Gershon Iskowitz, General Idea, David Altmejd and Mark Lewis, under the vision of influential Canadian curators, such as Alan Jarvis, R.H Hubbard, Jessica Bradley, Philip Monk and most recently, Barbara Fischer. In this sense, the pavilion has not only marked the history of Canadian art, but has also functioned as a meaningful encounter point between Canadian and international art - a window through which Canada shows the world its national artistic and curatorial practice. Understanding and treating the pavilion as a fundamental Canadian gallery-like structure abroad may shed light on its significance to both the development and display of Canadian art history and its related museological work. Finally, a more critical and open debate involving the pavilion’s stakeholders should be promoted in order to define whether the solution is either to destroy the pavilion, establish a foundation, or to take a still not defined road. As a temporary solution, the National Gallery announced in mid 2010 that it was reclaiming the Canada Pavilion for the next representation, meaning that there will not be an open competition to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale in 2011. This action brings in itself another set of problematic issues, most importantly the elimination of a nation-wide peer-reviewed process. Since this is an ongoing discussion, it will be interesting to observe the next steps Canada will take in order to ensure its national pavilion in Venice as an integral and essential part of its cultural heritage.

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