

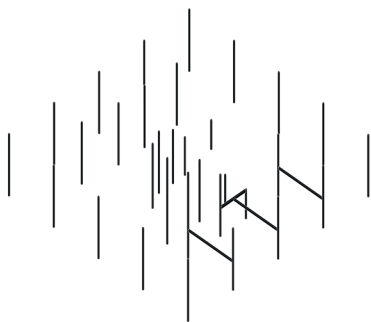


ISSN 2385-2291

Fuoco Amico / **Syllabus**

February 2024

# Imitation Parody Montage



FUOCO AMICO  
Architectural Review  
ISSN 2385-2291

The Syllabus series presents experiences and research made inside formative courses at different levels: bachelor, master, doctorate. The goal is to offer these results, provisional and incomplete as they can be, to the scientific community, enhancing dialogues and exchanges.

This issue collects the assignments made in the course "Architecture in Transition", held by Alessandro Rocca on February 2023 at the PhD Program of Architectural Urban Interior Design, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano.

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Yuwei Ren, Contrast between pillars (Villa Savoye, Villa Dall'Ava)

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## Imitation, Parody, Montage



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The subject of this investigation is two distinct projects in which a common critical method can be identified – recycling. The first project is the 'Recycling Beauty' exhibition, designed by Rem Koolhaas/OMA and curated by Salvatore Settis, Anna Anguissola, and Denise La Monica. It represents the third chapter in Fondazione Prada's comprehensive study on the contemporaneity of ancient art, exploring the paradoxical and delicate relationship between fragments from the past and the cultural diversity of the contemporary world. On the other hand, this research encounters the latest design project arising from the enduring collaboration between Kosmos Architects and Château Chapiteau - the Tin Can Castle, known as the Château Chapiteau Refugee House. This paper primarily aims to investigate the recycling conceptions in two cases thoroughly and, afterwards, by employing the methodology of comparative analysis, examine their shared characteristics, differences, and specificities concerning contemporary architecture discourse.

Dorđe Bulajić

**Recycling Beauty and the Beauty of Recycling:  
Comparative Analysis of the Colossus of  
Constantine and the Tin Can Castle**

Dorđe Bulajić (1995) is an architect engaged in teaching, research, architectural design, and cinematography. He is a PhD candidate in Architectural, Urban, and Interior Design in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies at Politecnico di Milano. He is also a teaching assistant at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, where he graduated (RIBA Part II) in 2019 with an internationally awarded project. From 2019 to 2022, his research was funded by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development (MP-NTR), and currently, he holds a 3-year open subject scholarship from the Italian Ministry for Universities and Research (MUR). His design-driven research investigates intersections between contemporary architecture and media. He has exhibited and published his work both nationally and internationally.

This article focuses on invention techniques, particularly montage, which has become a surprisingly powerful meta-technique, clearly present in all artistic practices, including architecture. Encompassing concepts like fragmentation, post-production, recycling and similar, it symbolises the ideological foundation of the rapidly growing, hyper-capitalistic society, as highlighted in the seminal works of Mario Carpo, Nicolas Bourriaud, and others.

The subject of this investigation is two clearly distinct projects in which a common critical method can be identified – recycling. The first one is the exhibition "Recycling Beauty", designed by Rem Koolhaas/OMA and curated by Salvatore Settis and Anna Anguissola with Denise La Monica. It represents the third chapter of the Fondazione Prada's comprehensive study on the contemporaneity of ancient art – a paradoxical, exceedingly fragile relationship between the fragments from the past and the cultural diversity of the contemporary world. Each exhibition artefact is slightly altered, accentuating the concept of transformation and discovering the beauty in the recycling process instead of in the physical object itself.

Conversely, Tin Can Castle – Château Chapiteau Refugee House is the latest design project of the long-term collaboration between Kosmos Architects and Château Chapiteau. This highly experimental, nomadic lifestyle community inhabits twelve hectares of co-living space among the

Georgian hills and forests. An immensely eclectic structure assembled from the materials collected within a two-kilometre radius of the construction site suggests another reading of recycling as a design methodology in contemporary architecture.

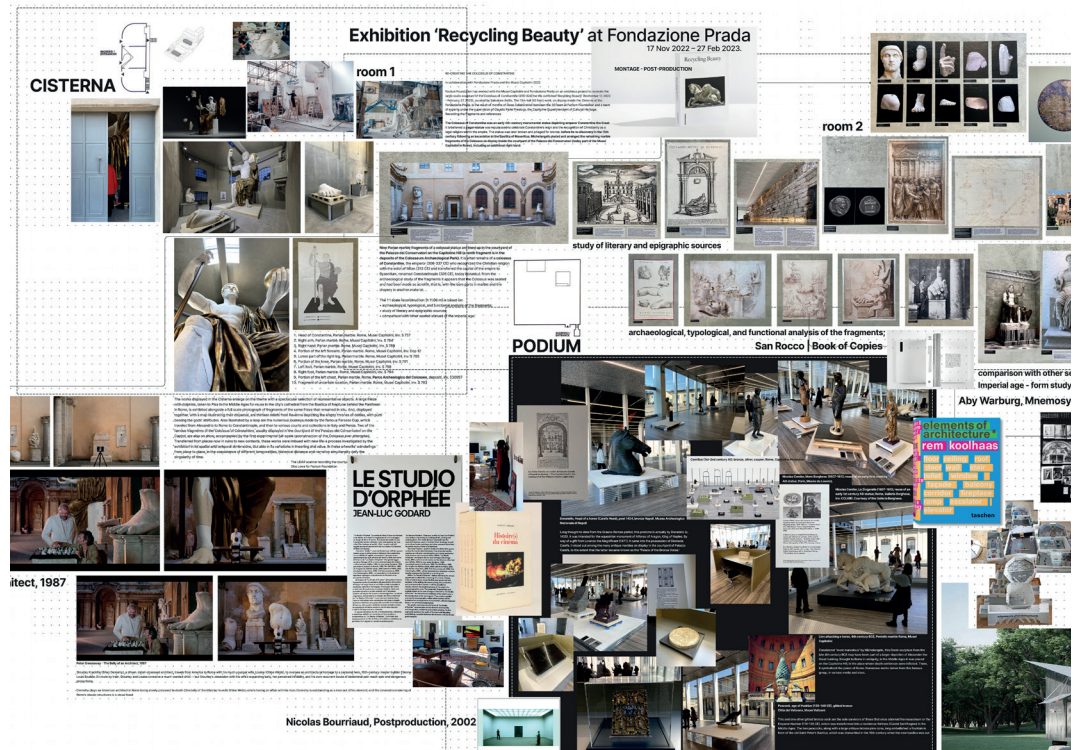
This article will primarily thoroughly investigate the recycling conceptions in two cases and, afterwards, by using the methodology of comparative analysis, examine their common characteristics, differences, and specificities concerning the discourse of contemporary architecture. However, this research will not solely focus on the architecture of these projects, instead, it will carefully consider the economic, sociological, and cultural context of these works, aiming to truly understand the specific environments and circumstances under which they were first conceptualised and then built. Finally, as a design-driven research, it will propose a research diagram in a Warburgian manner, which serves as both internal verification and the portrayal of the complex research process. Furthermore, it will also present several thought-provoking images aiming to enhance the text and construct the dramatic what-if scenarios of these projects.

### **Unwrapping the "Recycling Beauty": The Case of the Colossus of Constantine**

This research follows the proposition repeatedly highlight-

ed in the seminar "Architecture in Transition": architecture is considered everything architects produce. Therefore, this research's first subject is the "Recycling Beauty" exhibition, curated by Salvatore Settis and Anna Anguissola with Denise La Monica and designed by Rem Koolhaas/OMA. Even though this spatial intellectual polemic is a fruitful exchange of captivating topics, due to the scope of the research, it will focus on one specific experience within the exhibition. It will build a case around the process of reconstructing the Colossus of Constantine, one of the most important works of late ancient Roman sculpture, exhibited in Cisterna's two rooms.

The exhibition venue – Fondazione Prada, also designed by Rem Koolhaas (OMA) in 2014, initiates a similar discussion as the exhibition topic. A former 1910 gin distillery located in the industrial complex on the southern border of Milan has been carefully reconceived by the OMA, highlighting the uneasy and highly complex relationship between the existing and new structures. Multilayer collage of different materials, from raw concrete and plywood to extensive reflective surfaces and the gold-painted façade of "Haunted House", shapes the spatial environment in which multiple heterogeneous experiences widely affect the spectator's perception. In that kind of setting, spatial concepts like reuse and recycling come as artificial normal, stimulating the mutual benefits between art and architecture.



Research diagram: different cultural references connected to the reconstruction process of the Colossus of Constantine and exhibition Recycling Beauty (graphic re-elaboration by the author).

The "Recycling Beauty" exhibition inhabits two out of seven spaces of Fondazione Prada. The first one, the Podium, is the square-plan open space: a "landscape of low-rise plinths made of acrylic allows for the pieces on display to be perceived as an ensemble, while the cubicle-like structures encourage a closer examination with the presence of office chairs" (Settis & Anguissola 2022).

The second one, the Cisterna, is a three-room sequential space with a two-level observation possibility which facilitates discontinuous perception and enables the spectator to see the 11-meter-high reconstruction of the Colossus of Constantine directly in the face – "a unique historical experience" (Koolhaas 2022, 3). This complex, ambitious project results from a collaboration between the Musei Capitolini, Fondazione Prada, and Factum Foundation, with scientific supervision directed by Claudio Parisi Presicce, the Capitoline Superintendent of Cultural Heritage (Settis and Anguissola 2022, 2).

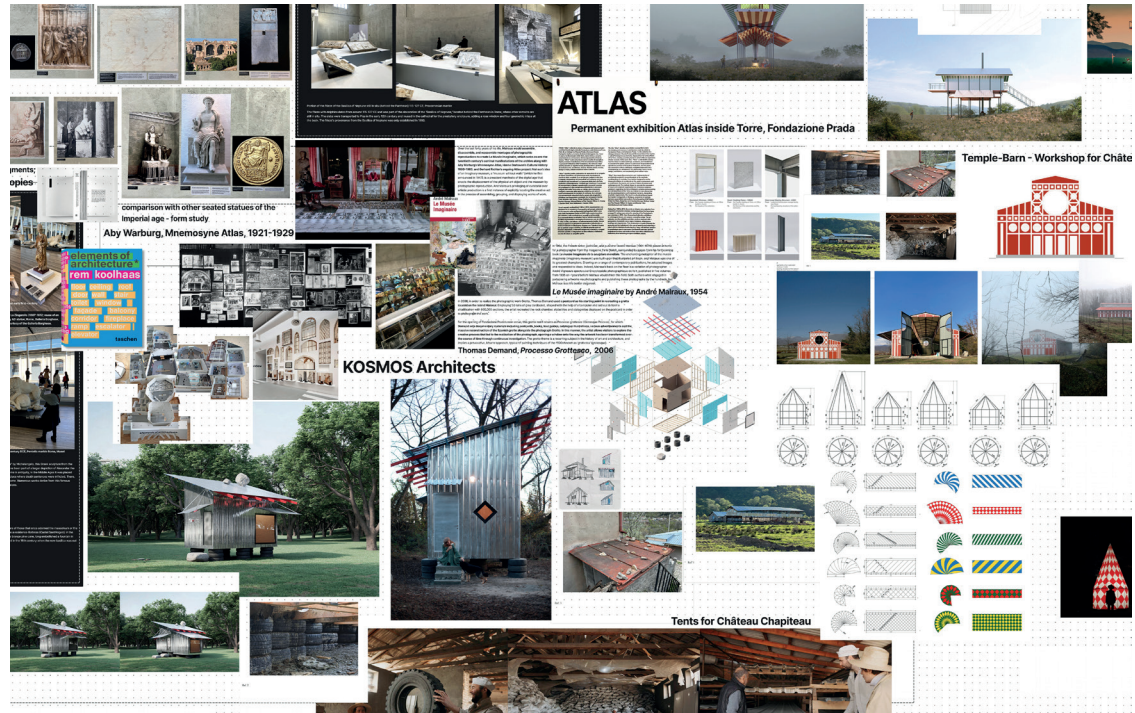
### **The Beauty of Recycling: The Case of the Tin Can Castle by Kosmos Architects**

Originating from the margins of Europe and highly diverse academic backgrounds, Kosmos Architects is an emerging international architecture office that is actively collaborating ultimately virtually, bringing together partners based in Zurich, Graz, New York, and Moscow. The office deals

with projects of mixed scales from immensely small to extra-large, as stated in their public portfolio: "from a door handle to a city plan; and from art installations and pavilions to big public, residential, cultural and infrastructural buildings" (Kosmos Architects, 2023). Their specific spatial sensibility and extensively explorative approach to the production of contemporary architecture derives from their constant teaching and research activities, as the partners of Kosmos Architects lead architecture studios at HEAD (Geneva University of Arts and Design) and TU Wien (Vienna University of Technology).

Recycling as a design methodology can be easily identified in several projects of this practice. In 2021, the office built three extraordinary projects for Château Chapiteau, which, each in its own way, demonstrate the contemporaneity of their architectural thought and profound understanding of the broken state of the planet we are living on. An extremely amusing 'House on Legs' with three roofs, three levels and three different atmospheres, colourful and lightweight tents, that have become a significant symbol of the whole space, and remarkably intelligent Temple-Barn, an architecture solely made from a bucket of white paint, small canopy-wings and cutting a circle at each end of the façade, represent the adequate foundation for the Château Chapiteau Refugee House. Completed in January 2023, 'Tin Can' Castle, Refugee House or just a spaceship, as called by the





Research diagram: different cultural references that construct a specific discourse around the recycling method employed in the work of Kosmos Architects (graphic re-elaboration by the author).

habitants of Château Chapiteau, is an immensely eclectic structure assembled from the materials collected within a two-kilometre radius of the construction site. Standing on the reused tires found nearby, which are the foundations of the structure, this project is developed as a rapidly constructed housing module able to spread and grow, aiming to provide temporary shelter to as many refugees as possible.

A few exciting points can be highlighted in a comparative analysis of the two applications of recycling as a critical design methodology. The first one arises from the temporal category and portrays architects' general approach to recycling. If we look back at another exhibition that Rem Koolhaas entirely curated, the fourteenth Venice Architecture Biennale titled "Fundamentals", which had an ambitious idea to "condense and close the century of modernity" (Rocca 2022, 8). A similar approach to recycling can be identified, especially in the exhibition "Elements of Architecture". After several International architecture exhibitions that celebrated the contemporaneity of architecture, some of which were successful and some less so, Koolhaas appeared and turned back to history, but with, at first glance, a plausible hypothesis that the exhibition speculates the future of the architectural discipline. It was about the future of our discipline rather than "the end of his career, of his mythology, the end of everything, the end of archi-

tecture" (Rocca 2022, 8); the critical recycling method was roughly the same. As Salvatore Settis writes in the exhibition catalogue, "the reuse of the past entails the coexistence of different temporalities, in which historical distance and narrative and emotional simultaneity are continually intertwined [...] recycling is able to generate meaning, by aggregating segments of the different inter-textual or inter-objectual network, which contains its components but does not coincide with any of them; thus it speaks not to the past, but to the future" (Settis 2022, 60). While Koolhaas' approach can be defined as nostalgic but utterly projective – positioning somewhere in between past and future, the critical approach of Kosmos Architects could be described as unambiguously present, which brings us to the second issue of this comparison – the purpose.

On one side, we have a generously beautiful purpose – temporarily sheltering refugees, mainly those fleeing from Mariupol and other cities in Ukraine and Russia. It portrays the genuinely modest but very contemporary view of the current world and the design culture. It can be easily compared to the exceptional work of Pritzker Prize winners from 2021, Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, whose outstandingly successful practice is fundamentally based on pre-existing values when designing new buildings and transforming existing ones.

On the contrary, a different perspective emerges. While



Project 'Tin Can' Castle by Kosmos Architects exhibited at the Podium in Fondazione Prada, Milan. The Beauty of Recycling Exhibition, 2023 (Photomontage).



Reconstructed statue of the Colossus of Constantine in the Château Chapiteau a coliving space among the Georgian hills and forests (Photomontage).

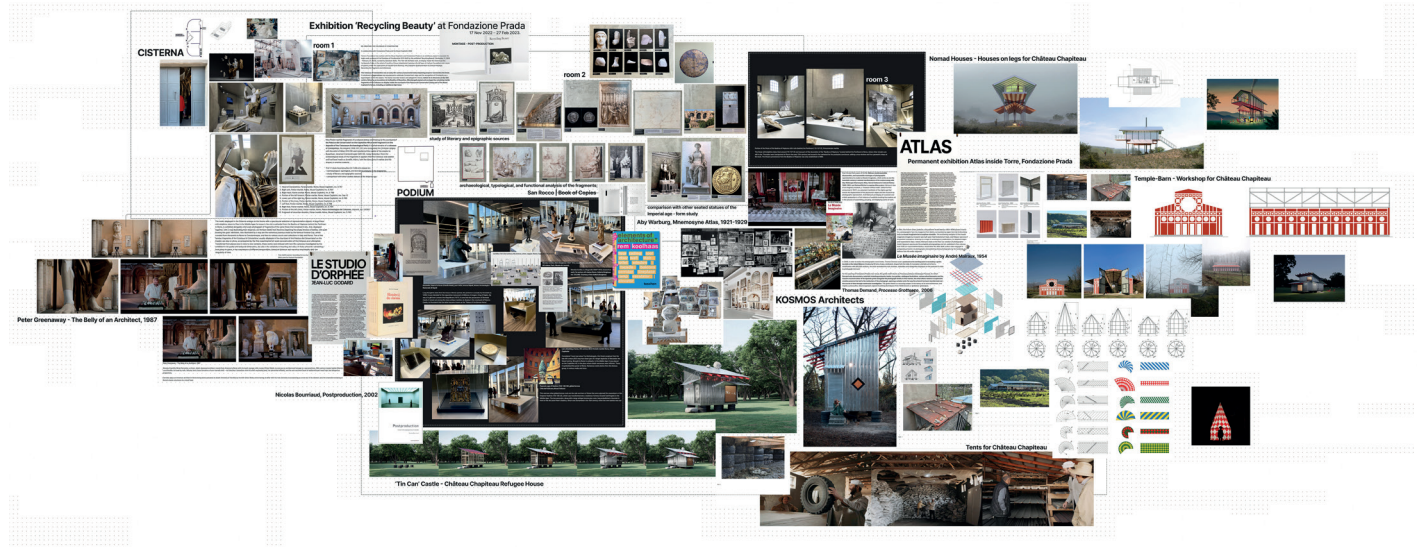
the reconstruction process behind this gigantic statue is awe-inspiring, allowing for the first-ever coherent reading of the Colossus of Constantine rather than discontinuous perception through different fragments, careful analysis of this project reveals an inherent paradox. Do the statue's immense size and the eight-month production process, which, according to the Factum Foundation website, included a vast team of experts under the supervision of Claudio Parisi Presicce, the Capitoline Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, truly advocate an idea of reuse and recycling? In contrast, it seems that instead of emphasising the beauty hidden in the recycling process, this project unquestionably indicates precisely the opposite. It reveals an unsatisfactory late capitalistic idea of overproduction and fetishism of plaster, resin, and polystyrene, even diverting the visitor's attention from the original fragments of the Constantine - right hand and right foot, which are usually displayed in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome. The complete insensitivity to the highly significant topic of recycling shown in this procedure vehemently denies the statement written in the exhibition's preface: "Running through the exhibition's narrative is a variety of themes: the reuse of works and materials [...] the transition of meanings and dialogue between culture; but also the historical and contemporary importance of recycling due to a shortage of resources, and

the destruction, recovery, and use of materials, architectures, objects, and iconographies for personal or political purposes, which is also common in our own world" (Settis and Anguissola 2022, 2). Nevertheless, it adequately sets the stage for this analysis' third and final point – context.

Cultural, spatial, and temporal, but also social and economic, context is an inseparable part of the project, as clearly indicated in the fourth edition of San Rocco magazine titled "Fuck Concepts! Context!" In the case of the Tin Can Castle, the recycling method is deeply embedded in its abstract, conceptual layer and its visible, material, and structural aspects. The castle's message and meaning remain largely unaffected by the environment in which it is situated. In contrast, detached from the Cisterna's artistic background and the ideological context of the exhibition, the Colossus of Constantine becomes a kitschy monstrosity, accentuating its own gargantuan dimensions and over-emphasised artificiality.

## Conclusion

As indicated, the recycling method is more than present and utterly crucial in contemporary design culture. Based on the critical action of collecting and curating, the proposed method represents the "basic methodology for architectural design" (Rocca 2022, 8). However, as seen from this research, the method itself is the subject of sometimes con-



Full scale research diagram (graphic re-elaboration by the author).

flicting interpretations, which derive from various aspects of the project and the environments that constitute them. If the montage procedure behind the reconstructed Colossus of the Constantine implies the very title of the exhibition – "Recycling Beauty", the utterly radical approach to recycling identified in the work of Kosmos Architects, which results in the rapid building of affordable contemporary spaces with modest but genuine materials, should be titled as the "Beauty of Recycling". Lastly, this research proposes a series of photo-manipulated images - photomontages, aiming to provoke and visually elaborate the discussed points of this analysis and enhance the written text.

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