

PRESS RELEASE

National Pavilion of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Futura bold? Post-City: considering the Luxembourg case

Venice. Summer. Hot and crowded, as usual.

She, 32, sits on a terrace drinking her morning coffee. Today she plans to visit the Giardini pavilions. It's her fourth Biennale of Architecture. As usual, before undertaking this cultural journey, she wants to disconnect herself from the architectural microcosm by reading the papers in a quiet street near the Palazzo Grassi. For some months now, the headlines have been about the European crisis. Today it's similar, yet more dramatic: "*The End of Europe?*" is written in bold letters all over the page.

By the way, she's a German architect. She lives in Brussels, running a small architectural practice with her French boyfriend. For some time now, the couple has been encountering problems. Their practice is not as successful as they imagined, "*cos of the crisis*", he says.

She's bored and alone. She doesn't have the courage anymore to visit the Giardini. Too hot, too far, too crowded. She remembers that, some years ago, a friend had visited a pavilion situated in an old and beautiful apartment near Accademia, she can't remember which country the exhibit was about, but she decides to try looking for what he called "*a charming and peaceful place*".

Luxembourg Pavilion, "*Futura bold?*" is written on the entrance door. The place looks like she imagined, calm and timeless. Ironically, the title reminds her of the papers' headlines over the last few months. Inside the narrow entrance hall, five names are displayed: Schengen, Belval, Berchem, Kirchberg and Ingeldorf.

She remembers an argument with her boyfriend while filling up with petrol at the Berchem service station coming back home from Brussels. She knows Schengen from the airports. Kirchberg is a familiar name, too: CECA, the Group of Six, the Treaty of Paris . . . she learned all that at school.

She enters the exhibition: each of the five ornamented rooms, with moulded ceilings and wooden floors, is displaying a delicate white structure enclosing a forest-like display of plants. At second glance, she recognizes small houses, office buildings and factories made out of white plaster. Carefully adjusted, the addition of building typologies expresses at once something hypnotic and sculptural.

Captured by this sense of abstract detail, she starts to imagine scenarios of living in this strip of in-between, of hyper-city . . . Intrigued, she grasps the exhibition book and starts to read:

This happened in Paris, on the night of the 23rd of July 1952 where, at three in the morning and after long discussions on the Treaty of Paris, we heard the voice of Joseph Bech (Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg), which seemed hitherto to be snoozing: "I propose that we immediately start working in Luxembourg; this would give us time to think about what to do next". Everyone was relieved, and this is how the CECA got their precarious headquarters in this small town, which has become a crossroads for Europe".

Jean Monnet