

**communiqué /press release****For immediate release****CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE TO PRESENT CITIES OF  
ARTIFICIAL EXCAVATION: THE WORK OF PETER EISENMAN, 1978-1988**

**Montréal, 2 March 1994** -- From 2 March through 19 June 1994, the Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture presents an exhibition on the prominent and controversial United States architect and writer Peter Eisenman. **Cities of Artificial Excavation: The Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988** explores how Eisenman questioned the concept of "site" during a crucial decade of his work. At the same time, the exhibition demonstrates the importance of drawing and modelmaking in generating Eisenman's ideas. Whereas past exhibitions have tended to talk about Eisenman's work, elaborating a theoretical discourse about the architecture, **Cities of Artificial Excavation** instead tries to rediscover the richness and complexity of the design process by looking carefully at Eisenman's drawings and models. Eisenman himself designed the exhibition, which is a work of architecture in its own right.

The exhibition focuses on four key works: the submission for the International Design Seminar in Cannaregio, Venice (1978); the submission to the South Friedrichstadt housing competition of the Internationale Bauausstellung, Berlin (1980-1981); the project for the University Art Museum for California State University in Long Beach (1986); and the *Chora L Works*, a garden for the Parc de La Villette in Paris (1985-1986). Through drawings and models for these and related projects, the exhibition demonstrates how an investigation of "site" became a primary strategy for Eisenman, informing his proposals, his built work and his ongoing criticism of the discipline of architecture.

In 1978, when Eisenman submitted his project for a town square in Cannaregio, he was searching for an open-ended architecture that would provoke people, pose questions and generate a multiplicity of meanings. To him, the entire tradition of symbolic architecture (including modernism) was closed and tautological; it asked only those questions that could be answered in advance. The eclecticism and nostalgia of post-modernism, which

then was coming into fashion, seemed equally inadequate to Eisenman's goals. As he saw it, these twin failings of modernism and post-modernism could be discovered in the treatment of site. In his view modernism, acting as a kind of authority from above, conceived of the site as a blank slate, on which it imposed the purity of its idea. Post-modernism, allied with contextualism, conceived of the site more as a storehouse of historical artifacts, to be dug up and restored at will.

To Eisenman, though, the site was a locus of possibilities. He recognized that any given place has not one but many histories, depending on who tells them, at what time, for which purpose. He also saw that a place may have any number of possible futures. So, in designing the 1978 Cannaregio project, Eisenman superimposed several "sites:" the existing place where the town square was to be built; a project for Venice designed by Le Corbusier in 1964-65; and one of his own projects, House 11a. The result was a shifting, discontinuous design of great topological complexity, realized through a drawing method—tracing—that Eisenman would frequently use in future "excavations." For the 1980-81 Berlin project, he proposed a public garden and building that incorporated both the history of the Friedrichstadt site and a fictitious "anti-memory" of Berlin. For the 1986 Long Beach project, he overlapped, on different scales, six maps, recording significant site conditions at dates in both the past and the future. For the Parc de La Villette, realized in collaboration with the philosopher Jacques Derrida, he discovered analogies between the canal and slaughterhouses of the actual site, the grid of follies designed for the park by Bernard Tschumi and his own project for Cannaregio.

In collaboration with Rizzoli International Publications, the CCA has prepared a fully illustrated English catalogue for **Cities of Artificial Excavation**. To complement this catalogue, the CCA has also prepared a French publication of approximately 48 pages, which includes an essay by Exhibition Curator Jean- François Bédard. In conjunction with the exhibition, Peter Eisenman and YveAlain Bois will give a talk at the Théâtre Paul-Desmarais in Montréal on Thursday, 3 March 1994, at 5:45 pm.

-30-

Information:

Brigitte St-Laurent Taddeo  
Press Relations Coordinator and Publicist  
Canadian Centre for Architecture  
(514) 939-7000