

# LIVING WITH WATER

L'Empordà against rising waters

Anna Maria Bordas Geli  
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L'Empordà against the rising water

Anna Maria Bordas

Miquel Peiro

This book is dedicated to Marianna de Ciurana, grandmother and wonderful woman who left us in June 2022. She taught us, more than anyone, to know and love Empordà.

Aquest llibre està dedicat a Marianna de Ciurana, àvia i dona meravellosa que ens va deixar el juny del 2022. Ella ens va ensenyar, més que ningú, a conèixer i estimar l'Empordà.

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## Préface

# The responsible experimentation

## Climate changes and architectural design

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For over twenty years Wave, the great ‘workshop made of workshops’ organized every summer at the Università Iuav di Venezia, has represented one of the most lively and significant experiences of making and teaching architecture in the contemporary world. The characters of this extraordinary event of collective work are considerable in size and variety: more than a thousand students each year involved, almost thirty thousand in this long journey; between twenty and thirty teaching groups for each edition, with more than 500 architects arriving in recent years from all over the world, and among them as many as three Pritzker prizes, but also many young and promising studios, such as that of Anna Maria Bordas and Miquel Peiro. Wave, in this sense, has been and continues to be a moment of training not only for students, but also for the new generations of architects who will build the world of the near future, through mutual acquaintance, exchange among multiple approaches and networking among related sensibilities. Iuav opens up to the world to discover different and sometimes surprising places and ways of working.

And then there is the particular teaching mode, based on an experimental form of intensive design workshop, focused on a shared theme, but articulated in several parallel ateliers. The continuous confrontation, which is practiced systematically between workshop activities and evening events, is a fundamental condition of the Wave format, which is at the same time strongly ‘authorial,’ that is, linked to the freedom of interpretation that each teacher can enact in his or her own atelier, but also decidedly collective, where the open doors of the various classrooms invite the ‘great spectacle’ of work in progress. Even the ‘strange’ duration of three weeks, rather atypical compared to a majority of much shorter workshops, contributes to determining a condition of special ‘familiarity’ among the participants: that long time, so difficult to carve out from each one’s academic and professional activities – and this Anna Maria Bordas and Miquel Peiro experienced firsthand –, is such as to allow for a maturation and deepening paper of the design paths, without losing the experience of the accelerated times typical of professional practice, stimulating individual creativity and expressive abilities in a context of particular dynamism.

Freedom, exploration, even utopian dimensions, are conditions that during Wave are continually measured against the possibility of performing more circumstantial insights, of looking carefully at certain contexts, of testing ideas against real conditions. In this delicate balance lies the work that Anna Maria and Miquel conducted with students for Wave 2023.

The year’s theme, organized in collaboration with the first Biennale della Sostenibilità The Mose Era, was entitled Waves, with a term that played on a double meaning. On the one hand it told of the new guise taken on by Wave with the 2023 edition: no longer a series of workshops dedicated to architectural design, but a new experimental dimension that was enriched by the involvement of other ‘project cultures,’ from the arts to design, from communication to fashion. The aim was to explore an interdisciplinarity often recalled as the only possible way to find

new and more complex answers to the new and more complex challenges of contemporaneity. And so architects found themselves working in parallel with exhibit, graphic, fashion, visual, and sound designers. Such a condition, which at first might have seemed destabilizing, actually proved to be a great reservoir, a kind of lagoon between land, fresh, and salt water, where attitudes, tools, and foreshadowing skills mingled, enriching each other.

The general context in which Wave 2023 was set, the Biennale della Sostenibilità The Mose Era, did not ask for immediate solutions, but proposed to open the debate on an issue with which we will have to – perhaps better, we already have to – come to terms if we want to imagine a future that is looming ever closer. The big workshop proposed to start this journey from the example of Venice, from its ability to still be, or return to being, not only the fascinating and unique place in the world, but also and above all an example and a model. It was about reviving the anticipatory capacity of a city in which problems that reverberate on a global scale are presented in a small way, in the microcosm of the lagoon laboratory. The long affair of the Mose, the system of movable sluice gates to avoid recurring high waters, teaches that bold experiments are not only possible, but necessary for the long-term preservation of a fragile environment. And to do this, technological solutions are not enough: it is necessary, as architects, planners and designers of a broad spectrum, to return to building scenarios, to return to working on imaginaries, without passively suffering the burden of an announced tragedy.

Looking at the Mose and the Venice Lagoon, Wave 2023 then wanted to try to anticipate urgencies and needs that will characterize the design work of the coming years. Climate change transforms hitherto ‘stable’ lagoons into changing, hybrid and amphibious territories with unclear edges and spaces in search of definition. Roses Bay will experience similar situations to Venice in the years to come and will have to resort to imaginative and design efforts to delineate a different but still positive future. Knowledge of specific places, limitations and opportunities is certainly the first step in the journey ahead, but it also requires an effort of confrontation, which helps to reread local issues within a framework that is now inevitably global. And the project effort carried out during Wave 2023 by Anna Maria Bordas and Miquel Peiro, together with their proactive students, possessed these characteristics: this work is for sure the first wisp of a long, difficult, but undoubtedly necessary dialogue.

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