

Raimund Abraham. *City of Twofold Vision*, Cannaregio West, Venice, Italy, 1978-80

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Raimund Abraham

Raimund Abraham (b. 1933, Austria). Abraham has taught at the Rhode Island School of Design, the Architectural Association in London and since 1971 has been a member of the architecture faculties at Cooper Union and Pratt Institute in New York. He has entered numerous international design competitions, including: 1959, First Prize, *Cultural Center Leopoldville*, Republic of the Congo (with F. Gartler); 1971, Second Prize, *Centre Beaubourg*, Paris (with F. St. Florian and J. Thornley); 1972, First Prize, *Plaza in Niagara Falls, N. Y.* (with A. W. Geller and G. Fiorenzoli); 1976, Second Prize, *House at an Intersection*, Tokyo (Japan Residential Competition); and 1980, Honorary Mention, *Les Halles*, Paris. His work has been exhibited in numerous exhibitions and galleries in the USA and Europe including: *Experimental Architecture* (with St. Florian), 1967, National Institute of Architects, Rome; *Hyperspaces*, 1969, the Architectural League of New York; *Zero-Zones*, 1969, Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and *Seven Gates to Eden, Suburban Architecture*, 1976, Venice Biennale exhibition "Europa-America." Drawings have been published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Domus*, *Architectural Design* and *Progressive Architecture*.

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City of Twofold Vision, Cannaregio West,
Venice, Italy, 1978-80

With the absence of the mechanical scale of land-bound transportation, Venice, as no other city, has been able to retain a physiological morphology which has consistently reversed all known spatial principles of Cartesian origins. While buildings are no longer organized along roads and squares but are compressed into intricate amorphous architectural volumes, the paradox between vision and tactility has disappeared. As rivers and canals cut through the main insular body of the city, narrow passages ("calle") cut further through the body of buildings. Only the Piazza, harbor and pure void release the pressure of the inner parts of the city and become gate and linkage between the cardiac network of water and land.

This twofold, dialectical interplay of voluminosity and voids, tactility and vision, amorphous and ordered, formal and indigenous, provides the organizing principle of urban past and urban present.

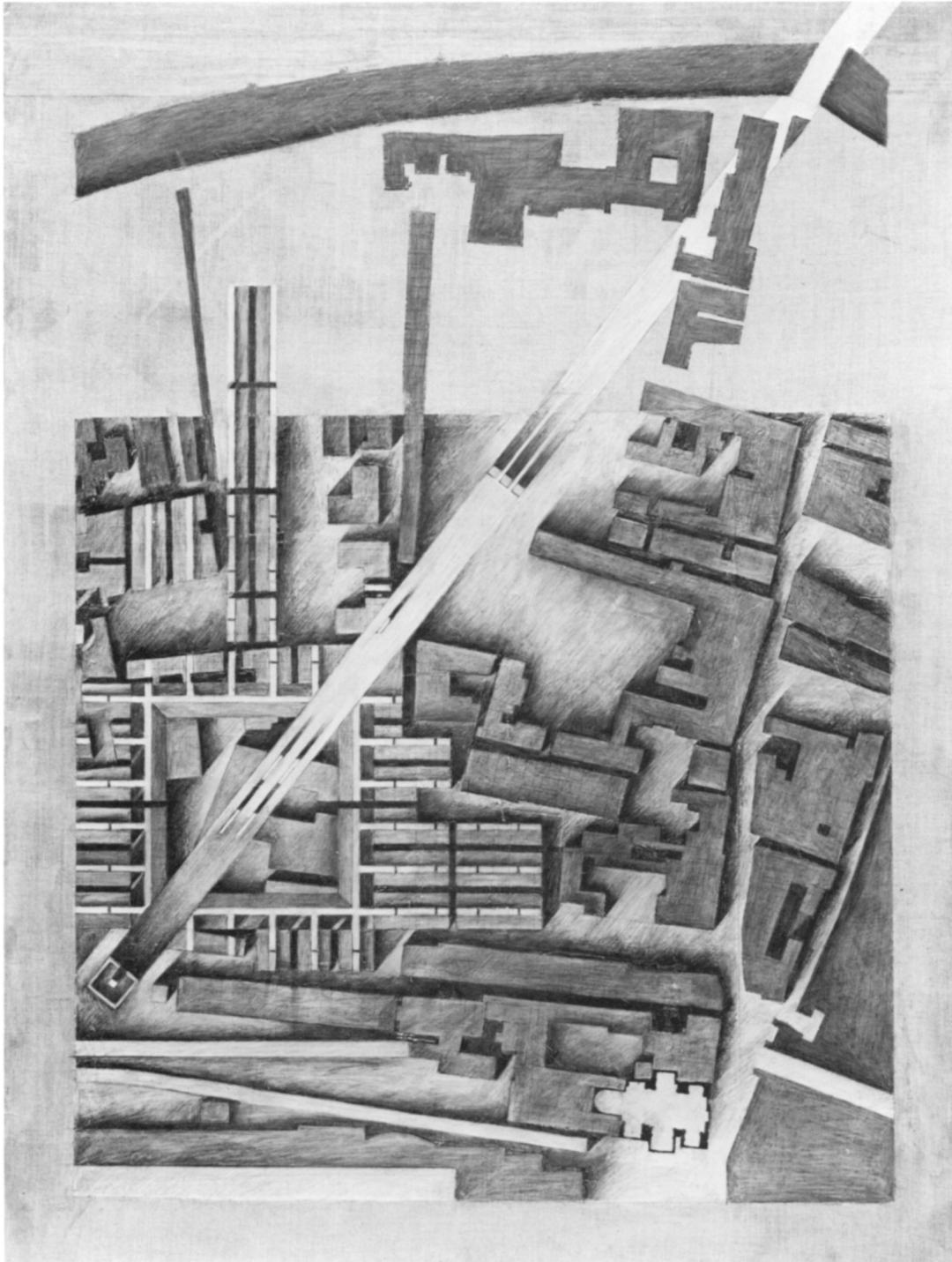
The complex cultural and architectural borders of the site of Cannaregio West offer the ideal conditions of an island within an island, a model which could reflect the possibilities of an urban concept which ought to respect the historic destiny of the city of Venice as well as the responsibility to cope with the complex and controversial changes brought about by technological interference and the absence of an architectural vision.

Syntactic Concept

A rectangular grid, based on the building module of 2.50 meters, is superimposed on the amorphous fabric of existing open areas and indigenous non-historic buildings. The geometric "imprints" of these buildings shall remain to provide the foundations of new structures, while the collision of these elements with the proposed architectonic elements forms the dialectical principle of the total architectural composition.

Along the main north-south axis of the compositional field three sequentially ordered square blocks form the compositional, functional and symbolic core of the new city fragment. A network of perpendicular linear blocks and passages radiates from the central squares toward the periphery of the site, interconnecting between the cores. Their symmetrical pattern is interrupted and distorted by the irregular formations of existing canals, walls and buildings.

Toward the edges of the Cannaregio Canal in the east and the Grand Canal in the south, they merge organically with the existing historic buildings, while toward the lagoon in the north and the railroad station in the west they are terminated by definite architectural boundaries. The sequence of the three squares reveals progressive change from a fragmented composition toward an idealized geometric and spatial condition. RA



Abraham's expressionistic images have a painterly character as in this depiction of three major blocks along the north-south axis of Cannaregio West, Venice.