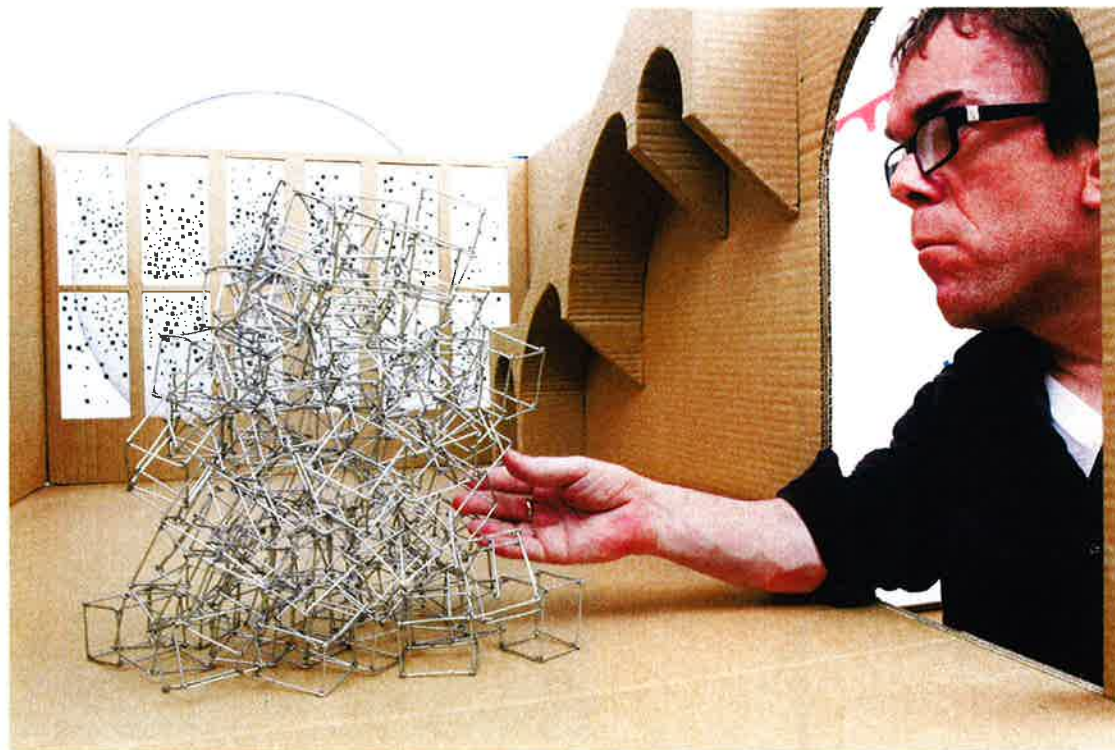


OUT THERE

## CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

Corban Walker adjusts your perspective in Venice.



Clear midmorning sunlight reflects off the East River and through the third-floor windows of Corban Walker's Greenpoint, Brooklyn, studio, giving it a Venetian feel that is entirely appropriate: The 44-year-old sculptor, best known for his plays on space and scale, will represent his native Ireland at this year's Biennale. At the moment his entry exists only as a model inside a dollhouse-size cardboard pavilion. Walker opens this up to reveal a sprawling structure composed of 160 interlocking cubes framed in steel rods. It looks a bit like an explosion in a box factory rendered in unbent paper clips and reaches most of the way up the walls. The cubes, which will each measure about 16 by 12 inches, are designed to link together and pivot freely around a corner joint. Thanks to the law of gravity and the anarchy of chance, every installation of the work will be different. "That unknown quality about it is quite interesting," he says. "There isn't really a definitive piece."

Such contingency is a leitmotif running through Walker's work, if rarely so explicitly. By using minimalist sculpture—often made of reflective or transparent materials—to describe and proscribe the space surrounding it, he peels back successive layers of the process by which

our consciousness of that space has been formed. It's not an academic exercise: Walker stands four feet tall in a world geared to an average height that is about 30 percent greater. Using his physical stature as a starting point, he multiplies and morphs the dimensions of his works to make manifest the normally invisible systems that govern our movements.

The viewer's destabilization is central to Walker's tripartite Venice installation. When he first visited the pavilion, in the 14th-century Istituto Santa Maria della Pietà, during the Architecture Biennale last October, Ireland's fiscal crisis was unfolding, and the threat of collapse thrummed underneath the festival's din. Thinking about what his eventual sculpture might look like, he says, "one thing that I kept coming back to was my piece *Untitled (Please Adjust)*," which consists of three interlocking steel boxes joined in such a way that if one moves, the others will shift unpredictably. Completed in the fall of 2008, "it's one of the few pieces I've made that's been a direct response to an actual event," he explains, referring to the recession that hit that year in the U.S., where he has lived since 2004. Mulling action, reaction, and consequence, he decided to "try to put

that into an Irish context, on a larger scale."

In his Venice installation, *Please Adjust*, the interlocking sculpture takes off from the earlier work, but "I was very keen to use the building in a direct sense as well," the artist continues. Although he has won critical praise for his site-specific and sculptural installations employing stacked sheets of glass, he was leery of bringing glass to Venice, so famous for its Murano wares. He decided instead on a transparent mural for the pavilion's glazed back wall, which faces the canal, and on see-through blue-vinyl appliques for the front windows.

Both appear at first to be composed of randomized patterns involving galaxies of squares and rectangular blue panels that resemble truncated bar codes. In fact, Walker explains, the pattern derives from a CAD drawing that projected a square into three dimensions, halved its size, then projected the halved square again, and again, down to zero—and finally translated the results back into two dimensions. The cerulean window panels enact an algorithm based on Walker's height, which is also embedded in the dimensions of the sculptural steel cubes—his reality continuously inscribing ours. —SARAH P. HANSON