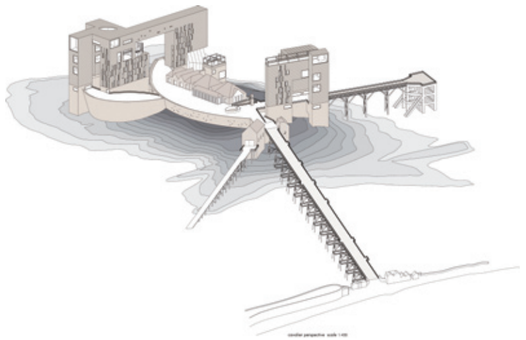
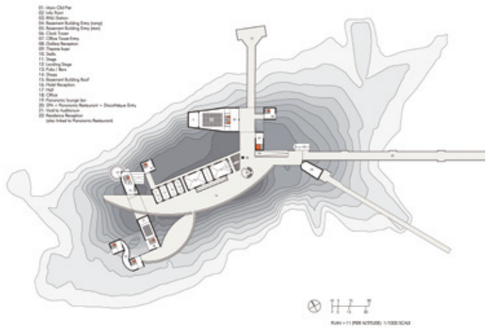
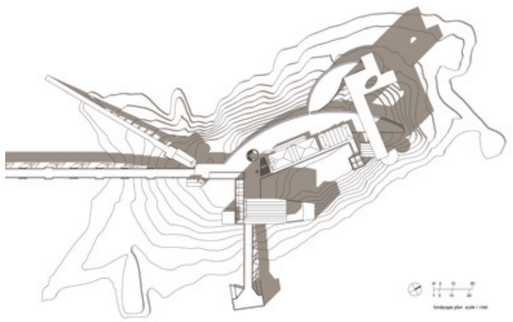
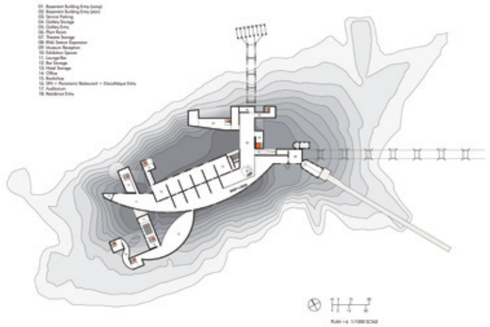
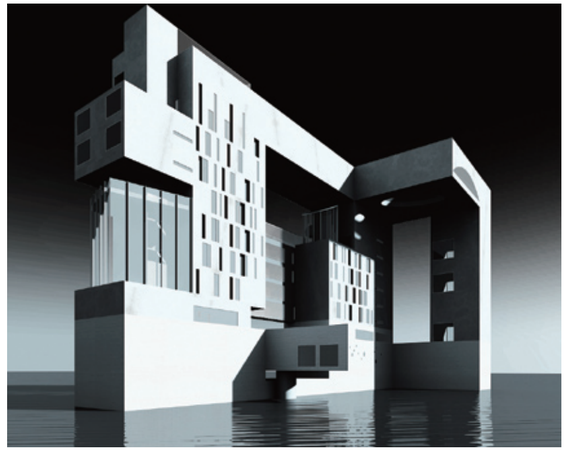
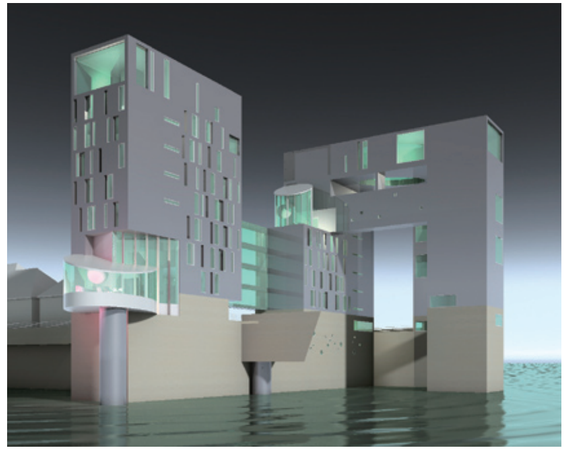
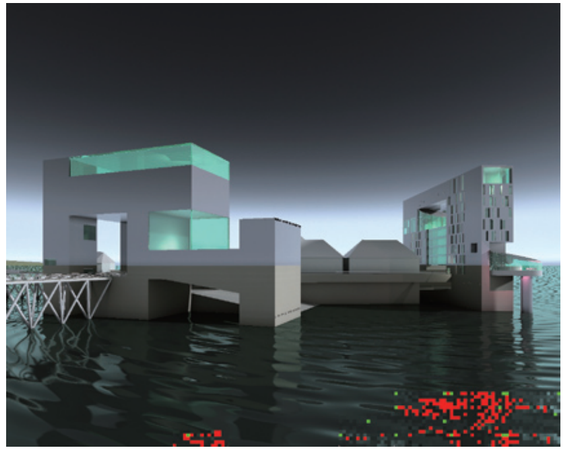
→BIRNBECK ISLAND

→Antonino Cardillo Architetto

Location: Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset, United Kindom
Design Type: Entry for Riba Competition

Having to be at least in intention a lasting phenomenon, architecture “puts up with” entertainment. Entertainment is ephemeral, mutable, and a building that tries to fix the shape of a space in time is destined almost always to fail. Is an architecture of amusement possible then? Probably not, because it is difficult to surpass its own time without incorporating such a strong subliminal content for it to become significant in itself, able then to transcend the function for which such architecture was born, transforming the same function into a pretext. Entertainment certainly influences actions and thoughts. It is a form of social control. A responsible architecture can ignore these difficult presuppositions only with difficulty.

This architectonic complex is born out of the pre-existing piers and buildings developing into a system of pathways. Like a big naval vessel, a curved shape embraces all the diverse elements of the composition, substituting an old concrete platform with the new basement building. Constructed five metres beneath the main pier, it is accessible from a ramp near the main gate of Birnbeck Island. Its sequence of flexible spaces links all the buildings on the island from below. The vessel design counterpoints the new tall buildings, in plan strategically oriented following the double orthogonal reference system created through pre-existing signs. Two different materials divide these building surfaces: concrete at the bottom and planking at the top. The method of occupying the void synthesizes diverse traditional architectural layouts (tower, linear, cantilever and city gate). In each of their narrow frontages, at the top, a big window marks the seascape creating a panorama like multitude of lighthouses. Moreover, these primary volumes are written through several unconventional signs that communicate to the outside the different spatial situation of the interiors, according to an “urban” poetry that makes a complex stratification of meaning.

Each episode, however, appears transfigured and its being in the complex renders it something else, acquiring for it new meanings. Each part resonates in another constructing a stratified reality, as in an ancient village where life and time leave tracks on the ground.