



Gianni Pettena
Anarchitecture

Anarchitecture

“I prefer to perform architecture, to build architecture, very often temporary architecture but with tools of art (...) How to deal with the environment without making violence?”

Extracts from a conversation between Gianni Pettena and James Wines (SITE), 2010

In a bid to break down barriers between disciplines, Gianni Pettena has never ceased to question through art the foundations of our architecture by challenging and criticising functionalism at all costs and the established social and capitalist orders that predetermine both our everyday behaviour and the way in which our living environments are designed. In *L'Anarchitetto. Portrait of the Artist as a Young Architect*, published in 1973, Gianni Pettena defines himself as an “anarchitect”, an aspiring architect turned artist, writer, thinker, mediator, somewhat of a radical all rolled into one, but one who looks at our environments and the fragility of the human and non-human entanglements that characterise them, attentively and from a political perspective. He adopts a conceptual approach, an *architecture based on thought*, preferring the creation of non-permanent installations and gestures to building logic. His works, including those presented in this exhibition, are rooted in a performative approach to art and architecture, to better disrupt frameworks and shift perceptions – they embody a breath of fresh air, a need to reimagine the way we live.

Taking visitors on a quasi-journey reflecting Gianni Pettena’s life and work, the exhibition unfolds across two geographies: on the ground floor, his native Italy – from the island of Elba to the Dolomite mountains, which Gianni Pettena refers to as his “school of architecture”; on the first floor, the landforms and deserts of the American West, where he lived and taught in the 1970s. The aim of presenting in this way the influences of the places which the artist has inhabited and roamed, alongside consideration of current ecological issues, is to reassess the relevance, radicalism and poetry with which his work, at the confluence of art and architecture, continues to make an impact today, and to highlight the pioneering approach he has adopted since the late 1960s vis-à-vis the precariousness and importance of the living, ecological and emotional links that bind us to our environments.



Gianni Pettena. *La mia casa all'Elba. The Tuna Fish Net Barn* (1975). 2011. Courtesy the artist and galerie Salle Principale, Paris

La mia casa all'Elba

1978 - on going

In 1975, Gianni Pettena purchased a little fisherman's cabin on the island of Elba, off the coast of Tuscany, where he spent an extended period of time and collaborated with others to experiment his research and reflections on what it means to build and live *with* a place. A cabin that started out as virtually nothing and gradually became a *living utopia*, open to the elements and vegetation, that he co-built with friends, students and artists who he invited to be involved in the construction process, as well as with nature, drawing on natural techniques, know-how and materials inherent to the island's environment and history. Not really a work of art, nor really a home, neither public, nor private, *My House on Elba* is a kind of *return to here* or *settling-in here*. In any case, the only real structure ever built by Gianni Pettena in his pursuit of alternative ways of doing and living. More than just a building, it is a place of technical and conceptual investigation and sharing, in which the very idea of his radical architecture is rooted, based on unbreakable and fragile links to environment.

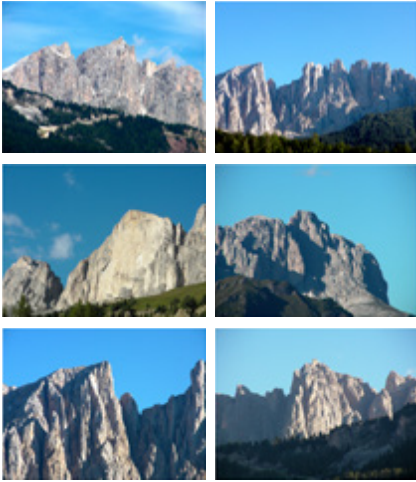


Gianni Pettena. *Paper (Midwestern Ocean)*, 1971. Collection 49 Nord 6 Est-Frac Lorraine. Photo: Aurélien Mole

Paper (Midwestern Ocean)

1971

For a lecture at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) in 1971, Gianni Pettena decided to transform a classroom into a 'penetrable' made of suspended strips of paper. Participants were invited to cut their way through the installation using scissors – an action that gave everyone the opportunity to experience the space for themselves, and to become actors in their own journey. By putting the very subject of the lecture he was about to give to the test in this way, the *anarchitect* reversed roles and mischievously challenged relationships of authority, turning an act of transmission into a collective work – an ocean of paper to cross. This immersive installation has been presented in different configurations and exhibitions ever since, each time dissolving the architecture and making it disappear, while placing us at the heart of a landscape that we are tasked with inventing.



Gianni Pettena, *La mia scuola di architettura*, 2011.
 Courtesy the artist and galerie Salle Principale, Paris

La mia scuola di architettura 2011

In the early 1970s, as he wandered and pondered the mountains and deserts of the American West, Gianni Pettena coined the term *non-conscious architecture*. Years later, he recognised this form of architecture in the mountains of his childhood, the Dolomites, the place in which he grew up. He went on to produce a series of photographs that he entitled *My School of Architecture* in homage to this mountain range and to what it had taught him, both physically and intellectually. Thus indexed, and presented in the exhibition as a skyline or a horizon, these photographs express the landforms and formations of nature, with powerful simplicity, echoing those of our everyday architectures, constructed or unconscious, visible or invisible, but which we keep within ourselves.



Gianni Pettena, *Tunnel sonoro*, 1966-2024.
 Courtesy the artist and galerie Salle Principale, Paris

Tunnel sonoro 1966 - 2024

Physically created for the first time in 2024, *Sound Tunnel* was one of the very first works conceived by the artist in 1966, evidencing an interest in the performing arts and experimental music that dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, both fields with which Gianni Pettena has regularly collaborated over the decades. Although its structure, a series of metal frames, is first and foremost a reference to minimalist art, it is an active, living piece, a sculpture to be performed. When coming into contact with a moving body, it becomes an instrument, a sound medium. Dressed in a bodysuit covered in metallic scales, the wearer moves through the tunnel, at first freely, and then increasingly forcibly – a metaphor for life and its requisites (from the possibilities of childhood to the demands of adulthood). The sound produced by the friction thereby generated resonates like a breath that the artist compares to “the wind that shakes the leaves in a forest.”



Gianni Pettena, *Wearable Chairs*, 1971.
Courtesy the artist and galerie Salle Principale, Paris

Wearable Chairs

1971

Wearable Chairs is a collective performance that the artist conceived together with a group of students from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD) in 1971. After designing a series of folding chairs together, the participants travelled around the city on foot and by public transport, carrying their chairs on their backs like shadows. Walking in single file, the group wandered around, stopping off in different parts of the city for a chat, in particular about the places they were passing through. Displayed in the exhibition alongside archive images, these chairs, objects of precarious design, also reflect the notion of displacement and transience in Gianni Pettena's work, echoing nomadic cultures in which ways of living and inhabiting are transient and in deep connection with the surrounding landscape.



Gianni Pettena, *About non-conscious architecture* (detail), 1973.
Collection Frac Centre-Val de Loire, donation Gianni Pettena

American Period

1971 - 1973

In 1971, Gianni Pettena left Europe to teach in the United States, where the landscapes – from the suburbs of medium-sized towns to the landforms and deserts of the South West – gave rise to a series of major works. This encounter with the American West marked a new stage in the artist's career, and a greater awareness of the spatial and temporal depth of our living environments and the way in which architecture – whether natural, *non-conscious* or constructed – fits into them. It was here that he developed much of his aesthetic vocabulary: on the one hand, photographic observation and indexing (*About Non-Conscious Architecture*, 1972, and *Already Seen Portable Landscapes*, 1973), and on the other, the creation of temporary installations (*Ice House*, *Clay House*, *Tumbleweeds Catcher*, 1971-1972). It should be added that, in contrast to the American land art artists who he met during his time in the country and with whom he had many exchanges, Gianni Pettena's aim was never to intervene permanently in spaces, nor to control them, but rather to learn from them.

BIOGRAPHIE



Gianni Pettena, *Io sono la spia (I am the Spy)* / Global Tools, Editorial offices of Casabella, Milan, 12 January 1973 © Carlo Bachi

Gianni Pettena Born in Bolzano (Italy), 1940. Lives and works in Fiesole (Italy).

Artist, architect, designer, critic and historian of architecture as well as curator and professor, Gianni Pettena is a key figure of the radical architecture movement that was shaking up the architectural scene in Italy and Europe in the 1960's and 70s. Pettena contributed to reforming the discipline of architecture, taking an approach strongly influenced by artistic practices such as performance and installation. In the 1970s, Pettena drew closer to conceptual art and Land Art. In this period, his concepts are being physically experimented by being confronted to the scale of the body and the natural and urban context. His book, *L'Anarchitetto*, published in 1972, left its mark on several generations of artist and architects. In this book, the author refuses to recognize the borders between disciplines and defines himself as an "anarchitect", a person for whom "speaking about architecture is a metaphor for speaking about a creative condition that

is intended for making architecture, but that winds up making art."

Gianni Pettena (Bolzano, 1940) is a graduate of the University of Florence, where he taught until 2008. In 1971, he won the Trigon competition (Graz). That same year he was invited to do a residency at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and again in 1972 at the University of Utah (Salt Lake City), where he created several performances with his students. In 1974, he participated in the foundation of the experimental laboratory, Global Tools. His pieces have been shown at numerous exhibitions (Milan Triennale, 1973; Venice Biennale, 1979 and 1980). In 1996, he became the exhibition coordinator for the Venice Biennale of Architecture and personally organised the exhibition *Radicals, Architecture and design 1960-1975*. He has taught and lectured throughout his career.

PUBLICATION



Gianni Pettena, Anarchitecture

Orléans, Frac Centre-Val de Loire, Sète,
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GUIDED TOURS

Every Saturday, 3.30 pm > 4.30 pm

Fee : 4€ per person

Booking recommended

THE GREAT HOLIDAY WORKSHOP

Wednesday to Sunday, 2 pm > 6 pm

During the school holidays, join in our four-
hand workshops.

Fee : 2€ per child aged 4 and over

(free for accompanying adults)

No booking required

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social networks*

PROGRAMME

NATIONAL ARCHITECTURE DAYS

Saturday 19 October, 3.30 pm > 4.30 pm

Visit with Élodie Royer, curator of the
exhibition.

Sunday 20 October, 3.30 pm > 4.30 pm

Behind-the-scenes tour, with an guide and a
registrar, telling you all the anecdotes of the
installation and the secrets of the artworks.

Free, no booking required

PERFORMANCE

Saturday 2 November, 6.30 pm > 9.30 pm

As part of the AR[t]CHIPEL Festival and in
partnership with the Centre chorégraphique
national d'Orléans, dancer and choreographer
Solène Wachter from the Cie Bleu Printemps
will activate the *Tunnel sonore* installation.

Free, no booking required

TALK

Thursday 23 January, 6.30 pm > 8.30 pm

To mark the publication of the catalogue
Gianni Pettena, Anarchitecture, the authors
discuss the work of Gianni Pettena

Free, no booking required

CROSS VISIT

Thursday 6 February, 6.30 pm > 7.30 pm

The Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans and the
Frac Centre-Val de Loire are organising two
cross-visits on the theme of 'Architecture and
Nature': on 6 February at the Frac and on 6 March
at the Musée.

Fee : 4€ per person

Booking on our website

PERFORMANCE

Sunday 9 March

The *Wearable Chairs* will once again be activated
by students from ESAD and the Conservatoire
as they walk through the city of Orléans.

Free, no booking required

Gianni Pettena. Anarchitecture

11 OCTOBER 2024 > 09 MARCH 2025

Exposition presented at the **Frac Centre-Val de Loire** in Orléans,
organised in collaboration with the **Crac Occitanie** in Sète.

Curator

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With the collaboration of

Julien Borrel, Guillaume Brabant, Bastien Courdavault, Malo Gagliardini, Tiphaine Monroty et Jonathan Sitthiphonh.

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l'ensemble des institutions et organisations
impliquées à ses côtés.

The **Frac Centre-Val de Loire** thanks its
partners

L'État

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the artist Gianni Pettena, his collaborator
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