



Venice Biennale 2012: The Piranesi Variations / Peter Eisenman

By Karissa Rosenfield

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Field of Dreams / Ohio State University Knowlton School of Architecture © Nico Saieh

Inspired by the 13th International Architecture Exhibition's theme *Common Ground*, Peter Eisenman has formed a team to revisit, examine and reimagine Giovanni Battista Piranesi's 1762 folio collection of etchings, *Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*. Derived from years of fieldwork spent measuring the remains of ancient Roman buildings, these six etchings depict Piranesi's fantastical vision of what ancient Rome might have looked like and represent a landmark in the shift from a traditionalist, antiquarian view of history to the scientific, archaeological view.

Eisenman's team consists of Eisenman Architects, students from Yale University, Jeffrey Kipnis with his colleagues and students of the Ohio State University, and Belgian architecture practice, Dogma. Each group has contributed a response to Piranesi's work through models and drawings that stimulate discourse on contemporary architecture. In particular, they explore architecture's relationship to the ground and the political, social, and philosophical consequences that develop from that relationship.



The Project of Campo Marzio / Yale University School of Architecture © Nico Saieh

Described as “precise, specific, yet impossible”, Piranesi’s images have been a source of speculation, inspiration, research and contention for architects, urban designers and scholars since their publication 250 years ago.



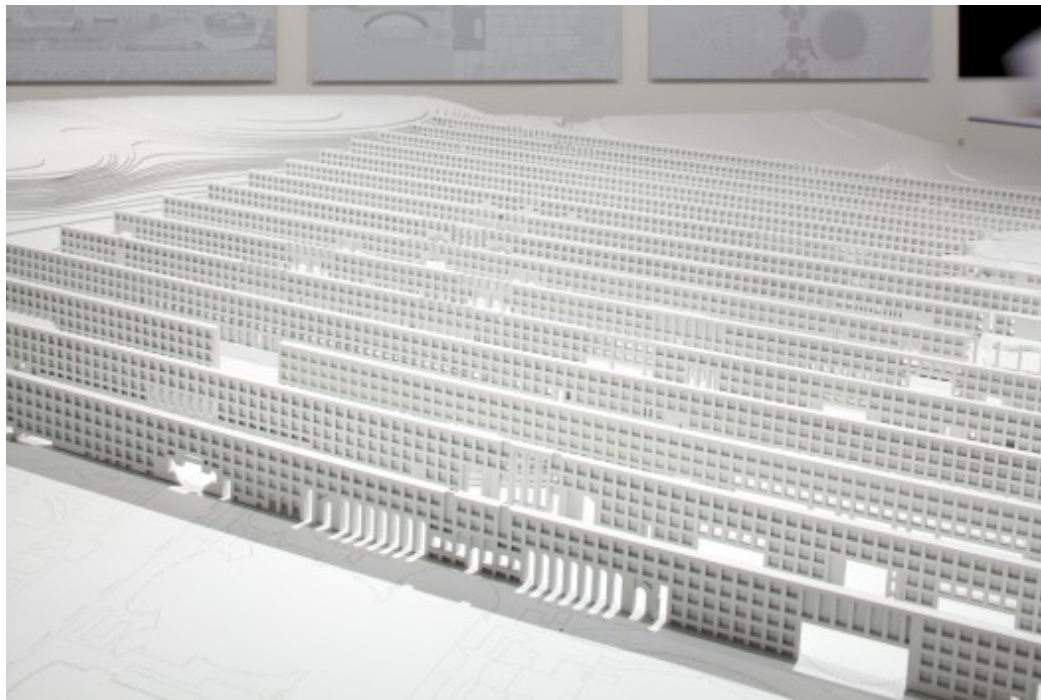
Field of Dreams / Ohio State University Knowlton School of Architecture © Nico Saieh

Yale University's *The Project of Campo Marzio* gives form to Piranesi's original plans, treating them not as archaeological reconstruction's of ancient Rome, but as an "architectural experiment".



A Field of Diagrams / Eisenman Architects © Nico Saieh

Eisenman's *A Field of Diagrams* transforms Piranesi's compositional aesthetics into a palimpsest of the spatial and temporal qualities between Imperial Rome and today.



Field of Walls / Dogma © Nico Saieh

Dogma's *A Field of Walls* explores how the politics embedded in the etchings are not a function of forms but of walls, and as such provides a guide for contemporary architect to reconsider the power of relations its deploys.



The Project of Campo Marzio / Yale University School of Architecture © Nico Saieh

A Field of Dreams, created by Kipnis' Ohio State University team, reanimates the passions, perversions and spectacles of ancient Rome as a morality play for contemporary architecture.



A Field of Diagrams / Eisenman Architects © Nico Saieh

Piranesi and the *Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*
Text provided by Yale Arts.

Engraver, mapmaker, and architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778), a native of Venice, spent much of his adult life in Rome, a city that captured his imagination and contributed to his most influential work. The etchings in the Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma—a time-bending, imaginary rendition of the ancient city—along with his additional studies of Roman ruins and remains, represent a landmark in the shift during the Enlightenment from a traditional antiquarian view of history to a scientific, archaeological one.

Indeed, for Piranesi, archaeological ruins were not part of history, but of a present that he could recombine and reconfigure, thereby turning the “truth” of mapmaking on its head. In the Campo Marzio etchings, for example, only the Pantheon remains at its original site, with other Roman landmarks relocated.

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