Graduate Workshop on Digital Tools for Art Historians: The Visualizing Venice Summer Program "The Biennale and the City"

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The Wired! group at Duke University[1] was created in 2009 with a commitment to teaching and training scholars and students with the digital visualization and storytelling technologies appropriate for the study of art, architecture, and urbanism. Our primary goal has been generate baseline competence and digital confidence, building an understanding of the scholarly, teaching and public outreach capacities of digital tools, and enabling art historians to engage in productive collaborations and conversations with other disciplines, including computer scientists and engineers. We envision and work towards a future where scholars in Art History and Visual Studies can not only create maps, models, and displays that narrate research questions, but also have enough knowledge to join with urban history and art museums in developing interactive displays that can engage the public in a more meaningful experience.

We realized almost immediately in 2009, however, that most Art History Departments are neither equipped to support technical training, nor able (or even willing) to integrate emerging technologies with teaching and research. Most humanist scholars in universities, research centers or museums have difficulty identifying which technologies are most appropriate for art historical questions; there is little access to expertise or to laboratories with the requisite software. To address this challenge, and with the fervor of recent converts, we started offering two-week summer workshops in 2009 that present participants with a "buffet menu" of low-cost or free and open-source digital tools and a forum for discussing each tool's relevance for the practice of art and architectural

historical research. The birth of Visualizing Venice in 2010,[2] initiated a collaboration with colleagues at the Architectural University of Venice (IUAV), the Engineering Department at the University of Padua, and Venice International University (VIU) to create a digital laboratory for on-site training that focuses on the history of art, architecture and urbanism in Venice. Workshop topics have included the cistern system (2012), the Ghetto (2013), The City and the Lagoon (2014), and The Biennale (2015). The participants integrate the collection of on-site research data (for example, scanning, 3D modeling, geo-referencing and archival information) into multimedia presentations. It has always been an important principle of our approach to show how multiple technologies can be combined (for example, video editing with photogrammetric 3D models) to address research questions and generate effective presentations for public outreach.

One of the most significant outcomes of our on-going work has been the realization that modeling and mapping can engage art historians in broadly-framed studies of systems that exist in dynamic relationships to each other. The type of new questions that emerged from this approach were powerfully visible in 2012 in our workshop on mapping and modeling the Venetian cistern system and its implications for urban and architectural planning, and the workshop on the City and the Lagoon (2014). The latter has been developed into a spectacular exhibit created by the Visualizing Venice consortium and curated by Donatella Calabi inaugurated on September 26th, 2015, at the Palazzo Ducale in Venice.[3]

As is often the case with new enterprises, funding has been a challenge. VIU worked with us to create our Venice laboratory and covered the expenses of hardware and software. Starting in 2012 the Gladys K. Delmas Foundation supported the cost of tuition. In 2015 a grant provided by the Getty Foundation covered the expenses of travel and residency in Venice for participants and faculty. The new support from the Getty Foundation has transformed our program, enabling participants to come from long distances (China, Australia, Mexico) and shorter ones (Poland, Slovakia, Germany, France and Italy itself) to join the workshop, greatly enhancing both the quality and number of applicants and participants.

Notes

1 http://www.dukewired.org/
2 http://www.visualizingvenice.org/
3 http://palazzoducale.visitmuve.it/it/mostre/mostre-in-corso/mostra-acqua-e-cibo/2015/04/7052/storie-della-laguna-e-della-citta/
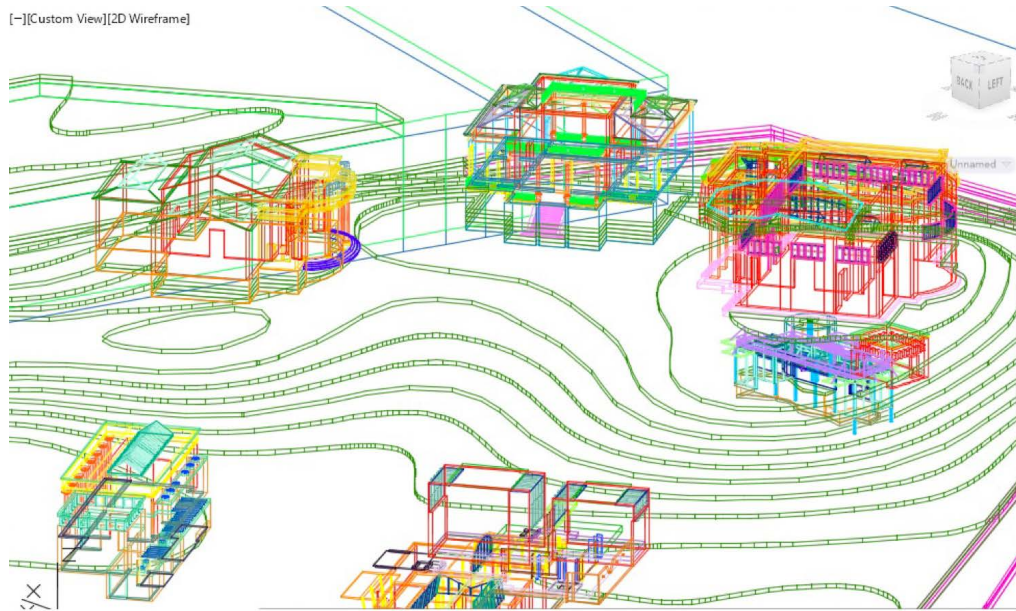
Fig. 1: Image of Biennale Pavilions by Mirka Dalla Libera, IUAV