

# France, Rise Up

As the highlight of the year for architects, the Venice Architecture Biennale is long-awaited both for the update it gives of the state of affairs of international architecture and for emphasizing particular facets of the profession as chosen by the curator. After Rem Koolhaas' "Fundamentals", we'll have Alejandro Aravena's "Reporting from the Front" from May 28th to November 27th, 2016. Those who saw a backward-looking and cynical viewpoint in 2014 will probably be more reassured this year. With the Chilean architect, we head to the frontlines, since the spotlight will be on architecture that succeeds in improving the living environment through a collaborative process, despite increasingly limited resources. The 2016 Biennale is as forward-looking as it is optimistic.

To illustrate his vision of a promising future, the Elemental founder has invited South-American, Portuguese, and Spanish colleagues, but also Germans, Polish and Iranians. And what about the French? With the exception of the national pavilion entrusted in 2016 to Frédéric Bonnet and to the AJAP14 collective, only one office – LAN (Umberto Napolitano and Benoît Jallon) – has been called upon to represent France at the central Biennale exhibition. This is one French office out of the 88 taking part. On this subject, the Curator of the Biennale has admitted his poor knowledge of the French territory. Nonetheless, this is still a disturbing situation. Left by the wayside, are French architects disdained as much as they are misunderstood? Admittedly, the profession has difficulty in defending its interests; an increasing number of architects have to battle with their own contractors to guarantee the quality of the projects, even within the framework of public procurement! According to the National Order of Architects Board (CNOA – Conseil national de l'ordre des architectes), this public sector is threatened in its very principle, particularly in the way alternative commissions are accessed, such as the "Réinventer Paris" call for innovative projects. Admittedly, in France, a victim mentality can sometimes prevail over a display of solidarity. However, the contemporary French architectural scene is as creative as it is revolted. Foreign observers tend to agree, including those invited by AA to contribute to the following pages. In the shadows of the Canopée des Halles, an army of creators designs and builds projects worthy of inclusion in a forward-looking biennial. From Marseille to Lille, from Nantes to Strasbourg, from Bordeaux to Paris, but also in Caen, Cornebarrieu and Châlons-en-Champagne, the French exception prospers, and its influence extends well beyond the borders of France.

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