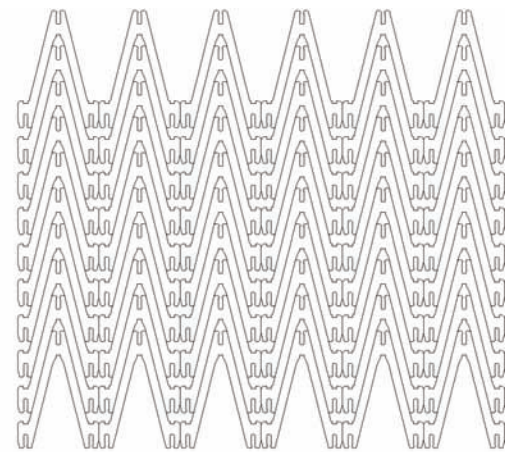


LIFE IN VENICE

Beckoning and recoiling, breathing and swallowing, Philip Beesley's Hylozoic Ground, installed at the Venice Architecture Biennale, reveals a future when building envelopes will push the limits of artificial life

BY TERRI PETERS PORTRAIT BY LORNE BRIDGMAN

PROPERTY OF AZURE MAGAZINE



L

t's late June, the week before architect Philip Beesley has to pack up and ship the thousands of pieces that make up Hylozoic Ground for the laborious process of assembly. His project, now installed in the Canadian pavilion at the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale, has both poetic and practical intentions. On the poetic side, it aims for a state of intense sensitivity; as a practical venture, it pioneers futuristic concepts for responsive, self-renewing and self-maintaining

building envelopes. Beesley has been experimenting with these ideas since 2007, installing iterations of his Hylozoic series in galleries around the world. Earlier this year, versions were mounted in Quebec City and Mexico City, and

last December aspects were featured as an artwork at COP15 in Copenhagen. He has already garnered many prestigious awards for his responsive, tactile installations, and now more than 130,000 expected visitors to the biennale are set to experience his strange, intriguing world first-hand.

The main floor of his office, shoehorned into an Arts and Crafts-era house in a leafy Toronto neighbourhood, has become what he calls "a grotto of stuff." Brushing aside several acrylic forms that dangle from the ceiling, he steps over piles of pear-shaped glass flasks that will be filled with an oil mixture and illuminated with LEDs. He has spent the morning at the centre of this hive, stress-testing with student volunteers – trying to snap and break various acrylic connectors and seals, the installation's critical joining components. "We have to know how the different elements will break, how they will fail," he explains. "I have fields of damaged things around me. It is kind of sad," he says in a slightly bemused

GROUP WORK

Student volunteers in Beesley's Toronto office pre-assembling components before they're shipped to Venice.

DANGLING PARTICLES

Acrylic prototypes of structural parts hang from the ceiling in the ground-floor office.