



## MAYBE THEY CAN JUST MAKE A VEST?

SweaterLodge, Canada's official entry for the architecture portion of this year's Venice Biennale, is an enormous tent in the shape of a pullover made from 350 square metres of bright orange polar fleece. The multimedia exhibit is a big, bold, warm and witty commentary on urban culture. The biennial event, which will be celebrating its 10th anniversary this fall, is one of the most prestigious in the world of architecture. So why is our Canadian team receiving such a chilly reception from government funding agencies and potential corporate sponsors?

"What started off as an exciting project, and one full of honour, has started to feel like a punishment," says Bill Pechet, who created SweaterLodge with Stephanie Robb at the Vancouver design studio Pechet and Robb.

It will cost \$400,000 to build SweaterLodge and take it to Venice next September. The Canada Council for the Arts, which held the juried competition, and Foreign Affairs Canada, which has championed Canada's participation in the event, provided one-third of the budget. Various sponsors have contributed materials: Mountain Equipment Co-op, which secured the polar fleece as a donation from Malden Mills; Global Mechanic, a Vancouver film-production company, which is editing a series of short films (vignettes of the city that show how artificial structures intersect with the natural environment) to be projected inside the tent; and Spot Brand Bikes, which has donated three custom-designed bicycles that will power digital projectors showing the films when visitors mount up and pedal.

But the exhibit's organizers are still about \$150,000 short. They are having an extremely difficult time, primarily because most government funding agencies and private foundations exclude architecture from their mandates.

"I was so naive when I went into this," says Greg Bellerby, director of the Charles H. Scott Gallery at Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. Bellerby is co-curating the exhibit with Chris Macdonald, director of the school of architecture at the University of British Columbia. "I've raised a lot of money for contemporary art. I thought there must be a community that supports architecture, but there is not."

He links Vancouver's difficulties to the fact that many of the major patrons of contemporary art are residential developers. And because they consider the architectural arts too close to home, they won't touch SweaterLodge with a 10-foot pole.

"These big developers have made millions of dollars off architects and they won't even provide a dime," Bellerby says. "This isn't a commercial venture. It isn't about promoting the Pechet and Robb studio. It's about cities and people and society and how design interacts with nature. I keep trying to explain that architecture is about more than high-rise towers, but it seems to be falling on deaf ears."

SweaterLodge, he says, won't be going anywhere if they can't come up with the rest of the money. "It's a real shame."

— Alexandra Gill, Vancouver