Christina Hainzl, Cristina Baldacci,
Adrian Praschl-Bichler (eds.)

VENICE, AN ARCHIPELAGO OF ART AND ECOLOGIES

[transcript]

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Beyond the Present – Reflecting Future Orders and Disorders | 1

Editorial

The book series **Beyond the Present – Reflecting Future Orders and Disorders** offers an inter- and transdisciplinary space for engaging with the challenges of the future. It addresses historical, political, or cultural topics, examining the interplay between societal orders and their potential disruptions. The focus is on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which extend far beyond the ecological realm and encompass social justice, economic stability, and cultural diversity. The series invites readers to adopt new perspectives for a future-oriented approach to development.
The series is edited by Christina Hainzl.

Christina Hainzl is Head of the transdisciplinary Society in Transition Research Lab at the University for Continuing Education Krems and an affiliated researcher in Art Ecologies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She studied art history and political communication in Salzburg, Florence, Rome and New York. Her current work addresses conflict and visualisation (with a focus on the MENA region), the Venice Archipelago and the disharmonies of the Anthropocene. She also works as a curator.
Cristina Baldacci is an art historian and an associate professor of the History of Contemporary Art at Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage). She is an affiliated faculty member at THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE), where she coordinates the Ecological Art Practices research cluster and the Art Ecologies series. She is also a research affiliate at the Platform for Sustainable Development (SDGs), University for Continuing Education Krems. Her research interests focus mainly on art, nature and ecology; art and the Anthropocene; archiving and collecting as artistic practices; and appropriation, montage and re-enactment in contemporary art – all topics on which she has published extensively.
Adrian Praschl-Bichler works as a senior scientist at the Platform for Sustainable Development of the University for Continuing Education Krems. The art historian studied for his master's degree at the University of Vienna and is a specialist at the interface between art history and psychology. His research focuses on the perception and the processing of art, often with the help of empirical methods. How does art affect people? And why do they react in a specific way?

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

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Contents

Part V. In Their Own Words: Conversations with Cultural Professionals in Venice

Appendix

Introduction

Christina Hainzl, Cristina Baldacci, Adrian Praschl-Bichler

Venice is an extremely rich and varied yet fragile ecosystem and a multi-faceted artistic and cultural archipelago, which goes far beyond the historic centre that is so extensively photographed by tourists and broadcast on the media. It includes other islands – such as Murano and Burano, which are also mass tourism destinations, Giudecca, Sant'Andrea, Lazzaretto Nuovo, which has become an ecomuseum dedicated to knowledge about the lagoon, and Lazzaretto Vecchio – as well as the mainland districts of Mestre and Marghera.

This book was therefore born out of a need: to observe the Venetian artistic and cultural ecosystem beyond the stereotypes that make Venice a museum city, an icon of natural and man-made beauty in the eyes of the world. And its aim is to present the complexity and dynamism, as well as the contradictions and range of powers, which animate the contemporary city.

Venice is an archipelago that, like other archipelagos on the planet, is endangered by rising sea levels. This led to early ecological concerns, on the basis of which cultural institutional organisations and independent bodies and groups have sought to raise public awareness, adopt strategies focused on care and respect (between the human and the non-human) and find more sustainable approaches to coexisting in a highly anthropised environment.

The ecological crisis and the international growth of mass tourism, together with neo-liberal policies, all of which are interrelated aspects that also profoundly affect the arts and culture, have contributed to the exploitation and weakening of Venice as a living city that now has fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. Despite this, the city and its lagoon are far from resigned to their fate, particularly due to the initiative of its residents, commuting workers and students and institutions that deal sustainably with education and culture.

La Biennale di Venezia (referred to in the book as the 'Venice Biennale'), the oldest cultural institution devoted to contemporary art and one of the largest recurrent art exhibitions in the world, is, for better or worse, the first subject to be addressed when thinking about the artistic and cultural sustainability of the city. Founded in 1895, not least in order to revive Venice as a city of art for a tourist audience, the Biennale is still a major event at which social, societal and geopolitical discourses are negotiated by and through the artistic contributions. In terms of media coverage alone, the Biennale's importance is enormous, influencing the programmes of museums, cultural institutions and people working in the creative sector. The sensitisation of the public to important issues is far reaching, although the highly topical contributions often fail to influence the city's cultural policy deeply enough to bring about real social, civil or ecological change. At the same time, the location of the Biennale, the city of Venice itself, symbolises the effects of the climate crisis. There are few other places where the threat of disappearance, of possible destruction, is so clear. The discrepancy between giving maximum attention to important issues and the threats posed by human activity are immediately apparent and have made Venice a powerful symbol of the Anthropocene.

This is why the book uses selected examples and a range of different formats (academic papers, critical and visual essays, artist's writings, conversations...) to explore how cultural institutions and practitioners are dealing with the socio-environmental situation. As always, however, no matter how much a book intends to offer as complete an overview as possible, it can never be exhaustive. Our intention was to give a voice to various cultural actors operating in Venice, chosen from different backgrounds, roles, methods and intentions, in order to construct a plurality of opinions and experiences. We are pleased to have brought together such a wide spectrum of perspectives, even if they do not necessarily always reflect the opinion of the editors.

The book begins with two 'visual narratives of Venice'. The first, *Mario Peliti – On Venice* by Christina Hainzl, highlights Peliti's methodical documentation of Venice's urban landscape through over 20,000 black-and-white photographs that are devoid of people and taken under specific lighting conditions. This extensive archive serves as a visual memory of Venice's architectural forms, reflecting the city's social, ecological and economic transformations. By portraying Venice's structures in abstraction and emphasising its fragile relationship with its environment, Peliti's work invites reflection on the city's past,

present and uncertain future amidst challenges like overtourism and rising sea levels. The second visual narrative, *Venice Does Not Exist: Deconstruction as an Aesthetic Tool on Screen* by Alice Ongaro Sartori, explores the representation of Venice in contemporary video and media art. By deconstructing its iconic imagery, the works reveal new perspectives on the city's identity, shifting from mere representation to reflections on the Anthropocene, issues of identity and environmental transformation. Using filmic and digital media, the presented artists challenge conventional perceptions of Venice, creating alternative narrative approaches that expose the fluid, often invisible structures that shape the city's ever-changing essence.

These two initial visual narratives are followed by a section exploring 'ecologies of care and regeneration' across Venice and its lagoon. In *Alternative Venice. A Look at the Last Twenty Years of Artistic Autonomy, Activism and Research*, Cristina Baldacci offers an account of some of the most effective – even when apparently unsuccessful – independent art and curatorial practices since the 2000s, which, through their reflections and actions, have sought to answer a fundamental ethical-political question: *What is to be done?* These self-managed initiatives express a form of specific *resistance* (according to the philosophical meaning that Jean-François Lyotard gives to the term) against the neo-liberal cultural hegemony. They become a space for care and possibility in an attempt to regenerate, and not just preserve, both the environmental and socio-cultural biodiversity of Venice. A major example in this regard is the letter that Giorgio Andreotta Calò wrote in 2023 to Salvatore Settis, a personal artist's text that has been translated into English and is published here for the first time. Andreotta Calò reflects on the acquisition of a concession on the island of Sant'Andrea that he obtained together with two comrades with the aim of preserving the natural and historical state of – rather than transforming – that special environment. Emphasising *doing nothing* as an active form of resistance, Andreotta Calò envisions the island as a last bastion against Venice's growing touristification and commodification. Drawing on the island's defensive heritage, he calls for a paradigm shift in perspective, where preservation becomes a radical act of cultural and environmental reclamation. In *Coexistence and Care: Notes on Curating Three National Pavilions at the Venice Biennale*, Natalie King tries to answer the question of whether the Venice Biennale itself can become a space of resistance from within by presenting the international art exhibition as a platform for transnational solidarities. She analyses her work as the curator of three national pavilions, Australia (2017), Aotearoa New

Zealand (2022) and Timor-Leste (2024), reflecting on slow curating, care and coexistence as essential curatorial practices. Drawing on Édouard Glissant's concept of the archipelago, the text frames the Venice Biennale as a space for relational networks and collective reflection amidst ecological and geopolitical challenges. Adrian Praschl-Bichler is also concerned with ecological issues arising from the Venice Biennale. In *The Architecture Biennale as a Platform for Socio-Ecological Interventions*, he explores how the international architecture exhibition accentuates architecture's role in addressing environmental and social challenges. Drawing on Warwick Fox's theory of responsive cohesion, which prioritises ecological sustainability and the broader societal context in architectural design, Praschl-Bichler discusses the ethical responsibility of architects. Several innovative projects from recent Biennales are presented as case studies that showcase how architecture can promote sustainable development, reduce resource consumption and support social inclusion.

The subsequent section addresses another important issue for a planet that is rapidly changing under the effects of the climate crisis, namely 'practising new imaginaries and methodologies', particularly in the lagoon context. In *The Expanded Enquiry: Reflections on an Interdisciplinary Approach Between Anthropology and Multimedia*, Matteo Stocco and Rita Vianello explore how interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropology and multimedia art can create new research methodologies for the Venice Lagoon. By combining anthropological interviews with video, photography and an interactive web platform like *Metagoon*, which was initiated by Stocco himself, they document the lagoon's socio-cultural and ecological transformations. This approach promotes participatory research, cross-media storytelling and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage through visual and narrative tools. Barbara Nardacchione delves into other forms of collective practices that combine environmental concerns and food and emerged from Venice's transformation under the pressures of over-tourism and the consequent need to find space for cultural and ecological renewal inside the lagoon. In *Disorientation and Where to Find Oneself*, she presents the initiative of the *Tavole Conviviali* (*Convivial Tables*), through which artists, researchers and chefs study and experience the lagoon's ecosystems via collective gatherings, food-based practices and interdisciplinary dialogue. By fostering a sense of care and reconnection with the environment, Nardacchione demonstrates how the lagoon becomes a site for reimagining Venice's future through shared practices of ecological awareness and cultural resistance. Axel Braun's exploration of Venice is more historical. With his project *Machina Mundi/Reign*

of Reason, on which his visual essay is centred, the artist observes Venice as a fragile relic of a glorious past and a symbol of human ingenuity, exploitation and ecological vulnerability. Through a mixed-media installation combining photographs, videos and archival materials, Braun deconstructs Venice's historical and post-colonial narratives, spotlighting its entanglement with the slave trade, resource extraction and global trade networks. By exposing the overlooked role of African individuals and the environmental impact of human activity, his work positions Venice as a case study for the broader challenges of the Anthropocene. Petra Schaefer introduces Braun's visual essay by contextualising his project within the artist residency programme made possible by the *German Centre for Venetian Studies*.

The practices and knowledges of Venice and its lagoon remain at the forefront in the fourth section, where the two craft techniques that have made the city famous throughout the world for centuries, printing and glassmaking, are analysed from the perspectives of 'then and now'. In *Venetian Art Prints from Their Beginnings to Today's Sustainability Initiatives*, Viola Rühse examines the rich history of Venetian printmaking while underlining its contemporary focus on sustainability. By exploring efforts by institutions like the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* and Fallani's screen-printing workshop, Rühse highlights the adoption of eco-friendly techniques and the preservation of artisanal traditions. These initiatives support sustainable tourism and underscore the significance of printmaking in safeguarding Venice's cultural identity amid challenges such as mass tourism and rising rents. At the same time, Matteo Silverio's article *Glass: Millennia-Old Excellence between Innovation and Sustainability* traces the evolution of glassmaking from its ancient origins to Murano's renowned craftsmanship. It draws attention to recent efforts to merge traditional glass artistry with modern technologies through projects like *Glass Matters* and the creation of *rehub*, a startup focused on recycling glass waste into a sustainable, mouldable material for design and architecture. These initiatives aim to balance heritage with innovation, promoting environmental sustainability and transforming Murano into a global model for the circular economy.

The final section of the book is dedicated to conversations with cultural professionals in Venice. They provide a diverse selection of opinions by explaining, 'in their own words', how cultural institutions and art organisations can act for a better future. As a methodological approach, we decided to maintain a certain

uniformity in the questions, varying them from time to time depending on the course of the conversations, to allow each of the interlocutors to answer according to their expertise and to get as broad a picture as possible of their different ways of thinking and acting. Karole Vail, Director of the *Peggy Guggenheim Collection*, focuses on the museum's commitment to sustainability, inclusivity and cultural preservation in Venice. Vail addresses initiatives like *Art 4 a Better Future* (2023) and collaborations with European conservation projects that aim to reduce the environmental impact of exhibitions. Stressing the role of art as a catalyst for change, she advocates for museums to serve as platforms for dialogue and education, while also addressing the broader challenge of Venice's overtourism and the city's need for more balanced, sustainable development. Bruno Racine, CEO and Director of the *Palazzo Grassi – Punta della Dogana | Pinault Collection*, explores the role of contemporary art museums in addressing ecological and social challenges. Racine highlights efforts to incorporate sustainability into exhibition practices, such as reducing transportation and reusing materials, while underlining the importance of public art and artist engagement. He also reflects on Venice's dual role as a cultural hub and a site of ecological vulnerability, accentuating the need for cultural institutions to support local communities and promote awareness of pressing global issues. Markus Reymann, Co-Director, *TBA21* and Director of *TBA21–Academy's Ocean Space*, describes the organisation's commitment to fostering interdisciplinary research and ecological transformation through art. By using oceanic thinking as a methodology, *Ocean Space* facilitates collaboration between artists, scientists and local communities, promoting embodied research and cultural practices of care. Reymann emphasises the need for regenerative approaches in art institutions, advocating for sustainable material flows, collaborative governance and deeper community engagement in Venice and beyond. Francesca Tarocco, Director of *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)*, discusses the centre's role in fostering transdisciplinary research on environmental issues, with a special focus on water studies and ecological art practices. *NICHE*, like the *Platform for Sustainable Development (SDGs)* in Krems, aims to bridge academic, artistic and community knowledge systems in order to promote socio-ecological transformation. Finally, Marco Baravalle, a founding member of the workerist collective *Sale Docks*, brings to the foreground the importance and difficulty of working on the margins, in an 'alter-institutional' context. Referring to the teachings of bell hooks, he explains how the margins are a space of productivity and resistance that is essential if we are to ensure social and cultural (bio)diversity and to better understand what happens at the

centre of the (eco)system. As an activist working in the arts and culture, his position challenges conventional norms and promotes collective thinking and engagement in the construction of the (art) commons.

The book is the result of a collaboration between the *University for Continuing Education Krems* and *Ca' Foscari University of Venice* through their respective research institutes specialising in environmental humanities: the *Platform for Sustainable Development (SDGs)* in Krems and *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)* in Venice. This collaboration started in 2024 with the work of the research cluster *Ecological Art Practices* at *NICHE* in bundling research that combines internal and external perspectives on the city. Indeed, *Venice, an Archipelago of Art and Ecologies* seeks to outline a panorama of possible perspectives and ideas that deal with the ambivalent situation of the city. The book deliberately includes very different approaches that, at first glance, might not appear fully in focus, but, on closer inspection, reveal themselves to be relevant and strongly interconnected. This collective endeavour is therefore driven by an underlying question: How can museums and cultural institutions, but also independent organisations and artist collectives, play a supporting role and become concrete actors in the socio-ecological transition?

Part I. Visual Narratives of Venice

1
Mario Peliti – On Venice

Christina Hainzl, Photos by Mario Peliti

Venice finds itself in an ambivalent situation. It is threatened by rising sea levels and a falling population. The city's cultural heritage, just like its role in contemporary art and culture, is a unique attraction. But is it not precisely this ambivalence, this fragile situation, that makes Venice even more attractive?

It is the attraction of potential loss and also the awareness that we will never remember everything, that makes us strive to preserve the things we know,[1] writes Judith Schalansky, 'we should probably count ourselves fortunate that humanity is unaware of the amazing ideas, the moving works of art and the revolutionary achievements that it has already lost, whether these have been wilfully destroyed or simply gone astray over the course of time'.[2]

This article addresses the architectural photographs of Mario Peliti and their contribution to opening up Venice's urban ecosystem as a thinking space.

The Venice Urban Photo Project

Taking place in the dawn, passing through winter, spring, summer and autumn, Mario Peliti's *Venice Urban Photo Project* presents a mosaic of Venice in over 20,000 photographs. Against the backdrop of Venice's pressing problems with *aqua alta* and overtourism, Peliti portrays Venice in the form of structures and materials: stone, concrete, iron, glass.

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1   Schalansky Judith: Verzeichnis einiger Verluste. Berlin 2018.
2   Ibid. p. 17.

Mario Peliti's *Venice Urban Photo Project* now comprises well over 20,000 photographs. He has been photographing the architecture of the city of Venice since 2006. In doing so, Mario Peliti follows a strict methodical concept. Depending upon the season, the pictures are taken shortly after dusk or when the sun is not yet shining or the clouds are generating a certain diffuse, grey light. The photographs are devoid of people and taken in black and white. At the same time, however, Mario Peliti avoids powerful contrasts and concentrates on shades of grey.

Peliti's photographs were presented in a comprehensive exhibition entitled *Hypervenezia* in the Palazzo Grassi in 2022.

During my frequent visits to Venice in the spring of 2024 while I was working on this book, I repeatedly came across the project. Whenever I mentioned that I would like to present it in the book, I was told about the extent to which memories had been awakened by a visit to the exhibition, particularly by people who live in Venice. Upon looking at the pictures, they recalled long forgotten or repressed moments.

There are a number of important aspects to Mario Peliti's extensive photographical oeuvre. Besides generating the above-mentioned sense of connection amongst Venetians, he also succeeds in creating a vision of the city at a number of levels.

An Archive of the Urban Landscape

One level is a process: the creation of an archive, a documentation of the urban landscape of Venice today.

From the perspective of Cultural Heritage Studies, precise documentation – particularly of endangered aspects of cultural heritage – is extremely important. Despite all our modern methods of reconstruction, preservation and revitalisation are largely dependent upon the documentation of the original condition. Peliti's photographs make a major contribution to this documentation.

Late in 2018, an agreement was signed between Mario Peliti, the *Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (ICCD)*, and the *Superintendence of Archaeology,*

Fine Arts and Landscape of the Metropolitan Area of Venice. With this agreement the photographer has freely granted the Italian State the right to use and reproduce the images from his collection for institutional cultural purposes and university publications within the European Union. In a conversation with Mario Peliti, he also explains that the sheer quantity of photographs would make it impossible for him to manage them himself.[3]

Peliti, an architect who, in his roles as a gallerist and publisher of a number of books of photographs, has worked with internationally renowned photographers, is an expert in approaches to urban photography. He is well aware of the challenges, sensitivity and preparation that are required to realise such work.

Abstract Architecture – An Inventory of Gazes

The second level is the development of a specific (pictorial) language: Mario Peliti is creating a visual memory of Venice that consists of not only the visible images of the buildings of the city but also the story of their development over time.[4] There are no people in this story, and only rarely is there any indication of anything else at all. We see the picture and add to it in our imagination. In this sense, Peliti enters into dialogue with the viewer. The systematic observance of these pictorial criteria leads to a certain abstraction of the architecture. The lack of human beings encourages us to focus on the form and the structures. Flaking walls and masonry damaged by salt, fog and wind come to the fore.

Peliti's works are sometimes positioned close to the oeuvre of Bernd and Hilla Becher. This establishes parallels in terms of methodical concept. Bernd and Hilla Becher's works focused on form. And form and buildings are also important to Peliti, who originally studied architecture. Further areas of comparison are the adherence to certain lighting conditions and the softness of the contrasts in the black and white photographs.[5]

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3   Hainzl Christina: Conversation with Mario Peliti. Venice. 29.04.2024.

4   See also: Rossi Aldo: The Architecture of the City. Cambridge, Mass. 1984, quoted from Pedrina Bianca: Architekturfotografie II. Vienna 2024.

5   Polte Maren: Schwarz-weiß- versus Farbfotografie. Zu einem Experiment von Bernd und Hilla Becher. In: Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik, Vol. 8.2/2017. p. 7ff.

Peliti was a close friend of Gabriele Basilico, who photographed numerous urban landscapes, including in Beirut, Milan, Moscow and Shanghai. Besides formal similarities, their works converge in other ways, particularly in terms of their intention and approach. Gabriele Basilico once described this approach as follows: 'I work on the visible, but sometimes there are things that we do not see immediately and the role of the photographer is specifically to highlight them.'[6]

In the catalogue to *Hypervenezia*, Alain Fleischer mentions the influence of Charles Marville's photographs of Paris on Mario Peliti's Venice project.[7] Not only do both photographers share a similar interest in urban landscapes and architectural details, but there are also parallels between their photographic approaches to the cities of Venice and Paris.

In the 19th century, Marville was the official city photographer of Paris and his works document such phenomena as the modernisation of the city. The urban landscapes in his pictures, unlike those of Peliti, also contain occasional people.[8] Just as Paris was undergoing a transformation at that time, Peliti documents Venice in a period of social, ecological and economic change.

The Urban Fabric as a Source of Social, Economic, and Cultural Sustainability

Peliti's photographs of Venice without human beings also encourage us to reflect. In his famous book *If Venice dies*, Salvatore Settis repeatedly points out that cities have to be inhabited in order to develop identities. It is precisely this that has knocked Venice off balance. Whereas the city still had 174,808 inhab-

6   Bauret Gabriel: 1994- 2015. In: Calvenzi, Giovanna (ed.): Gabriele Basilico. Back to Beirut. Rome 2023. p. 152.

7   Fleischer Alain: The Arpenteur of Venice. In: Mario Peliti. Hypervenezia. Venice 2022. p. 415.

8   Charles Marville. Photographer of Paris. Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum New York. 2014. www.metmuseum.org/de/exhibitions/listings/2014/charles-marville. accessed on 18.10.2024.

itants in 1951, the number had fallen to 56,072 by 2015 and is now apparently below 49,000.[9],[10]

Urban landscapes have the potential to regenerate themselves in social, cultural and economic terms. For those seeking to sustainably and adaptively reuse our tangible cultural heritage – whether buildings or architectural fabric, squares or gardens – not only technical constructional measures but also social and ecological aspects and their repercussions are highly relevant. Such restoration work is generally regarded as sustainable, although each example must be considered on its own merits. The process is also often unsuccessful.[11] And the relationship between people and the environment was similarly supressed for a long period.[12]

Changes

In his works, Mario Peliti also illustrates changes in the cityscape. Besides numerous new and remodelled buildings, the island of Giudecca (which is part of the city of Venice and actually consists of several islands) has changed hugely in recent years. The former industrial facilities have largely been transformed into residential and public space and schools. Tourism is also reaching Giudecca, but not to the same extent as elsewhere in the city. The area is also affected by rising sea levels, but the social fabric is more stable. In order to reach Giudecca one is obliged to take the boat because there are no bridges connecting it to the other districts of Venice. In other words, the water of the *Canale* that isolates the island also acts as a dividing line that results in a different form of urban development.

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9   Settis Salvatore: If Venice Dies. New York 2016. p. 8.

10   Venezia scende sopra i 49 mila abitanti. Venezia Today. 03.04.2024. https://ww
       w.veneziatoday.it/cronaca/venezia-scende-sotto-49-mila-abitanti.html. accessed on
       03.10.2024.

11   Vafaie Fatemeh/Remoy Hilde/Gruis Vincent: Adaptive reuse of heritage building. A
       systematic literature review of success factors. In: Habitat International. Vol. 142. De-
       cember 2023. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2023.102926 accessed on 19.10.2024.

12   Baldacci Cristina/Bassi Shaul/De Capitani Lucio/Omodeo Pietro (eds.): Venice and the
       Anthropocene. An Ecocritical Guide. Venice 2022.

Peliti's photographs document and question these developments, challenges and coexistences. They can lead us to not only see buildings, squares and spaces, but also reimagine their impact on the fragile relationship between people and the environment.

Fig. 1: Mario Peliti, San Marco, Giardini Reali, 2016.

Courtesy of the artist

The Giardini Reali date from the Napoleonic era. After being largely forgot-ten for many years, the restoration of the gardens began in 2014 and they were reopened in 2019. Besides its historical importance, the project is also one of many, largely civic and private initiatives that are returning greenery to the city. The gardens and the park also fulfil a key social function. They are a place of exchange and recreation as well as cultural heritage.

Fig. 2: Mario Peliti, Castello, Arsenale, 2021.

Courtesy of the artist

The Arsenale, which is now best known as an exhibition location of the Venice Biennale, is one of Europe's largest industrial complexes and was a shipbuilding yard long before the age of industrial mass production. It traces its origins back to the 11th century. Parts of the Arsenale have been rezoned for public use and another part is the home to the control centre of the *M.O.S.E.*, the controversial system that is designed to protect Venice from flooding and is Italy's most expensive public project.

Fig. 3: Mario Peliti, Castello, Giardini della Biennale, 2020.

Courtesy of the artist

The Venice Biennale is the oldest in the world. Each year, alternating Art and Architecture Biennale address different current issues. Built on former marshland, the pavilions are located inside (and outside) the large park of the Giardini, offering nation states the opportunity to present themselves. But is a national approach still appropriate at a time of global ecological and social challenges?

Fig. 4: Mario Peliti, Dorsoduro, Giudecca, Fortuny, 2016.

Courtesy of the artist

Giudecca was previously an industrial working-class district. But the larger companies have long since moved away or closed their premises. Only the textile producer *Fortuny*, which has been famous for over a century for its pleated silk prints, combination of styles and incorporation of Venetian elements into its fabrics, still remains.

Fig. 5: Mario Peliti, Dorsoduro, Giudecca, Fondamento del Rio di Sant Eufemia, 2019.

Courtesy of the artist

Separated from the centre of Venice by a broad canal, Giudecca is somewhat cut off from the city's streams of tourists. This is leading to its increasing importance and growing popularity as a residential area. Venice is affected by flooding every year. The second highest floods in November 2019 clearly demonstrated how rising sea levels are threatening the city.

Fig. 6: Mario Peliti, Dorsoduro, Giudecca, Campo Junghans, 2016.

Courtesy of the artist

Campo Junghans was Venice's largest housing project in the 1990s. It is located on the empty site of the *Junghans* watch factory in Giudecca. Heavily influenced by Venetian architecture, the restructuring of the complex created apartments, playgrounds, schools and a theatre.

Fig. 7: Mario Peliti, Castello, Riva dei Partigiani, 2021.

Fig. 8: Mario Peliti, San Polo, Campo San Giacomo de Rialto, 2017.

Fig. 9: Mario Peliti, San Polo, Campo San Tomà, 2018.

Fig. 10: Mario Peliti, Dorsoduro, Rio Terà ai Saloni, 2014.

Fig. 11: Mario Peliti, Santa Croce, Veritas, 2021.

Fig. 7–11: Courtesy of the artist

2
Venice Doesn't Exist
Deconstruction as an Aesthetic Tool on Screen

Alice Ongaro Sartori

Those who fall under the spell of the reflection of their image deceive themselves and become lost. A city like Venice, which constantly coexists with its reflection and reproduction, presents an interesting case study, especially in its relationship with its moving image on the screen. The visual and conceptual deception manifested through the reflection is a recurring theme in contemporary art, where the representation of reality often transforms into an ambiguous game of duplication and loss of authenticity. The reflected image, far from simply reproducing the real, becomes a symbolic device capable of questioning the very nature of identity and perception. Artists from Dan Graham to Michelangelo Pistoletto have used reflective surfaces and reflections to challenge the viewer, forcing them to confront their image and to question the boundary between subject and object, self and other. The reflection is no longer a means of knowing reality but a tool that destabilises visual certainties, amplifying the illusion and fragmentation of subjectivity.[1] This contribution analyses six works of contemporary video art that focus on Venice and its lagoon, deconstructing the city's most perceived reflected image. The aim is to analyse these works using Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction as an aesthetic tool applied to moving images. Here, deconstruction is neither a negation nor a destruction of the image but, rather, a decomposition that allows us to decode the more complex cultural and conceptual components.[2]

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1   Merleau-Ponty Maurice: Phenomenology of Perception. London 2012. p. 236–240.
2   See Brunette Peter/Wills David: Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory. Princeton 1989.

Venice and its double. This question is about not only its reflection but also its identity. As Sara Marini and Alberto Bertagna write in *Venice 2nd Document*, both *Venezia* and Venice exist: a place where people live but also the background of tourists' photographs, a city of residence and the struggle for citizenship but also the world's most replicated souvenir, *Venezia* is the place and Venice is its brand.[3] This duplication generates quite a few idiosyncrasies, not least because *Venezia* and Venice seem to stand in a relationship proportional to that of the object and its reflection: they will never overlap. This is neither a novelty nor a recent phenomenon. Indeed, as early as the 18th century, Venice emerged as one of the first cities to become a visual icon standardised through art, particularly through the 18th-century *vedute* of Canaletto and the 19th-century stereoscopic views of the city. Renowned for its unique architectural and landscape features, Venice was transformed into a fixed, reproducible and internationally recognisable image, anticipating the phenomenon of urban 'branding'.[4] Influenced by foreign collectors and the Grand Tour, Venice became one of the first cities to be systematically immortalised and perceived not merely as a physical location, but also as an idealised visual experience. When examining the moving image in the 20th century, the relationship between Venice and its representation evolves into a *mise-en-abyme* through the lens of cinema. Two primary approaches emerge: filmmakers who utilise Venice as a quintessential backdrop of itself, and those who adopt a more oblique and psychological usage. Among the fictional films most acclaimed globally, one encounters iconic scenes set in the most touristy and beloved locations in the lagoon city. These films include *Summer Madness* (1950) by David Lean, which features Katharine Hepburn, *Death in Venice* (1971) by Luchino Visconti, *Moonraker* (1979) by Lewis Gilbert with Roger Moore as James Bond and *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996) by Woody Allen. These works showcase the idyllic clichés that are marketed and consumed, ranging from St. Mark's Square to the Rialto Bridge, as well as the Hotel des Bains at the Lido and the Gritti Hotel on the Grand Canal. On the other hand, there are films that take a different direction in their relationship with the city, such as Gianfranco de Bosio's *The Terrorist* (1963) with Gian Maria Volonté and Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973) with Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland. Here, Venice becomes less conspicuous and is used not only as a cinematic set but also as a labyrinthine and ghostly psychological dimension, a

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3   Cf. Marini Sara/Bertagna Alberto: Venice 2nd Document. Venice 2017.
4   Cf. Bettel Hans: Canaletto and the Art of Venice. Yale 2003.

mirror of the protagonists' minds, as in Roeg's film. However, the Venice inhabited by its residents often diverges significantly from these cinematic portrayals. So, how has the representation of Venice and its lagoon on screen evolved in contemporary times? And in what ways have contemporary artistic media influenced new approaches to portraying a city that has increasingly become a symbol of the Anthropocene?[5]

The first example analysed in this reflection, *Atlantide* (104', 2021) by Yuri Ancarani (Fig. 1), straddles the boundary between film and video art. The feature film, which was presented in competition at the 78th Venice International Film Festival, is a hybrid fiction that navigates the submerged aspects of the city by following the lives of adolescents from the island of Sant'Erasmo. Their experiences blend bucolic moments – like diving into the lagoon from vaporetto stops and doing wheelies on bicycles – with reckless, dangerous races between their small but furiously fast motorboats. This side of Venice is largely hidden from outsiders and often overlooked by the city itself. Their Venice is far away from the city's historic centre and famous landmarks. Much like the islands of Sant'Erasmo and Pellestrina, adolescence in Venice is marginalised and little attention is paid to these outlying communities. Ancarani's film deconstructs the familiar image of Venice, exposing a reality that is less visible to mainstream audiences but nonetheless present: the reality of the lives of young Venetians and of how they navigate their formative years. Over four years, Ancarani followed this group of teenagers, who appear in the film as non-professional actors playing themselves. The dialogue is taken directly from their real lives, and the screenplay evolved alongside the film's production, challenging traditional approaches to filmmaking. In this way, *Atlantide* captures a unique perspective on Venice and its lagoon, highlighting the city's ecological transformation from the often-overlooked viewpoint of its youth.

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5   'Thus, whatever happens in Venice requires a special scrutiny as both an indication and a laboratory of what fate has in store for the cities of the future.' Salvatore Settis: If Venice Dies. New York 2016. p. 170.

Fig. 1: Yuri Ancarani, Atlantide, 2021. Still from video (104').

Courtesy of *Studio Ancarani*

In the field of video art, Antoni Muntadas's work, *In Girum Revisited…* (14' 32", 2017) (Fig. 2), engages with and recontextualises in a contemporary way the psychogeographical drift of Guy Debord's film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978).[6] In *In Girum Revisited…*, Muntadas presents a series of extended sequences of Venice, viewed from its canals and captured by a camera placed on a boat that moves through the water. The title itself is also a reference to Debord's film, which was his final cinematic work.[7]

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6   Guy Debord, one of the founders of the Situationist International, developed the concept of psychogeography to describe the effect of the geographical environment on the psychology of individuals. In his short text of 1957, Psychogeographical Venice, Debord proposes Venice as the first subject for a psychogeographical exploration, describing it as a city impossible to map, a true labyrinth that eludes rational understanding. Debord Guy: Psychogeographical Venice, 1957. In: Knabb Ken (ed.). Complete Cinematic Works. Baltimore 2003.

7   The Latin phrase 'In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni' is an ancient palindrome meaning 'We go around in the night and are consumed by fire', which evokes the fleeting brilliance of fireflies and symbolises a view of history in which revolutions are momentary bursts of intensity that eventually burn themselves out. Debord Guy: In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni. 1978.

Fig. 2: Antoni Muntadas, In Girum Revisited…, 2017. Still from video (14' 32").

Courtesy of the artist

As with several of Debord's films, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* incorporated found footage, including scenes shot in Venice, which were interwoven with other cinematic fragments. These Venetian sequences intermittently appear throughout the film, conveying both movement and a spatial relationship with the city that frames the entire narrative as a visual *dérive*. Muntadas re-edits and brings together Debord's Venetian sequences to create a continuous movement through the city. The original 1978 footage is presented alongside contemporary images of Venice, which appear in a small window on the screen, blending past and present. Like Debord, Muntadas maintains the disconnection between the spoken commentary and the images, creating a layer of separation that was integral to Debord's original. In 2015, inspired by Debord's fascination with Venice, Muntadas created *Derive Veneziane*, a film that captures a nocturnal boat journey through the city, exploring themes of darkness, solitude, discovery and the phantasmagorical qualities of Venice as experienced through drifting. Venice, as the first city selected by Debord for psychogeographical analysis, serves as the perfect setting for this continued exploration; Venice, as the symbol of the impermanence of things, including nature, humans and utopias. Muntadas's gazes retrace those of Guy Debord but the lagoon landscape has changed, and psychogeographical drifts also meet the challenges of climate change. In fact, *In Girum Revisited…*

also documents the bulky traces of the Anthropocene that are not present in Debord's drifts. At the entrance to the Arsenal dock, Muntadas captures the yellow architecture of *M.O.S.E. (Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico)*, a system of mobile barriers designed to safeguard Venice from the increasing threat of rising sea levels and tidal surges.

In 2015, the videomaker Matteo Stocco initiated *Metagoon,* an online platform organised as an archive of micro reports and interviews with individuals working in the Venetian Lagoon. This project, whose name suggests a lagoon that 'goes beyond' traditional geography and accessible knowledge, serves as a tool for investigating the lagoon's ecosystem. It disseminates information about the environment as experienced by those who work closely with the waters: harbourmasters, fishermen and laboratory chemists. Notably, *Metagoon* deliberately maintains a distance from the city of Venice itself, orbiting around it and describing its operations without ever explicitly naming or framing the city. Instead, the project reveals the 'traces' of Venice through the experiences of its labourers, offering an indirect portrayal. On the *Metagoon* online platform, oral histories are interwoven with landscape footage of the areas where the interviews were conducted. This knowledge archive, available in both Italian and English, has also taken the form of a performative medium-length film titled *Metagoon 24h* (2024), which is edited in various ways and lengths depending on the context in which it is presented. In collaboration with Matteo Primiterra and the band *Macedonia Sintetica* (Simone Carraro, Carlo Camerin, Mattia Rigon), Stocco re-edited materials from the online archive, juxtaposing images of the lagoon's landscapes and activities over the course of 24 hours, from dawn to dusk, culminating in night-time aerial footage over Porto Marghera. The slow pace of working life in the lagoon, with its expanded rhythms and gestures, combined with the techno-jazz compositions of *Macedonia Sintetica*, becomes a reflection of the frenetic interchanges between human, animal and ecological life that characterise Venice's unique environment.

Fig. 3: Sonia Levy, We Marry You, O Sea, as a Sign of True and Perpetual Dominion, 2023. Still from video (18' 12").

Courtesy of the artist, and of the *Giacomelli Fund, Municipality of Venice Photographic Archive*

If traditional historical narratives have always started from the surface of the water, Sonia Levy looked at the complex and changing nature of Venice through underwater cinematography. *We Marry You, O Sea, as a Sign of True and Perpetual Dominion* (18' 12", 2023) (Figs. 3–4) is a two-channel video installation that turns the city's history upside down by narrating its submerged biomorphic processes, the fractures in its environment, highlighting a new materiality of Venice. But Levy's work also speaks volumes about the domination of man, and industry, over the ecosystem. The title refers to the *Marriage of the Sea*, a Venetian tradition that took place every year on Ascension Day between the 11th and 18th centuries. The Doge, the patriarch of Venice, would throw a wedding ring into the water from a boat as a symbol of the eternal union between the Republic's highest political figure and the waters of its territory. The marriage union, however, is understood as matrimonial domination, with the patriarch controlling the sea for good.[8] Levy's work thus questions the anthropogenic effects on the lagoon but, more importantly, highlights the roles of domination, historical and political, over water. Like Muntadas's work, Levy's is also grafted onto archival documents. Stories of the modernisation of life in the lagoon flow across the screen, interweaving

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8   Cf. Lane Frederic Chapin: Venice: A Maritime Republic. Baltimore 1973.

documents that come from the Giacomelli Photographic Archive in Venice. Photographs of early 20th-century railway infrastructure, the architecture of the petrochemical plant in Marghera and structures in the port area are interwoven with microscopic visions of the delicate lagoon morphology, with its constant struggles and existential tensions. The sonorous and conflicting relationship between the human and aquatic dimensions is also expressed in the soundtrack: a mixture of human choirs and underwater sound recordings.

Fig. 4: Sonia Levy, We Marry You, O Sea, as a Sign of True and Perpetual Dominion, 2023. Still from video (18' 12"). Commissioned by TBA21-Academy with the support of the S+t+ARTS initiative of the European Commission and the European Marine Board 'EMBracing the Ocean' programme.

Courtesy of the artist

The underwater world and underwater cinematography are also taken up by Andrea De Fusco in a video essay entitled *Per un'estetica dell'Apocalisse* (*Aesthetics of the Apocalypse*, 9' 22", 2022) (Fig. 5). In this work, Venice's image is deconstructed by being shown from below water level, which makes it almost unrecognisable, while also associating it with deeper symbolic deconstruction. Narrated by Gianni Garrera, philologist and translator of the *Book of Revelation*,[9] the short film intertwines footage of diverse destructive events: the 2019 Notre Dame fire, Venice's exceptional high water in November 2019 and eruptions of lava from Stromboli in the Aeolian Islands. These images suggest the possibility of impending natural disasters – rising sea levels, urban fires and volcanic eruptions – creating an apocalyptic vision of nature's fury. The imagery and footage are intentionally decelerated to evoke a sense of extended temporality, while simultaneously accentuating the aestheticisation of catastrophe and its intricate details. This technique not only underscores the severity of the depicted events but also encourages viewers to engage thoughtfully with the complexities of destruction, transforming the horrific into a contemplative visual experience. Through Garrera's narration, De Fusco's work reflects the Christian concept of the Apocalypse, drawing on Hegel's idea of a fundamental conflict between humanity, civilisation and nature. However, within modern ecological discourse, this principle of conflict is absent. Instead, the moment of the world's end represents the ultimate expression of divine supremacy over nature, with the *Revelation* serving as the highest manifestation of divine creation.[10] De Fusco's work engages with the imagery of Venice through an additional layer of symbolic identity: the persistent fear of its destruction. Venice is not merely the city built on water; it is also the city that constantly risks sinking into it. This duality highlights the tension between Venice's iconic status and the looming threat of environmental degradation, underscoring the fragility of its existence in an ever-changing ecological landscape.

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9   Garrera Gianni (ed.): Apocalisse di Giovanni con un saggio sulla musica della fine del mondo «super apocalypsim musica». Diabasis 2005.

10   Cf. Garrera Gianni. In: Sertoli Giuseppe (ed.). Della grammatologia. Milan 2013.

Fig. 5: Andrea De Fusco, Per un'estetica dell'Apocalisse (Aesthetics of the Apocalypse), 2022. Still from video (9' 22").

Courtesy of the artist

Fig. 6: Sara Tirelli, VR Pavilion, 2019.

Photo: Cecilia Tirelli. Courtesy of the artist

VR Pavilion by the artist Sara Tirelli (Fig. 6), which was commissioned by the *Nordic Art Association (NKF)* under the curation of Jonatan Habib Engqvist, emerges as a significant case study in contemporary video art, particularly due to the way it engaged with the Venetian Lagoon while expanding the medium of virtual reality. The immersive installation exemplifies the transformative potential of virtual reality as an artistic form, while interrogating and subverting traditional perceptions of the Venetian landscape. In doing so, it serves as a compelling framework for examining the disconnection of iconic imagery from its established narratives. Positioned on a functioning barge departing from the historic headquarters of the ex-Communist Party in Venice, *VR Pavilion* presents a distinctive platform for engaging with Tirelli's work *Medusa* (2019). Participants don Oculus Rift headsets, immersing themselves in a stark, anonymous white cube gallery space where the narrative unfolds. The experience begins with soundbites relaying news and regulations regarding unaccompanied underage migrants arriving in Sweden, situating viewers within contemporary social issues that extend far beyond the picturesque veneer of Venice. As the experience progresses, participants observe unidentified male youths clad in baggy sportswear ascending a steep ladder to an isolated platform. This striking visual invites immediate emotional engagement, as each youth approaches the viewer, eliciting visceral reactions that oscillate between discomfort and empathy. This interaction underscores the human narratives often overshadowed by romanticised depictions of Venice. Then the viewpoint shifts to hover above a group of white individuals in uniform T-shirts, who echo the pose of the survivors depicted in Théodore Géricault's iconic painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19). This deliberate allusion deconstructs visual narratives surrounding Venice and provokes critical reflections on historical and contemporary issues, including migration and identity. By juxtaposing these two groups, Tirelli illuminates the dissonance between the idealised imagery of the Venetian landscape and the pressing realities faced by marginalised communities. *VR Pavilion* deconstructs the romanticised experience of being transported by boat through the fetishised city of history and beauty. Instead it opens a window onto the struggles of those who have faced – and continue to face – the traumas of migration and survival by sea, creating a powerful and unsettling disruption that also interrogates European memory and identity. The fluidity of virtual reality allows for a manipulation of time and space, enabling narratives to shift between past, present and future. In this way, Venice vanishes into its most iconic image, serving as the perceptual backdrop for an immersive experience that encompasses drift, shipwreck,

sense of loss, the disintegration of identity and a sense of alienation, all at the same time.

In *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* Derrida writes that 'to deconstruct is to take apart a system that operates invisibly; it means to reveal that what we consider natural is constructed by structures that are not fixed, but fluid'.[11] This is precisely the approach reflected in the works analysed here: a more or less deliberate process of deconstructing Venice's identity, revealing new perspectives and less visible, constantly shifting realities. Venice's identity appears fragmented and in flux, as in Matteo Stocco's web archive and film, or in Sonia Levy's installation that offers an underwater perspective on the city's materiality. Antoni Muntadas revisits the *dérives* of Guy Debord, highlighting analogies and changes in the city from 1978 to today, while Andrea De Fusco immerses the observer in a visual essay that explores a hidden yet ever-present feature of Venice: its potential disappearance.

Yuri Ancarani's *Atlantide* portrays the 'drifting youth' of Sant'Erasmo and Pellestrina, a vibrant yet often marginalised microcosm. Sara Tirelli's virtual reality work deconstructs the visual representation of Venice, leaving it as a sensory point of reference or experience in a project that addresses a sense of European identity in decline and a feeling of expanding alienation. Venice no longer exists as a singular, recognisable representation; Venice is not the timeless entity that has been depicted for centuries, 'it is a stratification of cultural and natural information'.[12] And these hybrid works, straddling the boundaries between art installations, video art and cinema, pave the way for new modes of representing the identity of an ever-changing ecosystem, a thinking machine in the era of the Anthropocene.[13]

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11   Derrida Jacques: Writing and Difference. Chicago 1978. p. 278.

12   Baldacci Cristina: Acque and Mud: Stratification as a Metaphor of Time (Maria Morganti). In: Baldacci, Cristina/Bassi Shaul/De Capitani Lucio/Omodeo Pietro (eds.): Venice and the Anthropocene. An Ecocritical Guide. Venice 2022. p. 55.

13   Iovino Serenella: Foreword. In: Baldacci, Cristina et al. (eds.): Venice and the Anthropocene. An Ecocritical Guide. Venice 2022. p. 6.

Part II. Ecologies of Care and Regeneration

3
Alternative Venice
A Look at the Last Twenty Years of Artistic Autonomy, Activism, and Research[1]

Cristina Baldacci

The Fragility and Resistance of a Cultural Archipelago

Laboratory, observatory, model: As a city on the water and part of a lagoon archipelago that has always been strongly anthropised, in its environmental, social and cultural complexity and uniqueness, Venice is today considered an ecosystem that symbolises and tries to cope with the repercussions of the climate crisis.[2] But the city became an icon of the Anthropocene long before this term entered use in the 2000s or the dramatic images of its flooding pervaded the global media in November 2019, when the water peaked at 187 cm above the mean sea level, submerging more than 70% of the historic centre. In the eyes of the world, Venice became part of our heritage that must be safeguarded as early as 1966, during the exceptional and uncontrollable phenomenon of the first high water that threatened the city's survival and lead to a profound rethinking of the relationship between the environment, human beings and works of art. Since then, 'amidst fear, suffering and beauty', the rise of the seas, with their abnormal waves, has represented 'a sort of subversive drive demanding respect

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2   See Baldacci Cristina/Bassi Shaul/De Capitani Lucio/Omodeo Pietro (eds.): Venice and the Anthropocene. An Ecocritical Guide. Venice 2022; and Giupponi Carlo: Venezia e i cambiamenti climatici. Milan 2022.

for nature, even if humanised'.[3] This is how what has been called an 'early "environmentalism"' was born: animated by different orientations but focused 'on the city and the lagoon understood as the expression of a civilisation and a history', rather than on nature itself.[4]

In more recent years, alongside the physical defence of the city and its lagoon, primarily through massive hydraulic engineering works that culminated in the construction of the *M.O.S.E.* system of mobile dykes,[5] a less interventionist attitude, more sensitive to the rights of nature and to a respectful coexistence between human and non-human, has spread – especially on the initiative of environmental groups, cultural associations and independent art collectives. The preservation of the museum city, which responds to a model of development based on tourism, perpetuating the two-faced image of a mausoleum and a playground of memory, cannot – or at least should not – fail to take into account the needs and changes required by the living city.[6] The heart of this city is currently home to fewer than 50,000 residents, a number that has been in constant decline for decades, but also to a growing number of commuters from the mainland as well as others who, for different reasons – principally work and study – live in Venice on a daily or periodic basis, even though they are not officially based here.

Imagining and practising possible alternatives to the stereotypical reality of a Venice agonising under the waves of ever-higher water, unstoppable depopulation and excessive mass tourism – the three major causes of fragility for the city and its lagoon – is a necessary form of resistance for those trying to regenerate, and not only preserve, both its environmental and its socio-cultural biodiversity.

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3   Cf. Nezzo Marta: Une ville d'art fragile. In: Laboratoire italien. Vol. 15/2014. p. 155. doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.842. accessed on 03.01.2025.

4   Cf. Pes Luca: Gli ultimi quarant'anni. In: Isneghi Mario: Storia di Venezia. L'Ottocento e il Novecento, Vol. 3. Il Novecento. Rome 2002. p. 2401.

5   For a study of the pros and cons of *M.O.S.E*, see Giupponi Carlo/et al.: Boon and Burden. Economic Performance and Future Perspectives of the Venice Flood Protection System. In: Regional Environmental Change, Vol. 24.44/2024. doi.org/10.1007/s10113-024-02193-9. accessed on 03.01.2025.

6   See Settis Salvatore: If Venice Dies. New York 2016; and Vettese Angela: Venezia vive. Dal presente al futuro e viceversa. Bologna 2017.

The political-philosophical interpretation of the concept of *resistance* derived from Jean-François Lyotard is taken up in this context. According to this line of thought, it is more appropriate to hypothesise specific 'moments of resistance'[7] that subvert traditional ways of thinking and feeling, opening up questions for which forms of judgement or action have not yet been figured out. Therefore, resistance

> is not something that is always the same, given in advance, supplied with a prior model, program, or an assigned place in the grand march of history. Born instead of an inchoate necessity, following unscripted paths, it calls for an invention or open experimentation in art and thinking, which accompanies the larger movement in which it figures.[8]

Every historical circumstance thus implies different forms of resistance in which art and culture, especially in their more autonomous and para-institutional expressions, play pioneering roles as proponents of counter-models and agents of change. In the case of Venice, which, even more than a 'bipolar city',[9] divided between insularity and mainland, is an archipelago historically made up of different communities – each with its own peculiarities and needs but firmly connected by more-than-human relations – *resisting* the challenges of the climate crisis, neo-liberalism and life after the COVID-19 pandemic means becoming a place of reflection and possibility. This process must start from the local dimension and the actualisation of vernacular knowledges, but avoid falling into the failed trap of blindly or nostalgically opposing ongoing planetary change.

To resist means, first of all, to ask oneself, with a great sense of ethical and civil responsibility: *What is to be done?* The artist Giorgio Andreotta Calò did this, in exemplary fashion, between 2022 and 2023, when he and two friends – Paolo Rosso and Marco Bravetti, one the promoter of the curatorial research initiative *Microclima* and the other the founder of the culinary collective *Tocia! Cucina e comunità* – took part in a municipal competition to 'reclaim' the island

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7   Cf. Rajchman John: Lyotard's "Résistance" Today. In: Baldacci Cristina/Ricci Clarissa/Vettese Angela (eds.): Double Trouble in Exhibiting the Contemporary. Art Fairs and Shows. Milan 2020. p. 86.

8   Ibid.

9   See D'Agostino Roberto: La città bipolare. Centralità urbana e qualità diffusa. In: La nuova dimensione urbana. Venezia-Mestre nella regione Veneto. Venice 1990. p. 61.

of Sant'Andrea.[10] After winning the tender and obtaining the concession for a first part of the island, the greatest temptation – at least for Andreotta Calò – is to keep it as it is, to do nothing, so that it remains 'a space for sharing and research among nature, culture and public commitment'.[11] Here, *non-action* clearly expresses a precise and firm artistic poetic-philosophical will.[12]

Situated in the northern lagoon, and a former bulwark of the city's defence that preserves the remains of the 16th-century fortress – the so-called *Forte* (in Italian, the term, besides being a noun, is also an adjective synonymous with tenacity) – Sant'Andrea is one of the last islands of the Venetian archipelago not to have been colonised by real estate and tourist speculation, as it can only be reached by private boats. As a place that is still *public* in the deepest sense of the term, it represents not only a rarity in Venice's natural and cultural ecosystem, but – even more than a symbol – a manifesto of resistance itself.

Sale Docks: Towards an Alter-Institutional Radical Practice

In the lagoon's artistic-cultural ecosystem, the radical experiment, now almost 20 years old, of the workerist collective *Sale Docks* can certainly be defined as another manifesto of resistance.[13] Established as the headquarters of Venetian art workers – many of them militants in the *Morion* social centre, active in the city

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10   The infinitive verb refers here to the noun 'reclamation', which alludes to the ecological actions undertaken by land artists in the 1960s and 1970s. See Morris Robert (ed.): Earthworks. Land Reclamation as Sculpture. Seattle 1979.

11   Cf. Baldacci Cristina: An Archipelago of Ecological Care. Venice, Its Lagoon and Contemporary Art. In: Lagoonscapes. The Venice Journal of Environmental Humanities. Vol. 3.2/2023. p. 325. doi.org/10.30687/LGSP/2785-2709/2023/02/011. accessed on 03.01.2025.

12   See, in this book, Giorgio Andreotta Calò's letter to Salvatore Settis about the island of Sant'Andrea. chapter 4.

13   In the 1960s and 1970s, Venice, as the home to heavy industries in Mestre and Porto Marghera, was one of the nerve centres of Italian Operaismo (Workerism). It is the region where theorists such as Antonio Negri, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Massimo Cacciari began their political-intellectual parabola and the *Montedison* workers were among the first to make ecological demands, denouncing the environmental toxicity of the petrochemical plant in which they worked. For an in-depth study of the visual dimension of Workerism in Italy, see Galimberti Jacopo: Images of Class. Operaismo, Autonomia and the Visual Arts (1962–1988). London and New York 2022.

since 1990[14] – and as a project space for artists, its history began in 2007 with an occupation.[15] The chosen location was a historic building in the Dorsoduro district. As the name indicates, it is a long-abandoned 15th-century salt ware-house, which started to be used in the 1970s as an additional exhibition venue during some editions of the Venice Biennale. Overlooking the Giudecca Canal and next to the *Accademia di Belle Arti* and the *Fondazione Vedova*, it is strategi-cally located close to the *Peggy Guggenheim Collection* and to the *Punta della Do-gana*, which opened two years later (2009), in conjunction with the *Fondazione Vedova*, and as another venue of the *Pinault Collection* alongside *Palazzo Grassi*.

As a self-managed aggregation centre, the *Sale*, as it is usually called by Vene-tians, responds to a practical need in a particularly delicate moment for Venice. Its intention is to criticise, through militant actions, the neo-liberal model of cultural valorisation in an attempt to make the city's cultural policies more in-clusive and equitable, finding valid alternatives to the precariousness of cul-tural work, especially among young people. As its co-founder, Marco Baravalle, recalls:

> It seemed to us then that we were in the midst of a paradigm shift, if not from the art city to the creative city, at least from the museum city to the contemporary city. We read the maturing of this transition in certain facts: the opening (at Iuav University of Venice) of a new art faculty with an ambi-tiously international scope, the purchase of Palazzo Grassi by François Pin-ault (2005) and his plan to restore Punta della Dogana to display his own con-temporary art collection, the growth in the number of countries interested in having their own representation at the Biennale, the budding of collateral events (even unofficial ones) in international exhibitions, with a relative and constant increase in audiences and, finally, the attempt to root small private foundations in the city.[16]

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14   In addition to the *Morion*, other social spaces with a pronounced cultural agenda include the *Centro Sociale Rivolta*, which opened (also with an occupation) in Porto Marghera in 1995, and the more recent *Palestra Popolare Zenobia*, which opened on the island of Giudecca in 2024.

15   For an overview of the many projects of *Sale Docks*, see www.saledocks.net. accessed on 03.01.2025.

16   Cf. Baravalle Marco: Sale Docks, un'alteristituzione contro la valorizzazione neoliberale dell'arte. In: L'autunno caldo del curatore. Arte, neoliberismo, pandemia. Venice 2021. p. 90; and also, idem: Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn. In: e-flux Journal. Vol. 89/2018. www.e-flux.com/journal/89/182464/art-populism-and-the-alter-institut

Baravalle's analysis is extremely lucid. He presents the new phase of accelerated cultural transformation that postmodern Venice is going through at the start of the third millennium: a 'paradigm shift' that follows in step with the long tail of the city's economic and social change. In the historic centre, one witnesses, among other things: a disappearance of productive and administrative activities; an increase in the number of tourists and, accordingly, a lengthening of the high season; an exodus of Venetians towards Mestre and the mainland and a consequent re-adaptation of buildings and flats as either exhibition venues or tourist lets, driven by the spread of Airbnb; and an arrival of large international investors, with a growth in speculation especially in the cultural and luxury spheres. The gradual spread of the tourist development model, for better or for worse, has been drastically changing the Venetian artistic and cultural context, with its desperate lack of spaces for free sharing. Public and private cultural activities invade and give new impetus to the city, but, at the same time, they stifle independent initiatives. Contemporary art plays a leading role in this process, complicitly embodied by the Venice Biennale, which, in its various manifestations (art, architecture, cinema, dance, music, theatre) and with its related events – even when unofficial – expands temporally (almost without interruption) and spatially (outside the institutional venues of the Giardini and the Arsenale into all six city districts and even beyond).[17] By doing this, the Venice Biennale confirms itself as a brand closely connected with the image of the city in which it was born.[18]

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17   While biennial events were already invading the urban space in the 1970s, exhibitions and collateral events really began colonising the city in the 1990s, notably with the Venice Biennale 1993 – and the show within the show *Aperto '93* – curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, and the Venice Biennale 1999 – not coincidentally entitled *dAPERTutto* – curated by Harald Szeemann.

18   For an interpretation of the Venice Biennale as one of the most enduring brands of modernity, see Martini Vittoria: How La Biennale as a Brand was Born. Venice as the Archetype of a Biennial City. In: Oboe Journal, Vol. 1.1/2020. p. 99–107. doi.org/10.25432/2724-086X/1.1.0008. accessed on 03.01.2025. In the article, the author also highlights the mission that the Venice Biennale, in the wake of the 1968 ideological protest, gave itself between 1974 and 1978 'as an institution that would work for the "salvation" and "vivification" of the city' (cf. p. 107, footnote 33).

ional-turn/. accessed on 03.01.2025. See also the conversation with Marco Baravalle. chapter 16.

In the era of the *Biennalocene* – the assembly of art and cultural workers, founded in May 2023 on the initiative of the *Sale* and the *Institute of Radical Imagination*, together with *ADL Cobas* and *Mi Riconosci?* (both workers' rights associations) (Fig. 1) – simply regaining space becomes the first requirement for those who position themselves as an alternative to the art mainstream and the 'artistification'[19] of Venice.

Fig. 1: Biennalocene, Venice Biennale, 2024.

Photo: Nicolò Zanatta. Courtesy of *Biennalocene*

From this point of view, the *Sale* continues to be a beacon in the city, although its radical model, based on collective action and an 'alter-institutional'[20] impulse, has not always been successful or even popular.[21] Despite its failures, difficulties and ongoing battles, the *Sale* certainly has the merit

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19 Cf. Baravalle Marco: Sale Docks, un'alteristituzione contro la valorizzazione neoliberale dell'arte. In: L'autunno caldo del curatore. Arte, neoliberismo, pandemia. Venice 2021. p. 91. To learn more about the *Biennalocene* initiatives, see: https://www.biennalocene .com. accessed on 03.01.2025.

20 Ibid. p. 89.

21 One of the aspects which, by Baravalle's own admission, the *Sale* initially failed to come to terms with, because it was too busy pursuing a radical ideology and militantism,

of having been the most tenacious agitator and having stuck rigidly to its demands. Throughout these years it has shown that an alternative to the neo-liberal cultural hegemony can be collectively constructed in Venice 'as a right to the city, as the conception of new institutional architectures, as the reinvention of cultural formats […] in the name of the common'.[22]

Microclima: A Curatorial Approach

Social and environmental responsibility are the basis of many artistic and curatorial practices that have spread in the Venetian cultural ecosystem in recent years and, while perhaps less radical than those carried out by the *Sale*, are no less relevant. These are collaborative practices that envisage the involvement of various public and private, local and international actors in single projects – even long-term ones. And while these practices do not always involve cohesion or even a shared design, they have a research methodology that unites several experiences and usually includes, depending on the case: walking in the landscape, educating about art and respect for the city and its lagoon, caring for others (interspecies collaboration), sharing and working together, developing the idea of community (in the singular but more so in the plural), archiving collective experiences, memories and knowledges, trying to regenerate what remains, avoiding intrusive attitudes and – last but not least – (re-)imagining the present and a possible future.

This procedural specificity found a catalyst in the self-funded project *Microclima*, which is based in the *Serra dei Giardini* next to the Venice Biennale (hence the name), and in its initiator, Paolo Rosso. Since 2011, the project, which has an essentially curatorial approach, has made a name for itself in the Venetian context as an assiduous promoter of 'independent and anarchist experiments'.[23] Born out of the cooperation between amateurs and interdisciplinary professionals and focused on 'the natural world, cultural heritage and the public sphere', these *experiments* seek to recreate, from time to time, 'a

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was its failure to consider that the art workers of 2000 were not moved by the same revolutionary fire that had characterised their predecessors in the 1970s. Ibid. p. 91.

22   Ibid p. 95.

23   Cf. www.microclima.net. accessed on 03.01.2025.

hospitable and welcoming microclimate triggering actions of a cultural nature in different contexts'.[24]

Among the *microclimates* recreated by Rosso and his many partners and companions – including the artist Edoardo Aruta – the most enduring and, for the moment, perhaps the most successful, is the *Cinema Galleggiante* (Fig. 2). Since 2020, this has presented an annual programme of screenings of artists' films on a floating platform located in the southern part of the lagoon, opposite the island of Giudecca.

Fig. 2: Cinema Galleggiante – Acque Sconosciute, 2023.

Courtesy of Riccardo Banfi & *Microclima*

So far it has had five editions, which, over the years, have shaped 'a collective vision and desire', rethinking the city 'starting from the lagoon'.[25] Between late August and early September, in conjunction with the *Biennale Cinema*, this independent emulation of Venice's international film festival brings together

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24   Ibid.
25   Cf. https://www.cinemagalleggiante.it/it. accessed on 03.01.2025.

institutions, associations, museums and local and international festivals to ad-
dress topical issues that start with the particular (Venice and its lagoon) and
open up to the universal (the world). These issues include *Unknown Waters* –
which was the focus of the first edition and constituted the conceptual frame,
as well as the subtitle, of the following editions – the journey, the dreamlike and
surreal dimension, living (from an ecological and more-than-human perspec-
tive) and the inner world. The leitmotif pays homage to two central figures of
psychiatric reform in Italy, Franco Basaglia and his wife Franca Ongaro, both
Venetians.

In addition to being an artistic-cultural event, the *Cinema Galleggiante* is also
a party for the extended Venetian community, bringing together old friends
and new companions and experimenting with different forms of conviviality,
including sustainable cuisine. Artistic-culinary collectives such as the afore-
mentioned *Tocia!* – often aided by the duo *Barena Bianca*[26] (Fabio Cavalletti
and Pietro Consolandi) or other professionals – reinvent Venetian and inter-
national cuisine under the banner of sustainability by studying the ecology of
the lagoon – especially the precious ecosystem of the salt marshes – and only
using it in ways that do not endanger biodiversity.

Practices like these show how Venice and its lagoon – both as a physical con-
text and as a metaphorical milieu – become a self-reflexive device, a kind of
meta-lagoon[27] that enables us to understand, respect and try to help this special
environment.

Coexisting Responsibly in an Artistic Ecosystem

The desire to question and challenge the established system and act in an ex-
perimental and courageous manner in order to promote a more democratic

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26   The collective is itinerant and operates in different contexts, collaborating with numer-
      ous initiatives, but also has a fixed base at *Spiazzi*, a cultural association inaugurated in
      2003 in a former carpenter's workshop a stone's throw from the Arsenale. For research
      into *Barena Bianca*, see www.barenabianca.earth. accessed on 03.01.2025.
27   In this regard, see in particular the projects: *Metagoon*, an online platform initiated by
      the artist and video maker Matteo Stocco, and *wetlands*, a publishing house founded
      as a non-profit social enterprise: https://www.metagoon.net and https://www.wetlan
      dsbooks.com. accessed on 03.01.2025.

idea of culture has been a common feature throughout the history of artistic-cultural activism, in Venice and elsewhere. This essentially means abandoning obsolete models and concepts, including the traditional definition of art and the recognised role of the artist, while being aware of the risks of swimming against the tide. However, every experience that seeks to be independent of the system constitutes a model of action and a critical device in its own right that is dependent upon the historical moment and the context in which it operates, the situation from which it starts and the objectives that it sets for itself.[28] The relationship with the territory and the community gives rise to 'a situated projectuality (in the public space and in the local dimension)'[29] that can last for years – as in the two Venetian cases of *Sale Docks* and *Microclima* – or rapidly die out like a meteor. Self-management is hard to sustain, especially for economic and relational reasons, despite the awareness that it is vitally important to remain united in order to cope with difficulties.

Non-profit spaces, multidisciplinary collectives, artists' studios and residencies, social centres and other hybrid entities belong to the galaxy of independents that have alternated in Venice over the last 20 years with new initiatives that act in the liminal spaces between art and activism, art and life. The reasons for this creative volatility are numerous and many have already been highlighted, but we must not forget the importance of Venice as a city that trains young artists and creative and cultural practitioners. A key role is played by the city's two universities, *Iuav* and *Ca' Foscari*, the *Accademia di Belle Arti* and the *Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa* – with its atelier programme, which has been its main activity, by statute, for more than a century (it was founded in 1898, almost at the same time as the Venice Biennale), as well as its exhibitions. The result is that Venice is home to many young people who, at least at the beginning of their careers, are strongly influenced by its environmental, social and cultural uniqueness and who live between the need to leave, due to the actual

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28   For an in-depth look at independent art initiatives in Italy, see, among others: Artissima Lido (ed.): An Almost Complete Directory of Independent Artist-Run Spaces and Collectives in Italy. Milan 2012; Brusarosco Patrizia/Farronato Milovan (eds.): Souvenir d'Italie. A Nonprofit Art History. Milan 2010; Pinto Roberto/Spampinato Francesco (eds.): Skank Bloc Bologna. Alternative Art Spaces since 1977. Milan 2024.

29   Cf. Coletto Stefano: From Bevilacqua to Collective Ateliers. Communities of Relations in Venice. In: Quaderni d'arte italiana, Vol. 2.5. Community. Rome 2024. p. 80–85. Also available online: https://www.quadriennaledirroma.org/en/from-the-bevilacqua-to-collective-ateliers-communities-of-relations-in-venice. accessed on 03.01.2025.

difficulties of living in the city, and the desire to stay, to try to contribute to its defence and growth.

Fig. 3: Maria Morganti, Self-Portrait Panel (detail). 17.02. Being Among Others. Artist's Wednesdays, 2022. p. 2024. Digital printing on cotton paper, artist's proof. Archive no. 2022_Panels_Self-Portarit Panels_033.

111– Luigi Viola	126– Marina Gasparini	141– Jeffrey Throwell
112– Gaston Ramires Feltrin	127– Franco Gazzarri introduce Wall(k)	142– Lucas Reiner
113– Private Gallery	128– Silvano Rubino, Augusto Maurandi, Roberta Iachini	143– Stefano Boccalini
114– Tobia Ravà visita mostra a Villa Donà delle Rose	129– Maja Baievich	144– Stefano Calligaro
115– Nikola Uzucnovski	130– Honorine Tepfer	145– Marcello Maloberti
116– Angiola Churchill	131– Wanda Casaril	146– Serena Nono
117– Aldo Runfola	132– Amy Worthen	147– Susan Crile
118– Katia Ceccarelli	133– Enrica Cavarzan, Lisa Castellani, Gloria Safont-Tria, Maria Zanchi	148– Carlo Steiner
119– Serena Nono	134– Amalia Dal Ponte	149– Sonia Rolak
120– Tania Bruguera	135– Sabrina Mezzaqui	150– Paolo Zamolo, Gerardo Balestrieri
121– Sebastian Zabronski	136– Tobia Ravà mostra	151– Maria Grazia Rosin mostra al Fortuny e Luca Clabot performance alla Querini
122– Julie Cook	137– Federica Bortolotti	152– Mario Bottinelli Montandon mostra allo Spazio Thetis
123– Visione video intervista Gilbert and George	138– Francesco Scarfone	153– Augusta Atla
124– Nicola di Caprio	139– Progetto Morinho	154– Cecio Casali
125– Katja Noppes, Alessandro Capozzo	140– Kim Jones, Dan Perjovschi, Ernesto Salmenròn	155– Anne Walden
187– Mauro Ghiglione	202– Paola Volpato	218– Nicola Nanke
188– Luca Clabot	203– Mario Airò	219– Roberto De Pol
189– Diego Marcon	204– Monica Trevisan, Cristina Lombardo	220– Claudia Rossini
190– Peggy Milleville	205– Manuela Vallicelli	221– Marianna Marchioro
191– Peter Feldstein	206– Uzia Ograbek	222– Visione Film "Gomorra" in previsione gita a Scampia
192– Vendaval (Pablo Alonso de la Sierra, Rocio Arèvalo Vargas)	207– Primoz Birjak	223– Italo Zuffi
193– Laura Viale	208– Enzo De Leonibus	224– Associazione "E"
194– Roberta Orio	209– Fabrizio Sartori	225– Renzo Brugin
195– Sergia Avveduti	210– Marya Kazoun	226– Kaitlin Zorah McDonough
196– Dominika Sobolewska	211– Lia Cecchin, Marisa Albanese	227– Maurizio Donzelli
197– Gabriele Soave	212– Alessia Armeni	228– Francesco Liggieri
198– Antonio Catelani	213– Giulio Squillacciotti	229– Michele Sambin
199– Adele Prosdocimi	214– Giuliana Racco	230– Luca Pucci
200– Delfina Marcello, Francesco Urbano, Francesco Ragazzi	215– Sonia Rolak	231– Nicola Ruben Montini
201– Olga Vanoncini, Bruno Lorini	216– Fabiola Faidiga	232– Renzo Brugin
	217– Luca Bertolo, Chiara Camoni	

Graphic design: Marta Magini. Photo: Francesco Allegretto. Courtesy of the artist

Moreover, the particular configuration of Venice as a pedestrian (or at most nautical) city encourages sociability and the sharing of the increasingly crowded and less available public spaces and the few but inclusive private interiors. An exemplary case in point is Maria Morganti's studio, which opened its doors at 6pm every Wednesday between 2002 and 2012, offering other artists in the city the opportunity to come together (Fig. 3). In ten years, 254 artists

visited Morganti's studio or, sometimes, the spaces of the *Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa*, jointly creating 'a space for the silent [...]; an intimate space within the public space [...]; a space which represents a multitude of individuals, of artists who each express their world with their meaning'.[30]

Given the frequent lack of accessibility of more traditional venues, artists' studios and flats have also often acted as sharing spaces and hosted exhibitions. Besides the ongoing activity of *Casa Punto Croce* (which started in 2012), the many other examples include the initiatives *Proj V–Incontrare* (at Tobia Tomasi's), curated by the *Mobeel Cultural Association*, and *Hic Sunt Leones* (at Sandro Zoico's and Pinuccia Casaccio's), both of which date from 2007.[31]

It would obviously be neither possible nor particularly useful to list the many initiatives, stable or otherwise, that have been promoted by independent artists and curators in Venice since 2000. We will therefore limit ourselves to a few brief considerations and hints that may help to offer an initial picture of the current situation. First of all, it should be noted that, despite the initial discouragement, the prolonged lockdown and other difficulties experienced by the world of art and culture due to the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated artists to react, reorganise and come together again. In 2020 alone, Venice, Mestre and Marghera saw the birth of such artistic-curatorial collective projects as *aarduork*, *Kadabra*, *Bardadino*, *Friche*, *Casablanca* and *Extra Ordinario*, to which we must add the multitude of earlier and later experiences that the *ComeCome* association attempted to map in its recent three-day *Walking Tour* (3–6 October 2024)[32] (Fig. 4).

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30   Cf. the artist's website: www.mariamorganti.it/en/self-portrait/17-being-with-others/ 17-02-artists-wednesday-meetings. accessed on 03.01.2025.

31   Cf. Boragina Federica/Brivio Giulia (eds.): Interno domestico. Mostre in appartamento 1972–2013. Verona 2013, p. 121–123; and the website of *Casa Punto Croce*: www.casapun tocroce.org. accessed on 03.01.2025.

32   The association's website contains the most comprehensive current list of artist-run spaces in Venice, to which we refer for a presentation of the individual experiences: https://www.comecome.info. accessed on 03.01.2025.

Fig. 4: 'Walking Tour', programme, Venice, Mestre, Marghera, 2024.

ComeCome Walking Tour

3 ottobre 2024

h. 14.45
Fondazione Malutta
Via Angelo Scarsellini 11, Marghera

h. 16.00
Kadabra
via Giuseppe Verdi 57, Mestre

h. 17.30
Telespazio
via Felisati 12, Mestre

h. 18.30
zolforosso
viale San Marco 96 I, Mestre
+ Scafandra
+ Tocia! Cucina e comunità

4 ottobre 2024

h. 14.00
Cazzo Spazio
Cannaregio, 6262

h. 15.00
Aarduork
+ Extragarbo
Castello, 4931

h. 16.30
Panorama
San Marco, 602A

vaporetto San Zaccaria → Giudecca Palanca

h. 17.45
Cosmogram
Giudecca, 624

h. 19.15
Studio Distilleria
Giudecca, 796

vaporetto Giudecca Palanca → Zattere

h. 21
Casa Punto Croce
Da Venezia Undertide a Binario17
Santa Croce, 2125

5 ottobre 2024

h. 14:00
Doppio Fondo
Santa Croce, 1256

h. 15:00
Joystick, Fondazione Malutta
Santa Croce, 2125

h. 16.30
zolforosso
+ Gli Impresari
Santa Croce, 1894

h. 17.45
Terzospazio
proiezione in collaborazione con
NAZRA Palestine Short Film Festival
Santa Croce, 1996

6 ottobre 2024

h. 16.00
The Parliament of Things
workshop a cura di BARN
Cooperativa Sociale "Il Cerchio"

ComeCome propone un tour di tre giorni alla scoperta dei diversi volti, mani, menti e luoghi che animano la rete delle realtà indipendenti tra Mestre/ Marghera/ Venezia.
Dal 3 al 5 ottobre esploreremo insieme agli amic* di BARN (Brussels Artist-Run Network) studi d'artista, spazi no-profit, collettivi multidisciplinari ed entità ibride che proliferano tra terraferma e città storica.
Domenica 6 ottobre ci ritroveremo presso la cooperativa Sociale Il Cerchio per The Parlament of Things, un workshop partecipativo in cui scambiarci pensieri sul fare arte oggi a Venezia, a Bruxelles and everywhere.

ComeCome proposes a three-day tour to discover the multiple faces, hands, minds and places that animate the network of independent realities between Mestre/ Marghera/ Venice.
From October 3 to 5, together with our friends from BARN (Brussels Artist-Run Network), we will explore artist studios, non-profit spaces, multidisciplinary collectives and hybrid entities that thrive between the mainland and the historic city. On Sunday 6 October, we will gather at Cooperatia Sociale Il Cerchio for The Parliament of Things, a participatory workshop where we will exchange thoughts on making art today in Venice, Brussels and everywhere.

Courtesy of *ComeCome*.

At least two other initiatives should also be mentioned due to the stable presence that they have enjoyed in the city for over a decade. The first is the *Fondazione Malutta*, an artistic collective with more than 40 associates that was formed in 2013 within the framework of the courses – especially the painting courses – of the *Accademia di Belle Arti* and whose intent is, in a certain sense, to represent a self-managed alternative to the (municipal) *Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa*. The second is *Spazio Punch*, a non-profit organisation located in the area of the former breweries – now an art district – on the island of Giudecca that has 'investigated and organised cultural events, exhibitions and talks' since 2011.[33] Its founder, Augusto Maurandi, is also one of the promoters of the symptomatically named network of artists and cultural professionals *Venezia c'è* (*Venice is there*), which campaigns publically to ensure that the Venice Pavilion at the Giardini of the Venice Biennale – which is currently mismanaged by local politicians – will have a scientific committee composed of members of the city's artistic community.

For the Venetian *artivist* community, the Venice Biennale remains by far the most prestigious, powerful and influential institution that it must deal with in redefining the socio-cultural ecologies of the city.[34] As the latest significant example in this area, we can mention the *rebiennale* collaborative platform, which enables a 'network of Venetian citizens, students, architects, artists and political activists to share methods, procedures, skills and know-how in the field of self-building'.[35] Set up in the context of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2008, it proposes a bottom-up and communitarian practice of living, far from building speculation and (largely) from power, that focuses on the dismantling of exhibitions as a form of recycling and redistributing used materials in the territory. For example, *rebiennale* collaborated with the *Sale* in setting up the exhibition *Open#6* (2013), which was made with salvaged material. This exhibition was part of a series dedicated to young artists that recalled the eponymous

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33   Cf. https://www.spaziopunch.com. accessed on 03.01.2025.

34   For a review of the topic, see Tarocco Francesca: How Do Venetian Artists Contend with Mass-Tourism? In: Frieze. 5 April 2024. https://www.frieze.com/article/venice-biennale-tourists-everywhere-242.

35   Cf. https://www.rebiennale.org. accessed on 03.01.2025.

Aperto, a historic presentation of emerging art at the Venice Biennale, that was held from 1980 to 1993, precisely at the *Magazzini del Sale*.[36]

As this brief account of independent art-curatorial practices during the last two decades shows on several levels, the theme of *living together* – which we now also ecologically define as *coexistence* – is particularly special, as well as urgent, to Venice. An archipelago that, according to the most catastrophic predictions and like other small and medium-sized islands threatened by rising seas, is not destined to last long. So, *what is to be done?* This question constantly resounds among (art) activists and independents who love and respect Venice and who keep it alive with their actions.

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36   For an accurate study of *Aperto*, see Ricci Clarissa: Aperto|1980-1993. La mostra dei gio-vani artisti della Biennale di Venezia. Milan 2022.

4
Letter to Salvatore Settis on the Island of Sant'Andrea

Giorgio Andreotta Calò

The following text was written in July 2023 in the form of a letter to Salvatore Settis. The Italian archaeologist and art historian was identified as an ideal interlocutor for the question posed in the text: *What is to be done?* Without explicitly requesting an answer, the text and the question argue the reasons for non-action and become a possible programmatic manifesto for the island of Sant'Andrea and the *Forte* (fortress) it houses (Fig. 1) – once a defence outpost of the City of Venice and today a symbolic place or, even more, a place to be defended for what it culturally represents for the city and its lagoon.

The text therefore overturns the perspective from which to consider and observe the *Forte*, as well as the action to be undertaken: the observation of this place, no longer in its function as a defensive structure but, rather, in the perspective of a space to be defended and preserved, in its current transitory condition. A place through which we can think and become aware of our actions against the ruined present, of the possibility of *not acting*, precisely where action has defined itself as consummatory and exhaustive, destructive. Somehow, *the* place that can defend us from ourselves.

By highlighting and cultivating its (and our) weakness and fragility, the *Forte* is transformed into metamorphic space. Like the shell of a moulting crab, it becomes vulnerable and open to possibility, only to transform itself into another space for the defence of new cultural values.

May Sant'Andrea therefore be a monument and a bulwark of a halting progression, of a gradual slowing down and decommissioning in favour of an ecosys-

temic re-appropriation of spaces, where the anthropic and the natural find balance and logic.

Venice, 2 July 2023

Dear Professor,

First of all, please allow me to thank you for your willingness to consider my letter. I will now attempt to briefly summarise my reasons for thinking of turning to you.
I would like to begin by briefly presenting myself and reporting to you who I am and what I am working on.
I was born in Venice and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, where I now teach sculpture… in truth, only since very recently. I lived in the Netherlands between 2008 and 2016 and returned to the lagoon to take part in the Venice Biennale in 2017, and then established my studio in the city and made it the focus of my research interests.

Last December, the website of the State Property Agency announced the auctioning by tender of a 20-year concession for the use of part of the island of Sant'Andrea.
I participated in the auction as part of a small group – three people who share the same views, positions and objectives.
Our bid was accepted and, hence, we were granted the concession.
The section of the island that we are permitted to use is relatively small, as is the entire piece of land of which this section is part and which, in my opinion, is extremely interesting and valuable.
This is because the area that is not at our disposal plays host to a 16th-century fortress that was designed by Andrea Sammicheli and has recently been renovated. The same piece of land also contains other structures from later periods – up to the Second World War – but as these are not cared for they find themselves in a state of decay.

We have attempted, and continue to attempt, to obtain permission to also use the part of the island in front of the fortress so that we can build an outpost in this extraordinary setting, a place for thinking and debating that will enable us to counter the risk of this location also being swallowed up, sooner or later, by

the constantly advancing tourism that has already infected Venice in an irreversible way and is now assuming a new, green and sustainable guise, in order to generate profits in newly conquered areas.

This was the trigger that moved us to follow this path.
Once we had arrived on the island, we were asked:
What do you want to do?
I have been asking myself this question for a long time, but it was not until participating in the tender process that I was able to answer it – because this was a sort of call to arms and I entered the fray with little delay.
Only recently, now that I am often on the island again, did it become clear to me exactly how I should answer the question of 'what is to be done?' This answer was both simple – and paradoxical.

'Nothing.'

We don't want to do anything.

What's that supposed to mean?
Well, I used to spend time on the island of Sant'Andrea years ago. It was one of the few abandoned free spaces that was worth investigating and could always be recognised because time had stood still.
When I returned to Italy and Venice in 2016 after many years in the Netherlands and experienced daily life in the city again, I was seized with doubt and had a real *crisis of presence*.
It was no coincidence that the work of art that I presented at that time at the Venice Biennale was shaped by this feeling and by the opportune reading of Ernesto de Martino's book *La fine del mondo* (*The End of the World*).
The city that I had left just a few years earlier had changed drastically. In those few years, many of these places, these undetermined free spaces, in which I had been able to rediscover myself, had simply disappeared or changed into something else – mostly hotels and tourist facilities.
But Sant'Andrea had not changed during these years.
In my opinion, the unsuspected potential of this place is due to its original function: defence.
This is why the past few months have revealed to me the civic, ethical and militant mission that we must carry out here.
We must ensure that this place remains as it is. A defence post, but one with a

paradoxically reversed perspective: a final bastion that is to be defended.
And we must be careful: If our answer to the question '*WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?*' is '*NOTHING*', we will find ourselves facing an even more treacherous path.

Because *doing nothing* doesn't mean taking no action. Quite the opposite: It takes a huge effort to resist the temptation to transform this place, too, into something else. Perhaps such a huge effort is even alien to our human nature.

Instead of transforming the place, we should change our own perspective.
As if undergoing a paradigm change, we should imagine that this place represents our last opportunity to take a really new look at our present.
In order to ensure that all that is here, made by man and saved by its context (the isolated location, the wild nature, the absence of private property) – indeed, this very combination with its *unexpressed and unrealised potential* – can remain preserved.
The privileged place where to project our imagination, in other words, our future.

Taking the idea further, I would like it to be able to consolidate to the point of becoming *forte* – strong, in the literal, original sense of the *fortress* itself – and to embody that place on Sant'Andrea.
I am just an artist and, as such, seek to give shape to visions. It would be naïve of me to imagine that my voice could achieve anything against the pressure of all the interests that converge here – public and private interests, each with their development projects.
So you can see, Professor, that whatever I was willing to pay I would simply not be able to find another place that gives me even a rudimentary sense of still being in my hometown and the surroundings in which I was brought up.
It is a real privilege to experience Venice as a normal citizen rather than as a species that is threatened with extinction. Today, I can find nothing as worthwhile as this.

I also require little to be satisfied. What is Sant'Andrea today, compared with the much larger area that has already been irrevocably conquered?
No more than a small, marginal island on the outermost edge of this voracious touristification.

This symbolises Sant'Andrea today and this says everything: Sant'Andrea symbolises Venice, a utopia, a cultural symbol that should not be allowed to perish. At the end of the day, I didn't summarise briefly, for which I am very sorry.

And I am also not completely sure what I am actually asking you to do.
In truth, I am probably asking you for *nothing*.
And I would also like to add that you are effectively *the author of your own destiny*: If you hadn't written this insightfully polemic book *Se Venezia muore* (*If Venice Dies*), I would probably never have sent this email.
Hence, I am now sharing with you this idea, which is also associated with reading your book and has, to a certain extent, become manifest to me in my life today.

I would be delighted if you could offer me some idea or piece of advice.
And if you should want to offer criticism, that would delight me even more: I prefer honest argument to flattery.

I suspect that, if we are to build a movement centred on this site, we will require many years of work, huge experience and a self-confident stride.
And, above all, in order to defend an apparently regressive and nihilistic and yet, in my opinion, absolutely essential idea…
The ability to pause, contemplate and change direction.
I also have absolutely no idea whether I remotely have the character, the temperament and the time to do this. Either way, I do not have the slightest intention of backing down and will attempt to do my bit.
Given the wave of destruction that is consuming everything in its path, I cannot remain inactive.
In truth, *doing nothing* in the *fortress* is an act of resistance on behalf of a place that, thankfully, no one has consumed so far…

Giorgio Andreotta Calò

Fig. 1: Giorgio Andreotta Calò, Fort of Sant'Andrea, Venice, 2024, Walkways inside the bastion.

Courtesy of the artist

5
Coexistence and Care

Notes on Curating Three National Pavilions at the Venice Biennale

Natalie King

> *My little ship, by means of oars and sails.*
> *Reason became my sails, my will the oars,*
> *Forming for me a solid dike and wall*
> *Against the fatal wrath and pride of Love.*
> *Thus without any fear of shoals or rocks,*
> *I live in this serene and blessed harbor.*
> *I praise One only, and I grieve for none.*

Gaspara Stampa[1]

Writing love sonnets and madrigals, the Italian Renaissance poet Gaspara Stampa passed away in Venice after a fifteen-day illness on 23 April 1554. The parish register records her cause of death as *mal de mare* or 'illness of the sea'.[2] In poem number 202, she writes about the intertwinement of love and living in 'this serene and blessed harbor', with its watery tendrils leading to the Adriatic Sea. The formation of the Venice Biennale is also a love story, which commemorated the silver wedding of the Italian King and Queen, Umberto I and Margherita of Savoy, in 1895.[3]

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1   Lillie Mary Prentice/Stortoni Laura Anna: Gaspara Stampa, Selected Poems. New York 2008. p. 157.

2   Ibid. p. VIII.

3   History of Biennale Arte. La Biennale di Venezia. accessed on 24.10.2024.

How can we collectively imagine the regenerative possibilities of the fragile ecosystem of Venice? Could the Venice Biennale provide a space in which country pavilions coexist despite geopolitical turmoil and crises? How could the marshland habitat and archipelago of islands inform notions of sustainability and care? And what of Édouard Glissant's archipelagic mode of thought, steeped in fragility, derivative drift and imaginary constructions, as a way of understanding the complexities of living, working, creating and exhibiting across the lagoon?[4] If archipelagos, then, can be considered as a system of relations, 'they also require', according to Glissant, 'a loving reassembling that signifies beyond the dehumanizing centripetal forces of globalization'.[5] Reflecting on curating pavilions at the Venice Biennale, I consider the possibility of reassembling this flagship event as a relational system: between artists, audiences, countries, communities and waterways.

I have curated three national pavilions at the Venice Biennale, situated in the Giardini, Arsenale and offsite, respectively. These are *Tracey Moffatt: My Horizon*, Australian pavilion, Venice Biennale 2017, *Yuki Kihara: Paradise Camp*, New Zealand pavilion, Venice Biennale 2022, and *Maria Madeira: Kiss and Don't Tell*, inaugural Timor-Leste pavilion, Venice Biennale 2024. Each curation was an epic and unremitting undertaking with moments, however, in which the archipelago of Venice could be considered as a cultural microcosm and meeting place, as envisioned by Glissant from '…across the world that joins shores and horizons together'.[6] Let us reimagine the Venice Biennale as a place of conjoining, whereby 'these archipelagos must encounter each other because, across their many islands, interdependence and difference coexist – and, in this way they carry the energy that is necessary for our whole globe, our whole world'.[7]

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4   Glissant Édouard/Obrist Hans Ulrich: The Archipelago Conversations. New York 2021.

5   Martinez-San Miguel Yolanda/Stephens Michelle: Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking: Toward New Comparative Methodologies and Disciplinary Formations. Lanham 2020. p. 3.

6   Ibid. p. 5.

7   Glissant Édouard/Obrist Hans Ulrich: The Archipelago Conversations. New York 2021. p. 19–20.

My Horizon

While Glissant links 'shores and horizons', I will commence with a discussion of Tracey Moffatt's *My Horizon* at the Venice Biennale 2017 (Fig. 1), and a pre-occupation with horizons as metaphors for coexistence, diversity and future thinking. Moffatt reflects, 'There are times in life when we can see what is coming over the horizon, and this is when we make a move. Or we do nothing and just wait for whatever it is to arrive?'[8]

Fig. 1: Tracey Moffatt, My Horizon, 2017.

Photo: John Gollings. Courtesy of the artist and *Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery*, Australia

Australia has been participating in the Venice Biennale since 1988 in a previously two-level exhibition space with a veranda like a beach house, designed by Philip Cox. Due to its temporary status, the Australian pavilion was redesigned and rebuilt by John Denton in 2015 into a large, black geometrical structure that juts out over an adjacent lagoon. Architectonic and monolithic, the design is one of the newest buildings in Venice, due to strict building

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8   King Natalie (ed.): Tracey Moffatt: My Horizon. Melbourne and New York 2017. p. 6.

regulation codes. Denton's black box in the corner of the Giardini was inaugurated by Cate Blanchett in 2015 with an exhibition by Fiona Hall. In 2017, the *Australia Council* asked five artists to submit proposals, with Tracey Moffatt's submission being chosen by the commissioner. Subsequently, I was appointed as the curator, with the *Australia Council* as the government agency responsible for managing the exhibition *My Horizon* and with Tracey Moffatt making the first solo presentation by an Aboriginal artist in the Australian pavilion.[9]

In her cinematic montage *Vigil* (2017), Moffatt activated the pavilion exterior with a pulsating film that lured audiences through the foliage to the back corner of the Giardini. Splicing found footage of rickety boats overflowing with refugees adrift at sea, Moffatt interspersed images of white movie stars watching from windows. Moffatt riffs off movie stars and boat wrecks to consider watching and waiting, arrival and departure, displacement and upheaval. Elizabeth Taylor stands aghast at a window-like aperture, while Kathleen Turner and Julie Christie peep through binoculars. *Vigil* recalls Moffatt watching, in horror, a television news story in 2010 about the asylum seeker boat that crashed on Christmas Island. For Moffatt, 'The smashing of that rotten wooden boat is symbolic of how borders around the world are disintegrating.'[10] As Moffatt signals a kind of re-bordering, I wonder if Venice and the Venice Biennale could be a locale for dissipating geopolitical borders, for living and creating together.

Why Biennials?

As the historiography of biennials is being developed and studied, the Venice Biennale has been considered a place of inquiry, exchange and dialogue. Furthermore, *Shifting Gravity*, the *World Biennial Forum No. 1* held in Gwangju in 2012, was a global gathering that explored the way biennials can actively accommodate political and social issues within a local context.[11] With their cultural geography, biennials as a popular 'exhibition medium of great power and

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9   Ibid. p. 16.

10   Ibid.

11   Bauer Ute Meta/Hou Hanru (eds.): Shifting Gravity: World Biennial Forum No 1. Berlin 2013. p. 224.

flexibility... were continually perceived as (and turned out to be) a context in which dialogue took place, both artistic and social'.[12]

According to biennial scholars, Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, these mega-events mark the convergence of art circuits and ideas with the history and popularisation of large-scale international exhibitions. Biennials are periodic exhibitions within a calendar cycle and a particular 'exhibitionary' format. Episodic, seasonal, recurrent and evolving, biennials often take the tempo of our times, whereby urgent contemporaneous topics are investigated and remediated.

A Brief History

The Venice Biennale is the oldest recurring international exhibition and has led to extensive scholarship around 'biennialisation'. The first edition of the Venice Biennale attracted 224,000 visitors and public acclaim. In the council meeting of 30 March 1894:

> the first decisions were taken: to adopt a 'by invitation' system; to reserve a section of the Exhibition for foreign artists too; to admit works by uninvited Italian artists, as selected by a jury. On 6th April, Mayor Selvatico announced the first exhibition for the following year. On 10th April, economist and scholar Antonio Fradeletto was nominated Secretary general. The place of work was the little Council library.[13]

Simultaneously, work continued on the construction of the exhibition venue in the Giardini di Castello. On 8 July 1910, the futurist poet Marinetti arranged a drop of anti-Biennale leaflets in Piazza San Marco. During the Second World War, the activities of the Venice Biennale were interrupted in 1942, only to be resumed in 1948. The opening days of the Venice Biennale in 1968 were marred by encounters between students protesting and the local police, which resulted in some of the artists refusing to show their work in solidarity. The only other

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12   Gardner Anthony/Green Charles: Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art. Chichester 2016.

13   La Biennale di Venezia. https://www.labiennale.org/en/history/recent-years. accessed on 21.10.2024.

time that the Venice Biennale was deferred was during the COVID 19 pandemic (the 59th Venice Biennale was postponed from 2021 to 2022).

The Venice Biennale is held across the city in palazzos, parks, warehouses and cafés. The traditional site of the Venice Biennale is the Giardini, on the eastern edge of Venice, where Napoleon laid out gardens at the beginning of the 19th century. The Giardini hosts 29 pavilions including Josef Hoffmann's Austrian pavilion, Gerrit Thomas Rietveld's Dutch pavilion and the Finnish pavilion by Alvar Aalto. These national country pavilions are purpose-built, architecturally designed, permanent pavilions arranged along promenades within the gardens. Presentations by nation states form part of a competitive environment, with differing timelines, budgets and media teams, depending on their resourcing and prominence, and with the Golden Lion being awarded by a jury. Notably, Archie Moore won the Golden Lion in 2024 for his exhibition *kith and kin* in the Australian Pavilion, curated by Ellie Buttrose, in which a genealogical family tree was handwritten in chalk across the gallery's walls.

Each participating country has different timetables and processes for procuring the artist and curator for their respective pavilions. The varying methodologies include open calls, selective shortlisting, invitation and the appointment of a curator who researches an artist, and so on. Some countries have, at times, attempted to disrupt the nation state format by swapping pavilions (France and Germany exchanged pavilions in 2013), exhibiting artists from other countries in a fluid statement about the porous qualities of nationhood. Amidst the pre-vernissage chaos and disruption, the overgrown gardens of the Giardini are filled with dust, crates, forklifts and ladders, scaffolding, scissor lifts, tools and feverish artists and their crews. Ultimately, the Giardini are miraculously manicured and tidied before the arrival of the art cognoscenti, media throng and collectors enjoying *cicchetti* (Venetian tapas) and parties.

Informal Networks

There is limited cross-pollination between pavilions as most artists, curators and teams are focussed on delivering their exhibition in climatically challenging conditions that include humidity, floods, dust and the complexity of moving artworks to a lagoon environment where barges with forklifts are used to manoeuvre crates. Yet, despite the pressures, informal networks have been es-

tablished. For example, in 2024, Tarini Malik, the curator of the British pavilion set up a WhatsApp group of over 25 female curators of national pavilions to share anecdotes, accommodation tips, advice and invitations and to gather in person for a casual dinner in the week prior to the vernissage.

Despite the multitude of logistics faced by each pavilion, this curatorial group offered supportive camaraderie, collective respite and good humour during the intense pre-opening phase. Working under the auspices of governments as stipulated by the Venice Biennale, the national pavilions are often compared to the Olympic Games, with systemic inequalities of funding and capacity. Despite the stark differences, the curators were able to gather and share their anecdotes and live struggles, depletion and elation.

The heightened conditions of the Venice Biennale, with the attention of the global art world, are adeptly described by Juliana Engberg. Whereby artists '…hope for opportunities to accrue from exposure to the largest gathering of international curators worldwide who attend the event… Artists will also admit it is a heavy responsibility to "represent" one's country, which is inevitably the burden they are given when showing in a national pavilion.'[14] There is immense pressure on an artist and the requisite careful support is required. It is this mix of euphoria and anguish, exhilarating yet exhausting, that defines the complex task of participating in a Venice Biennale with its seven-month duration across the shores of Venice.

Nu'utele Islet

Another kind of shoreline or island is featured in Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp* (Fig. 2) as a gigantic wallpaper image of a landscape decimated by the 2009 tsunami in Samoa. Kihara was notably the first Pasifika, Samoan and *fa'afafine* (Sāmoa's 'third gender') artist to represent New Zealand at the Venice Biennale with her camp ensemble of photographs, archive and film.

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14   Gardner Kerry: Australia at the Venice Biennale: A Century of Contemporary Art. Melbourne 2021. p. X.

Fig. 2: Yuki Kihara, Paradise Camp, 2022

Photo: Luke Walker. Courtesy of the artist and *Milford Galleries*, Aotearoa New Zealand

Despite its picturesque qualities and resemblance to tourist brochures with palm trees and sandy beaches, the backdrop includes, in the distance, Nu'utele Islet, which was a leper colony during the period of colonisation by Germany and New Zealand. Thus, the beach is a complex place, which is impacted by climate change with significantly higher rates of rising sea levels and acidification along the coastal strip.

For the Tongan-Fijian scholar Epeli Hau'ofa, however, 'Oceania is hospitable and generous...We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views....'[15] This Venice Biennale was conceived and delivered under the constrained conditions of the pandemic, with an unforeseen yet ultimately triumphant outcome. Adaptations, deferrals, funding constrictions and travel limitations were the context that this Venice Biennale contribution researched and delivered after responding to an open call submission process by *Creative New Zealand*.

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15   Hau'ofa Epeli: Our Sea of Islands. In: The Contemporary Pacific 6, 1/1994. p. 148–161.

Paradise Camp was presented in the Arsenale, a complex of former shipyards and armouries dating back to 1104 that are clustered together in a colonnade of long warehouses with concrete floors and brick walls. Despite the heritage background of these interlocking halls where countries can rent spaces from the Venice Biennale for varying amounts depending on their size and location, these national pavilions co-exist side by side, with New Zealand and Albania sharing a space in 2022. New Zealand has been participating in the Venice Biennale since 2001, with such presentations as Lisa Reihana's epic video animation *In Pursuit of Venus* in 2017. Other previous artists and curators include Michael Parekōwhai, Francis Upritchard, Dane Mitchell, Zara Stanhope and Rhana Devenport, respectively. New Zealand chose not to participate in 2024.

Kihara states that: 'These works pay homage to my ancestors and simultaneously subvert the dominant western heterosexual "normalcy" that continues to conflict with the existence of fa'afafine people today.'[16] Intrigued by the use of photography as a decolonial weapon that irreverently returns the Western gaze, I commenced a research phase reading *Gender on the Edge*,[17] *Samoan Queer Lives*[18] and *Coming of Age in Samoa*,[19] the American anthropologist Margaret Mead's earnest but culturally insensitive study of adolescent girls in Samoa in the 1920s.

On 18 May 2020, the Venice Biennale announced that it was postponing two of its signature international exhibitions – the Architecture and Art Biennials – due to the ongoing disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the ripple effect on cultural institutions. The Venice Art Biennale was shifted from May 2021 to April 2022, ensuring that Cecilia Alemani's exhibition would now coincide with *documenta*, Europe's leading quinquennial, in Kassel, Germany, in June 2022, which was curated for the first time by a collective from Asia – the Jakarta-based artist's collective ruangrupa. Alemani, the first Italian woman appointed as artistic director at the Venice Art Biennale, used the extra year to develop new projects and align with Liberation Day, when Italy celebrates

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16   Tama Samoa – Samoan Man. Auckland Art Gallery. accessed on 21.10.2024.

17   Besnier Niko/Alexeyeff Kalissa: Gender on the Edge: Transgender, Gay, and Other Pacific Islanders. Honolulu 2014.

18   McMullin Dan Taulapapa/Kihara Shigeyuki: Samoan Queer Lives. Auckland 2018.

19   Mead Margaret: Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation. New York 1928.

the end of the Fascist regime and Nazi occupation. Quoted in the New York Times, Alemani declared: 'I hope that the occasion will mark a new celebration of togetherness, a new sense of participation and communion.'[20]

The pandemic induced increased interest in the ethics of care in the context of COVID, from care at home, in schools, hospitals, day care centres and social enterprises to the issue of global unevenness. The urge to develop different modes of working acted as a hiatus or pause, with people based at a fixed point as travel and mobility were suspended. It was a time for reflecting on some of the problems of existing habits: on how to come together in a slower, more reflective way of working. As deadlines evaporated and calendars were suspended, many of us needed to learn 'different ways of practicing being human, being an artist, curator, researcher, practitioner, listener...', as noted by curator Biljana Ciric, while '...working towards creating more complex entanglements over long periods of time'.[21] This kind of slow curating, taking more time to think through and work, consistently guided the relational process of curation.

Firsts Solidarity Network

Initiated by Yuki Kihara, the first Pasifika, Asian and Fa'afafine (Sāmoa's 'third gender') to present in the New Zealand pavilion, the Firsts Solidarity Network (Fig. 3) was an informal group that offered collegial support to the participating artists and curators. It was also an opportunity to initiate cross-pavilion discourse around pertinent issues such as the internal machinations of national pavilions, while also striving towards equitable representation.

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20   Farago Jason: Venice Biennale Postpones Next Two Editions. The New York Times. 18.05.2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/arts/design/venice-biennales-postponed-coronavirus.html. accessed on 21.10.2024.

21   Ciric Biljana (ed.): As You Go… the Roads under Your Feet, towards the New Future. Milan 2022.

Fig. 3: Venice Biennale, Firsts Solidarity Network, 2022.
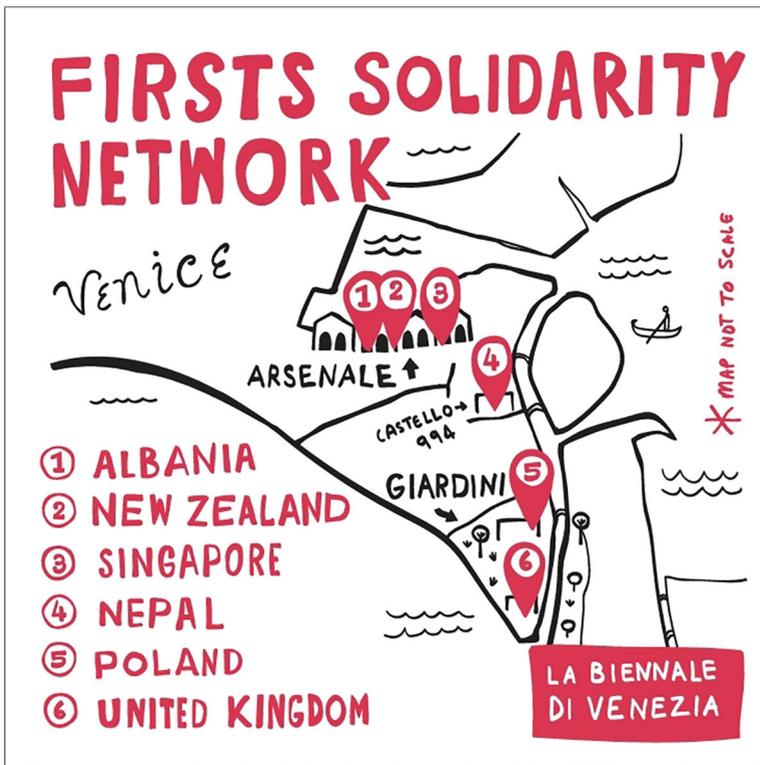
Courtesy of the New Zealand Pavilion

Comprising artists who were first-time representatives from a marginalised or under-represented group in their respective countries or first-time country participants at the Venice Biennale, the network offered practical advice and camaraderie among participating pavilions, including Albania, New Zealand, Singapore, Nepal, Poland and Britain, with a pre-vernissage gathering at *Ocean Space*. The network provided cross-pavilion support and hosted webinars that reflected on collective experiences in the final phase of the Venice Biennale – as a powerful gesture towards solidarity and a way to expose systemic flaws and inequalities while finding a way to come together.

Sea, Soil and Solidarity

In the film accompanying Maria Madeira's ensemble installation *Kiss and Don't Tell* (Fig. 4), she sings the haunting refrain of a traditional song, *Ina Lou / Dear Mother Earth*, in the local language Tetum. Returning to her homeland after the Timorese voted for independence from Indonesia in 1999, the artist slept in a bedroom, in which there were coloured markings on the walls at knee height. After gaining the trust of surrounding neighbours, Madeira learned that the marks were the remains of lipstick. During the Indonesian occupation (1975–99), Timorese women were forced to wear lipstick, kneel down and kiss the walls. Madeira slept surrounded by hundreds of clearly visible impressions of lipstick, imprinted stains of torment.

Fig. 4: Maria Madeira, Kiss and Don't Tell, 2024.

Photo: Cristiano Corte. Courtesy of the artist and *Anna Schwartz Gallery*, Australia

Fig. 5: Ina Lou / Dear Mother Earth: Sea, Soil and Solidarity, poster of the two-day symposium, Venice, 19–20 November 2024.

Graphic design: Giulia Brolese. Courtesy of Mónica de Miranda

Madeira honours these anonymous women and their suffering in her site-specific, large-scale installation *Kiss and Don't Tell* in Spazio Ravà on the Grand Canal, adjacent to the Rialto Bridge. By drenching the walls in drips of paint and betel nut that resemble blood, further enhanced by the deep crimson hue of antiseptic, Madeira alludes to wounds and injuries. As there are no art supply stores in Dili, Madeira deploys materials sourced locally by diluting the red ochre earth from her village, Ermera, co-mingled with threads of *tais*, the tra-

ditional Timorese textile. The effect is like a stain, a teardrop, or even oozing blood. The pale hues of blue and peach acrylic paint add a further luminous quality to her epic painting installation, whose vibrating and pulsating effect is pleading to be seen.

Madeira sings *Ina Lou / Dear Mother Earth* as she narrates her harrowing discovery, which was also the inspiration for a two-day gathering during the closing days of the Venice Biennale 2024 that brought together Timor-Leste, the project *Greenhouse* from Portugal (the former coloniser of Timor-Leste), the collateral exhibition *The Spirit of Maritime Crossing* and *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE) at Ca' Foscari University of Venice*. Comprising panel discussions, film screenings and a performance, this mini cross-pavilion event (Fig. 5) was a way of sharing critical discourse surrounding our respective pavilions while formulating collective trans-national responses. These kinds of gatherings are part of a curatorial practice of conversation, dialogue, friendship, support, alliance and camaraderie.

A Biennial in Slow Motion

During this time of geopolitical and environmental crises, one of the most prescient realisations has been how everything is interdependent and interconnected. The Delhi-based trio of artists, curators and interlocutors, Raqs Media Collective, asks, 'So what is a collective life based on mutuality, generosity, reciprocity and trust?'[22] While exhibitions are temporal, the curatorial process takes time and care.

Raqs Media Collective's essay in e-flux 'Earthworms Dancing: Notes for a Biennial in Slow Motion'[23] rethinks the biennial model in terms of tempo and momentum, imagining a biennial stretching to become something that happens across two years rather than an event that occurs once every two years. They write about syncopation and the pace of researching '…dormant, barely

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22   Raqs Media Collective: Planktons in the Sea: A Few Questions Regarding the Qualities of Time. In: e-Flux Journal, no. 27/2011.

23   Raqs Media Collective: Earthworms Dancing: Notes for a Biennial in Slow Motion. In: e-Flux Journal, no. 7/2009.

discernible, and hibernating strands...' as well as cultivating patience 'through multiple acts of turning, borrowing, tunnelling, and composting'.[24]

Perhaps we could look at these notions of co-inhabiting a period '...to create structures and processes by which different rhythms of being and doing can act responsively towards each other'.[25] Instead of the high intensity vernissage or in addition to the peak opening, we could reimagine a biennial in slow motion that builds relationships and solidarities, discourse and conversations, which lead towards a jointly sustainable future, over time and in time.

Curating Carefully

The inherent vulnerabilities of caring can be linked to Judith Butler's articulation of the '...reciprocal and material modes of sharing [that] describe a crucial dimension of our vulnerability, intertwinements and interdependence of our embodied social life'.[26] Delicacy and fragility are helpful ways of understanding the support systems, effort and activities that curators are required to forge. The prominence of the word 'care' and 'curating' is noted by Elke Krasny and Lara Perry in the recently published anthology *Curating with Care*[27] with a convergence that the editors refer to as a response to the dual crisis of ecological care and a professional crisis in curating: 'The cultural production of curators, including curation at different scales ranging from the big museum to the self-managed art space, from the global biennale to the local cultural community centre, is always an expression, and a reflection, of urgent contemporary concerns.'[28]

With these three pavilion case studies, I have charted a paradigm of care as a horizontal and relational practice, with coexistence and taking care as central tenets of all curatorial activities and encounters. We can only hope that with the appointment of Koyo Kouoh as the first African woman to take up the

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24   Ibid.

25   Ibid.

26   Butler Judith/Yancy George. Interview: Mourning Is a Political Act amid the Pandemic and Its Disparities (Republication). In: Journal of Bioethical Inquiry 17. No. 4. 2020. p. 483–487. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10043-6.

27   Krasny Elke/Perry Lara. Curating with Care. Abingdon 2023.

28   Ibid. p. 2.

mantle of curator of the Venice Biennale in 2026, she will extend her cura-
torial mode as an 'artist-centered curator'[29] and be guided by conversations
and listening. By contrast, an alternative, nimble model to curating large-
scale recurrent international exhibitions in our present condition of ecolog-
ical crises is to look towards biennials/triennials in the Global South such as
Kathmandu Triennale, Nepal, Lahore Biennale, Pakistan and Kochi-Muziris
Biennale, India. As co-Artistic Director of the Kathmandu Triennale 2026, we
are seeking a newfound intimacy amongst us all, a yearning for belonging that
speaks to a global ethics of connection and coexistence, care and kinship. We
are searching for avenues to repair a precarious world by working with our
counterparts to co-create, co-curate, co-produce with artists in the unique
locale of Kathmandu amidst the foothills of the Himalayas. As curators, we
could adopt habits of care and inclusive modalities of hearing each other in
order to generate renewed collective futures. Slowing down ways of working
and being is a way to chart new ecologies of collective care as a continuous
mode of support.[30]

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29   Marshall Alex. Koyo Kouoh is named 1st African woman to curate Venice Biennale. In:
The New York Times, 02.12.2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/03/arts/design/v
enice-biennale-curator-koyo-kouoh.html. accessed on 12.12.2024.

30   Other important references consulted for this text include:
Filipovic Elena/Hal Marieke Van/Øvstebø Solveig: The Biennial Reader. Ostfildern 2010.
Green Charles: South as Method? Biennials Past and Present. In: Galit Eilat, Mayo,
Charles Esche, Pablo Lafuente, Luiza Proenca, Oren Sagiv, and Benjamin Seroussi
(eds.): Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Fo-
rum No 2. Sao Paulo 2014.
Lamberti Maria Mimita: International Exhibitions in Venice. In: OBOE JOURNAL, Vol. 1
No. 1/2020: Why Venice? p. 26–45. doi.org/10.25432/2724-086X/1.1.0004
Recent Years. La Biennale di Venezia. https://www.labiennale.org/en/history/recent-y
ears. accessed on 21.10.2024.

6
The Architecture Biennale as a Platform for Socio-Ecological Interventions

Adrian Praschl-Bichler

Humans have shaped their surroundings according to their own ideas since time immemorial – even in locations that are unusual or hard to reach. One excellent example of this is the historic centre of Venice, which was built on a lagoon. And yet, the architecture of Venice – just like the city itself and its inhabitants – is facing a growing threat, not least due to this exposed position. Above all, Venice is struggling to deal with rising sea levels, recurring floods, mass tourism and the resulting exodus of its population.

It is not just in Venice that architecture, as a discipline, can contribute to solving such problems. Together with related disciplines – such as urban planning – and political decision-makers it shares responsibility for the functionality, use, distribution, accessibility and future viability of the spaces that are all around us. In this sense, architecture has a huge influence upon our human coexistence and our relationship with nature as well as, very concretely, the wellbeing of every individual.

However, rather than contributing to the solution of ecological and social problems, architecture – in combination with certain policies – frequently makes them worse. Growing levels of building development and the associated soil sealing are leading, in the short term, to more frequent flooding events and higher temperatures and, in the longer term, to the reduction in the amount of agricultural land and a loss of biodiversity driven by a simultaneous loss of habitat, together with a reduction in the ability of the ground to store CO_2,

which is further accelerating climate change.[1] This, in term, is reinforcing social inequality – as exemplified by the fact that it is the more disadvantaged social groups that, by being compelled to live in poorly insulated homes in densely-built urban districts, are most exposed to rising temperatures.[2] Other social problems directly affecting the population include the housing shortage and homelessness, which are closely linked to the generally unfair distribution of space and the associated concentration of wealth and power in the hands of just a few people.

Having said this, architects are becoming increasingly aware of their considerable influence upon societal trends and their unique position among the visual arts. Unlike sculpture or painting, architecture is defined by its functionality, its relationship with its location, its public character and its characteristic sense of openness or enclosure, which can refer to not only spaces but also their degree of accessibility to different individuals.[3] The functionality of architecture principally concerns the basic need for a place to live, which makes it relevant to everyone. But a home and its location are also accompanied by a close psychological connection with these and other subjectively important built spaces. In addition to this, the public character of architecture also means that we are subject to a permanent sensory relationship with it – whether we want to be or not.

Hence, it seems to be even more significant that the Venice Architecture Biennale is playing an expanding role as a platform for socio-ecological interventions. In the spirit of architectural ethics, a school of thought within architectural philosophy that has developed rapidly in recent decades,[4] the discipline is able to go beyond a purely functionalist and/or aesthetic approach[5] or, at least, is able to regard the ethical aspect of construction as being of equal importance. Indeed, considering that, in contrast with the other arts, the solution

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1   University for Continuing Education Krems: Bodenversiegelung in Österreich. Bodenv ersiegelung in Österreich - less emissions (donau-uni.ac.at). accessed on 15.08.2024.

2   Tagesschau: Wie Klimawandel die soziale Ungleichheit verschärft. Wie Klimawandel die soziale Ungleichheit verschärft | tagesschau.de. accessed on 30.09.2024.

3   Baumberger Christoph: Architekturphilosophie. Eine Einleitung. In: Baumberger, Christoph (ed.): Architekturphilosophie: Grundlagentexte. Münster 2013. p. 7–29.

4   Ibid.

5   Harries Karsten: Die ethische Funktion der Architektur. In: Baumberger, Christoph (ed.): Architekturphilosophie: Grundlagentexte. Münster 2013. p. 167–179.

of ethical problems in architecture is a directly intrinsic and essential part of the work of architects, they are obliged to go beyond the merely functional and aesthetic.[6] As architecture (once again, unlike the other arts) both provides the framework for and impacts upon our daily lives, even its aesthetic aspects can hardly be addressed independently from its ethical aspects and their impact.[7] And yet, which ethical functions must architecture fulfil in the first place?

According to Karsten Harries, architecture should assign us a place or offer us a home and 'rescue us from the meaningless homogeneity of space'.[8] Christian Illies offers more concrete detail in his proposal for the six fields of architectural ethics:

> (1) Professional behaviour and interaction during the planning, designing and construction phase. (2) The function and use of a building. (3) The impact on nature. (4) The impact on individual users: their health, safety, and general wellbeing, including their psychological wellbeing. (5) The influence on human behaviour, individually and collectively. (6) The cultural or symbolic meaning of buildings [...].[9]

While largely agreeing with Illies's points, Warwick Fox adds the concept of *design fit* as a further key consideration.[10] This refers to the purely creative suitability of a building, the extent to which it fits into its natural, social and built context. Fox took the *design fit* of a building, which he regards as being essential for an architectural ethic, as a basis for the development of his ethical theory, the *theory of responsive cohesion*, which can also be applied to architecture. This states that our well-founded and best-informed opinions regarding what is most valuable are underpinned by a specific organisational form, *responsive cohesion*, which we should see as an absolutely fundamental value that applies

6   Lagueux Maurice: Ethik und Ästhetik in der Architektur. In: Baumberger, Christoph (ed.): Architekturphilosophie: Grundlagentexte. Münster 2013. p. 180–199.

7   Ibid.

8   Harries Karsten: Die ethical function of architecture. In: Selected Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, vol. 11. 1985, p. 138.

9   Cf. Illies Christian: The moral relevance of architecture. In: IAPS Bulletin, Vol. 31. 2008. p. 3.

10   Cf. Fox Warwick: Architecture, ethics, and the theory of responsive cohesion. Flash (an zasca.net). accessed on 30.09.2024.

to every conceivable area, including the process of evaluation itself. As a result, it should structure our life and our actions. *Responsive cohesion* sits between the two extremes of *fixed cohesion* (in which things cohere rigidly, statically and without any communication between the elements – as exemplified, in politics, by dictatorship and autocracy, etc.) and *discohesion* (in which there is absolutely no cohesion between things – as exemplified, in politics, by anarchy) and reflects the order or organisation of things that are cohesive and whose elements and central characteristics communicate significantly with one another. In any particular field, the example that best represents *responsive cohesion* and its relational quality is generally regarded by informed judges as the best example of its kind.[11]

What does the *theory of responsive cohesion* mean for architectural ethics?

The theory provides architects with unambiguous decision-making criteria. Fox differentiates between *internal responsive cohesion* (cohesion and communication between individual elements within a system) and *contextual responsive cohesion* (cohesion and communication between two systems) and emphasises that the realisation of the organisational form of *responsive cohesion* should be aimed at the broadest possible context, which means that *contextual responsive cohesion* is to be preferred to *internal responsive cohesion*, although both should be strived for. He declares that the Earth, the very basis of our existence, is the broadest context to which *responsive cohesion* can apply and, hence, advocates the protection of the biosphere and of the integrity and responsive capacity of its constituent parts. As a result, the social, political, economic or, indeed, any other context is subordinate to the ecological context. In addition to this, every aspect of our broader society – everything that involves our living together as humans – is to be put before human-made artefacts. According to this theory, architects involved in realising buildings should attempt to achieve an outcome that is satisfactory for all specified contexts and, in case of doubt, should decide in favour of the greatest context of all – nature – or, otherwise, the next largest context.[12] This approach contradicts the three-pillar model regularly used in

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11   Ibid.
12   Ibid.

architecture, in which economic, ecological and social aspects are regarded as being of equal importance.[13]

The most recent editions of the Venice Architecture Biennale offer particular proof that architects are beginning to understand their major impact on society and to seek architecture-related solutions for the broader contexts described by Fox, such as nature and social cohabitation. In contrast with purely aesthetic questions, these contexts are not only relevant to a small circle of art aficionados. While Venice has become a regular location for civil protests on behalf of a better environment and successful social cohabitation, the socio-ecological interventions of individual national pavilions at the Venice Architecture Biennale, one of the world's most significant artistic institutions, have the potential to deliver a much greater impact. After all, architects represent entire nations through their contributions in the pavilions and the Venice Architecture Biennale attracts an unbelievable number of visitors. In 2023, the total was 285,000.[14] Furthermore, the media response to the event is huge. The innovative approaches of the socio-ecological interventions also have a decent chance of being seized upon by politicians as a basis for political debate and, in individual and the best cases, playing a role in the drawing up of new legislation.

The relationship of humans with their broadest possible context[15] – nature and the environment – has been central to a number of contributions in recent years. In 2016, for example, at the Venice Architecture Biennale entitled *Reporting from the Front,* a special project that was not associated with any national pavilion reported on *The Forests of Venice.*[16] On the one hand, the project is a reference to wood as a natural resource and to the ten million timber posts upon

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13   Düchs Martin: Architektur für ein gutes Leben. Über Verantwortung, Moral und Ethik des Architekten. Münster/New York/Munich/Berlin 2011. p. 180–197.

14   La Biennale di Venezia: The Biennale Architettura 2023 closes with 285,000 visitors. Biennale Architettura 2023 | The Biennale Architettura 2023 closes with 285,000 visitors (labiennale.org). accessed on 30.09.2024.

15   Cf. Fox Warwick: Architecture, ethics, and the theory of responsive cohesion. Flash (an zasca.net). accessed on 30.09.2024.

16   Aravena Alejandro: Reporting from the Front: 15. Mostra Internazionale Di Architettura: Biennale Architettura 2016, 28.05-27.11. Venice. Participating countries, collateral events. Venice 2016. p. 162–163.

which Venice was built. On the other hand, it conceptually turns the appearance of Venice on its head by proposing ten million new trees as a solution to ecological problems. And even if the idea of planting so many trees initially appears utopian, we need precisely such powerful visions of how cities can be reconciled with nature in future. This proposed project sees Venice as a future symbol and as a model for the intact relationship or symbiosis between built cities and their natural surroundings.

The Peruvian contribution of the same year, *Our Amazon Frontline*, refers to the title of the Venice Architecture Biennale and reports on the 'last frontline' that has to be overcome.[17] This runs between the vision of the earlier inhabitants of the Amazon region and the approach of modern Western society that, through its massive interventions in the rainforest, represents a threat to biodiversity, the production of oxygen and the regulation of the climate. In this light, we have to learn from the knowhow of the native people in order to obtain valuable insights in the fields of medicine, nutrition and sustainable production. In line with this intention, the Peruvian pavilion addressed *Plan Selva*, a largescale public programme that rebuilt hundreds of schools in corners of the Amazon region that are difficult to access and lacking in infrastructure. The educational programme in these schools is also dedicated to overcoming cultural challenges. They promote multiculturalism and Indigenous languages. The architecture itself consists of elements that can be adapted to specific local climatic and topographical conditions and individually and flexibly transported by boat.[18] The newly-built schools strengthen the social fabric that connects the various cultures. And their construction, with its knowingly minimal intervention in the natural context, is justified by the expectation that they will have a positively retroactive impact on the natural environment.

In 2016, the Montenegrin pavilion presented the project *Solana Ulcinj*.[19] One of the country's largest and historically most important salt works was artifi-

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17   Ibid. p. 90–91.

18   Youtube: BiennaleChannel. Biennale Architettura 2016 - Peru (youtube.com). accessed on 01.10.2024.

19   ArchDaily: Montenegro Pavilion at 2016 Venice Biennale to Investigate One of Europe's Largest Post-Industrial Landscapes. Montenegro Pavilion at 2016 Venice Biennale to Investigate One of Europe's Largest Post-Industrial Landscapes | ArchDaily. accessed on 01.10.2024.

cially created close to the town of Ulcinj in the 1920s. In 2005, however, production ceased to be supported by a state monopoly and Solana Ulcinj was declared bankrupt. Since then, the ownership status of Montenegro's salt works has been uncertain and there has been no clear strategy for the use of the facilities. Salt production ceased in 2012, but the salt pans have since inexorably developed into a huge biotope. The production of salt created a range of chemical conditions that has generated enormous biodiversity and Solana Ulcinj is also home to around 250 species of bird, which use the former salt production facility as a resting place during long migratory journeys or as a breeding ground. A total of four different projects addressed the possible future structure of the ecologically significant area. The project by *LOLA Landscape Architects* of Rotterdam was particularly notable for the way in which it considered a range of contexts before prioritising the expansion of the biodiversity of Solana Ulcinj by pumping salt water all-year-round rather than just during the warmer months. The aim of the idea was to attract new species of birds. At the same time, the area covered by the pumping was reduced and modern technology was employed in order to produce particularly high-quality salt that can be offered on the global market without having to compete with cheap Chinese salt. The area was also opened for leisure activities such as birdwatching, floating on the salt water or taking mud baths, with the aim of stimulating the social life and entrepreneurial instinct of the region. Existing buildings were used and only a handful of new ones erected where absolutely necessary. Paths were also laid around the perimeter of Solana Ulcinj, while its heart remained inaccessible and untouched. And while the project was not realised in exactly this form, the area has still been a nature reserve since 2019.[20]

Salt was also an important element of the contribution by the United Arab Emirates to the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2021,[21] whose motto was *How will we live together?* This investigated the development of an environmentally-friendly alternative to cement production, which is responsible for around 8% of global CO_2 emissions. With the help of salt obtained from the *sabkhas*, the

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20   Ulcinj Salina: An analysis of legal and institutional challenges in the process of EU integration and closing Chapter 27. Solana-izvjestaj_ENG-final-min.pdf (czip.me). accessed on 01.10.2024.

21   Margutti Flavia Fossa/Pietragnoli Maddalena (eds.): How will we live together?: Biennale Architettura 2021. Participating countries and collateral events. Venice 2021. p. 126–127.

coastal deserts that can be found in the UAE, and the use of brine, which is a common by-product of the desalination of sea water, it is possible to produce environmentally-friendly building materials that can replace cement. If new human artefacts still can or should be made, even considering and weighing up the broader context, it is particularly important to build them using recycled materials and to avoid waste.

The reuse of materials was also a central element of the German pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2023, which had the theme *The Laboratory of the Future*.[22] The contribution addressed the care, repair and preservation of buildings and public spaces and, in particular, of the German pavilion itself. More specifically, the pavilion was to remain in its current condition and no additional materials were to be employed, which means that the project countered the prevailing logic of the market economy and its demand for the permanent creation of new things. Material from more than 40 different national pavilions from the Venice Art Biennale of 2022 was recycled and integrated into the new design. This triggered a central question: How can creativity be conceived to be environmentally-friendly? In addition to this, the interventions in the building also considered socio-spatial needs. Attention was paid to those spaces and infrastructural elements that enable the most vulnerable groups to participate fully in society and underline the importance of often unseen caring work: a meeting room, a tea kitchen, a material store – or, for example, a workshop. Here, elements of Venice's social infrastructure were cared for, repaired and made usable again. In this sense, the pavilion addressed the broadest possible context, the environment, but also the underlying level of social relationships.

Further architectural contributions of recent years have directly continued this theme of social relationships. And in doing so, while not always explicitly addressing the ecological context, they have also avoided any unplanned negative ecological consequences. These social interventions often concern the possibility of and the need for public participation by less-privileged individuals. In this process, the public realm is not primarily regarded as the opposite of the private realm but, rather, as a series of social and spatial spheres that can essentially establish themselves anywhere in line with the density and form

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22   Arch+: Open for Maintenance – Wegen Umbau geöffnet. Open for Maintenance – Wegen Umbau geöffnet | ISBN 9783931435752 | ARCH+ (archplus.net). accessed on 01.10.2024.

of social relationships[23] and that include such issues as inclusion or democracy.[24] The private realm, on the other hand, is associated with property and ownership rights. And it is also accompanied by ever more obvious inequality in the areas of both property ownership and social participation, which is resulting from the accumulation of space by an increasingly powerful minority. As the enablers of such a problematic situation, political decision-makers are also challenged to counter it.

The objective of *Beteiligung*, the Austrian contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2023, was to open the Venice Biennale to the city. The idea was to place one half of the interior of the pavilion at the disposal of the neighbouring district of Castello, which is still primarily inhabited by local people, for use as a public meeting space. In order to achieve this it would have been necessary to circumvent the wall around the Venice Biennale site, which passes alongside the pavilion. The architectural collective *AKT* and the architect Hermann Czech, who were responsible for the project, initially planned to break through the wall. However, the Venice Biennale organisers and the city authorities rejected both this idea and a subsequent proposal to cross the wall using a bridge. As the possibility that the idea of opening up to the city would be rejected had been recognised from the outset, the alternative show in the completed pavilion documented the failure of the project. This triggered a discussion about not only the power to determine the use of space in a city in which land is limited, but also the notion of social sustainability in the context of the constant expansion of the Venice Biennale in the historic centre of Venice. The truth is that this expansion of the Venice Biennale is being accompanied by the exclusion of local people from the spaces used by the event. In 2023, the Austrian pavilion demanded at least a partial reversal of this expansion.[25,26]

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23   Lofland Lyn H.: The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory. New York 1998. p. 11.

24   Hannemann Christine/Hilti Nicola/Reutlinger Christian (eds.): Wohnen: Zwölf Schlüsselthemen sozialräumlicher Wohnforschung. Stuttgart 2022. p. 63.

25   La Biennale 2023.at: Partecipazione / Beteiligung. Partecipazione / Beteiligung — 18. Internationale Architekturbiennale in Venedig 2023 (labiennale2023.at). accessed on 01.10.2024.

26   Kleine Zeitung: Architekturbiennale: Österreichs Beitrag stößt in Venedig auf feste Mauern. Architekturbiennale 2023: Österreichs Beitrag stößt in Venedig auf feste Mauern (kleinezeitung.at). accessed on 01.10.2024.

In the same year, the so-called *Unfolding Pavilion* took place for a fourth time. This is a pop-up exhibition about the specific space that it is occupying at that moment. The *Unfolding Pavilion* has never been part of the Venice Biennale programme, but this time it was located in the area in front of, behind, around and along the perimeter of the Giardini. The Giardini are home to most of the national pavilions that form part of the Venice Biennale. The *Unfolding Pavilion* had the motto *#OPENGIARDINI* and, in a similar way to the Austrian pavilion, rejected the spatial conditions created by the organisation of the Venice Biennale and the exclusion of people from an area that is actually public. The fact is that, in 1807, Napoleon built a public park (the Giardini Pubblici), which came to be occupied by permanent exhibition buildings after the first international art exhibition in 1895. The section of the park used by the Venice Biennale is still not privately owned but, rather, public land that is merely placed at the disposal of the institution by the city of Venice. Only one third of the total area of the park is permanently accessible to the public free of charge, while the rest of the Giardini can only be entered during the visiting hours of the Venice art and architecture biennales upon payment of an entry fee. However, the primary target of the criticism of the *Unfolding Pavilion* was the inaccessibility of the Giardini during the six months of the year in which no exhibition is taking place. Because the public is unable to enter the Venice Biennale area in the Giardini all year round due to a 'system of gates, walls, fences, CCTV cameras, metal spikes, barbed wire and armed guards'.[27] The interventions curated by Daniel Tudor Munteanu and Davide Tommaso Ferrando included a sticker campaign, a photo project by the photographer Laurian Ghinițoiu and a huge banner demanding the opening of the Giardini that was placed in front of the entrance to the Venice Biennale. In addition to this, boat owners who suffer due to the border devices created by the Venice Biennale were helped to get to their boats. Some of these boat owners who rent mooring points from the city are assigned, purely by chance, points that are located on the perimeter to the Venice Biennale. This perimeter includes high barriers, ladders suspended above the water, spiked fences and walls topped by broken glass –obstructions that the artists countered by creating, among other things, three ladders for overcoming the height differences, inflated clown's noses that covered the spikes on the fence and a soft grip that enabled the boat owners to swing around the barrier.[28] Hence, while the Venice Architecture Biennale offers, as we have seen above,

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27   Unfolding Pavilion: Press release. Unfolding Pavilion. accessed on 01.10.2024. p. 3.
28   Ibid.

a suitable platform for contributions addressing socio-ecological subjects, the organisation itself does not always meet its socio-inclusive aspirations.

The Luxembourgish contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018, *The Architecture of the Common Ground*, condemned growing privatisation and land speculation in the country.[29] As in other European cities, hardly any building land is available in the city of Luxembourg. The aim of the exhibition was to define and present land as limited, essential and as an inalienable public asset. Only when we understand this can we think about cities in ecological and social terms and develop them further from first principles. The exhibition presented a range of projects from the history of architecture as well as contemporary ideas, all of which seek to use land in the public interest and, in particular, occupy very little space on the ground and at the lower levels. The designs and buildings presented in the exhibition were high-rise projects, whose social quality results from their functional flexibility as both living space and public facilities, while their ecological quality results from their creation of large open areas at ground-floor level. As a result, the projects also suggest how new buildings can counter the problem of excessive soil sealing.

The Hungarian pavilion from 2018 also addressed the subject of – and the potential for sharing – open space by reporting on the temporary occupation of the Liberty Bridge in Budapest by the wider public.[30] During a period of road-building works, cars were unable to cross one of the oldest bridges over the Danube. The population took advantage of this by enjoying the freed-up space. Barbecues, yoga sessions and even weddings took place. And while these people may not have been explicitly criticising planning policy, the events that they organised can be regarded as an implicit criticism of the urban development framework. In other words, the Hungarian pavilion was asking such questions as what makes an open space free and how can people reclaim the right to use such spaces that they have lost in the name of development and economic progress.

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29   Architecturebiennale.lu: Presskit. LUX_presskit_DEF-1.pdf (architecturebiennale.lu). accessed on 16.08.2024.

30   Margutti Flavia Fossa/Pietragnoli Maddalena (eds.): Freespace: Biennale architettura 2018. Participating countries and collateral events. Venice 2018. p. 58–59.

In 2018, the pavilion of the Czech and the Slovak Republics argued explicitly for an urban planning approach that enables as many people as possible to exercise social influence. The two countries presented the project *UNES-CO*.[31] This focussed on the depopulation of the centres of Český Krumlov and Venice, which can be traced back to mass tourism and its associated economic structures. Rising rents and an infrastructure that fails to meet local needs are the immediate cause of the exodus, the exclusion, of these people. City centres lack suitable spaces in which they can lead fulfilling lives. The project sought to counter this by inviting people to live in the centre of Český Krumlov for three months, free of charge, and to participate in activities that would be considered quite normal in other places. In addition to this, the participants also received a salary that truly enabled them to lead a *normal* life. Visitors to the exhibition were able to leaf through a list of everyday activities and follow these activities in Český Krumlov by live feed. It was very important to the initiator Kateřina Šedá that locals and tourists enjoyed an equal status in the city. And she also wanted to make a concrete suggestion for addressing the numbers of people moving away from threatened cities.

People may not enjoy a universal right to live in a place of their own choosing, such as the centre of a heavily visited city, but there is a human right to adequate housing. This is part of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations (ICESCR)*.[32] But many people are unable to exercise this right. For decades, the housing policies of most Western democracies were determined by the interaction between the free market and public institutions. Recent decades, however, have seen a neoliberalisation of housing policy that has been characterised by the marketisation of living due to the privatisation of public housing, the retreat of social housing providers and the liberalisation and financialisation of housing provision.[33] Sablowski describes financialisation as the widespread penetration and shaping of socio-economic relationships by the logic and the institutions of the financial

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31   Ibid. p. 36–37.

32   Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte: Sozialpakt (ICESCR). Sozialpakt (ICESCR) | Institut für Menschenrechte (institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de). accessed on 01.10.2024.

33   Hannemann Christine/Hilti Nicola/Reutlinger Christian (eds.): Wohnen: Zwölf Schlüsselthemen sozialräumlicher Wohnforschung. Stuttgart 2022. p. 386.

markets.[34] The neoliberalisation of housing policy is leading to rising housing costs, the squeezing out of less well-off tenants and the dominance of more upscale housing projects.[35]

Not for Sale!!, the Canadian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2023, took up this problem and protested against the lack of affordable homes, inadequate housing conditions and homelessness in Canada.[36] The pavilion identified real estate speculation as being responsible for Canada's housing crisis. Apartments are transformed into financial assets and their form, function and aesthetics are adapted for the purposes of value retention and speculation. However, the roots of these current problems can be traced back to the expropriation of land during the colonial era. Indigenous knowhow and behaviour were replaced by the notion of land and space as private property. The ten demands of the Canadian pavilion refer in part to the Indigenous population.[37] For example, one such demand was that the Canadian land used by the crown should be returned to Indigenous peoples. The pavilion also took up David Madden and Peter Marcuse's concept of *residential alienation*.[38] This describes the alienation of people from the land they inhabit, the social world that supports them and the ability to creatively shape their environment.[39] This alienation resulted from the downgrading of residential space into an exchangeable good[40] that, with reference to Karsten Harries's architectural ethics, is thus unable to offer us a sense of home.[41] By setting out these demands, the pavilion sought to overcome this alienation and to not only enable

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34   Sablowski Thomas: Krise und Kontinuität des finanzmarktdominierten Akkumulationsregimes. In: Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie, vol. 55, 1–2/2011. p. 50–64.

35   Hannemann Christine/Hilti Nicola/Reutlinger Christian (eds.): Wohnen: Zwölf Schlüsselthemen sozialräumlicher Wohnforschung. Stuttgart 2022. p. 386.

36   Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia/Kulturstiftung (eds.): Biennale Architettura: The Laboratory of the Future. Venice 2023. Venice 2023. p. 22–23.

37   AAHA: Manifesto. AAHA. accessed on 01.10.2024.

38   Madden David/Marcuse Peter: In defense of housing: the politics of crisis. London/New York 2016.

39   Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia/Kulturstiftung (eds.): Biennale Architettura: The Laboratory of the Future. Venice 2023. Venice 2023. p. 22–23.

40   Ibid.

41   Harries Karsten: Die ethische Funktion der Architektur. In: Baumberger, Christoph (ed.): Architekturphilosophie: Grundlagentexte. Münster 2013. p. 177.

people to re-establish their roots in their land and their social context, but also re-enable them to have a creative impact on their surroundings.[42]

Refugees are accompanied by a particular sense of homelessness. The Austrian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016 wanted to create *Places for People*.[43] As a reaction to the refugee crisis of 2015, three teams of Austrian architects were commissioned to design spaces for refugees that offered adequate privacy while encouraging social interaction. For example, the architects *CARAMEL* intervened by accommodating a total of 280 refugees in an office building in Vienna.[44] As part of their project *HOME MADE* they created a modular spatial structure that used a large umbrella as a basic framework and fabric walls that safeguarded the privacy and the intimacy of the refugees. These new residential units, which consisted of a main area for two beds and two connected but spatially separated secondary areas, each containing one bed, were enhanced by a provisional doorbell with a nameplate. In one of many interventions introduced by the architects in consultation with the local authority, the building was opened to the outside world and the local community in the form of an area with seating benches, a children's playground and planters that was created on the public space next to the building. The architects were particularly keen to encourage constructive exchange with the residents and to involve them in the various interventions. The three different projects shared the aims of rapidly improving the living conditions of the refugees and addressing general questions about the future design and use of our cities, homes and public spaces.[45]

The exemplary approaches presented above illustrate the growing aspiration of architects and urban planners to act in an ethical and socio-ecological manner. The projects demonstrate creative ways of strengthening ecosystems, reusing

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42   Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia/Kulturstiftung (eds.): Biennale Architettura: The Laboratory of the Future. Venice 2023. Venice 2023. p. 22–23.

43   Aravena Alejandro: Reporting from the Front: 15. Mostra Internazionale Di Architettura: Biennale Architettura 2016, 28.05-27.11. Venice. Participating countries, collateral events. Venice 2016. p. 16–17.

44   Orte für Menschen: Intervention 1, Home Made (Caramel Architekten), Traces of Improvisation. CARAMEL.pdf. accessed on 01.10.2024.

45   Aravena Alejandro: Reporting from the Front: 15. Mostra Internazionale Di Architettura: Biennale Architettura 2016, 28.05-27.11. Venice. Participating countries, collateral events. Venice 2016. p. 16–17.

materials, meeting our basic housing needs, improving access to and the inclusivity of the world around us and reimagining the distribution of space. If architects and urban planners are to develop such approaches further, the creation of the right framework is a task for society as a whole. Politicians, as the brokers of our social structures, must therefore first address the ecological context and the need to safeguard the very bases of our existence, and then immediately focus on social cohabitation. The role of art, science and civil society is to take every opportunity of their own to put pressure on these political decision makers. The contributions to the Venice Architecture Biennale discussed above can hopefully help to trigger the implementation of political measures. As the home to one of the world's most important major cultural events, the city of Venice has developed a growing role in recent years as a source of stimuli and ideas for social change.

Part III. Practicing New Imaginaries and Methodologies

7
The Expanded Enquiry
Reflections on an Interdisciplinary Approach Between Anthropology and Multimedia

Matteo Stocco and Rita Vianello

Foreword

We will begin this brief, four-handed reflection with the possibility that a specific and innovative interdisciplinary approach can open up in the sphere of research on the environment in general and the Venice Lagoon in particular. The complex reality of the lagoon, one of the most studied inland waters in the world and now also affected by globalisation, requires new perspectives capable of studying an environment that is rapidly changing from many points of view: from the landscape to the transformation of traditional crafts (many of which, no longer necessary, are being lost), from the phenomenon of overtourism to ecosystems in crisis and the age-old issue of high tides, to list just the best known phenomena. In order to understand how to analyse these sudden socio-cultural and ecological evolutions and their consequences on people's daily lives, we will attempt to intertwine the methodology of anthropological research with the opportunities offered by filmmaking. Anthropology, which lends its voice to people by collecting their testimonies, intertwined with new film and multimedia techniques (Figs. 1–3), can build a new approach to investigation. Starting from the already well-established tradition of visual anthropology, we will also try to reflect upon ways of exploring the deepest and most emotional dimensions of the human soul. These are intimate aspects and, therefore, difficult to collect and convey. It is in the process of unveiling them that the sensitivity of artistic expression can help us.

Before venturing into interdisciplinary encounters, it is necessary to clearly explain what we are referring to when we talk about anthropology, filmmaking and multimedia, and art. If the basic concept of anthropology – that is a recent discipline mainly concerned with investigating the facets and peculiarities of and differences between the various human cultures – is now more or less clear to everyone, it may be harder to define a concept that is accepted by most people and sometimes taken for granted in the case of art and its products. In reality, our definition of 'art' often takes on a polysemic character, depending on who is looking at or practicing it. The best-known genres of art are painting, sculpture, drawing, dance, theatre, music and literature, as well as film, photography and mass media production. Oral narrative forms, festivals and celebrations can also be regarded as forms of artistic expression. These are now joined by the many objects, activities and products of our cultural heritage[1] that are beginning to take on patrimonial value thanks to their rediscovery by the curious and by enthusiasts (but sometimes also by those whose aims are more oriented towards business than appreciation).

Without dwelling too much on aspects that deserve more than this brief discussion, we will limit ourselves to providing a short description of what art means for anthropological scholars. We will use the definition of Alexander Alland who, based on the premise of a playful activity that is widespread throughout the world, explains that, unlike freely conducted play, art is limited by rules and the observation of pre-established forms, without whose guidance we would be unable to assess its value and mastery. In practice, Alland defines art as 'playing with form, which produces some aesthetically successful transformation-representation'.[2] Today, this 'playing' avails itself of new means such as filmmaking or multimedia tools. The latter are exemplified by interactive website-based documentaries,[3] which enable us to share a plurality of material, from audio-visual to textual, organised together thanks

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1   Vianello Rita: The MOSE Machine. An anthropological approach to the building of a flood safeguard project in the Venetian Lagoon. In: SHIMA -The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures, Vol. 15. 2023. p. 168–194.

2   Alland Alexander: The Artistic Animal: An Inquiry into the Biological Roots of Art. New York 1977. p. 39.

3   Calogero Lucilla: Documentario interattivo. Design e spazio del reale espanso. Milan 2020.

to the graphic interface of the platform and also, often, by users themselves with the help of the possibilities of interaction offered by the network.

Fig. 1: Screenshot from the metagoon.net page, where users can display their selected video and generate the interviews transcriptions booklet, 2024.
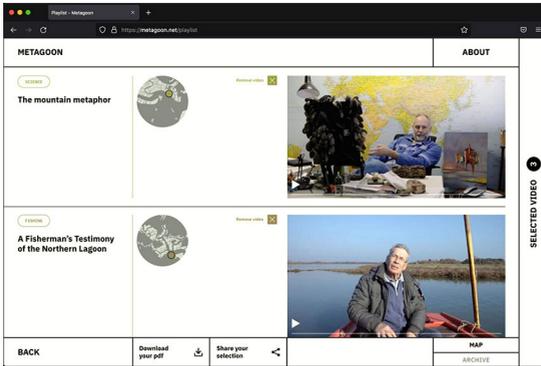
Courtesy of Matteo Stocco

Fig. 2: 3D rendering of the immersive interactive installation, Interreg ITA-HR project 'Arca Adriatica', exhibited at the National Museum of Maritime Archaeology in Caorle (Venice).

Courtesy of Rita Vianello

Fig. 3: Documentation image with the public of the immersive inter-active installation 'Arca Adriatica'. On this side of the installation, visitors can interact with a digital archive composed of archival im-ages and interviews. Caorle Museum.

Courtesy of Rita Vianello

A Chance Encounter

Bruno was a fisherman from the island of Burano, whom Matteo Stocco met in 2015.[4] Due to his advanced age, Bruno could unfortunately no longer practise his passion, and limited himself to preserving and keeping in order the tools of the trade that he had collected throughout his life. From an early age, he had dreamt of being able to go fishing every day with his father. Unfortunately, the precariousness of those times, the mid-1950s, and the meagre earnings offered by small-scale fishing, together with a large family, saw him forced to fall back on work in the glassworks on the nearby island of Murano.

He was a kind man and very willing to meet strangers (in Venetian parlance, foreigners), especially as this meant that he could spend a large part of his precious time, which was as precious as only the time of the elderly can be, sharing his stories and his vast knowledge of the world of fishing. Matteo then began

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4   Matteo met Bruno in December 2015, they started their first shoots together that month and completed them in January 2016.

to take his first steps as an artist in the shape of his lagoon explorations, collecting notes through interviews that would later become a fundamental part of the *Metagoon*[5] platform archive (Fig. 1).

Fig. 4: Still image from an interview filmed by Matteo Stocco with Bruno Polesel in January 2016, in front of the island of Torcello.

Courtesy of Matteo Stocco

Matteo was able to make contact with Bruno (Fig. 4) thanks to a series of chance acquaintances. The most important of these was a woman who was working as a gondolier and had long been convinced that someone had to interview Bruno before it was too late. And so it happened: Bruno decided to open the doors of his very secret warehouse on Murano (Fig. 5) in order to leave a testimony of a world that was disappearing, before he also disappeared, taking his precious testimony with him. Thanks to Bruno, it can be said that Matteo's

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5   *Metagoon* is a tool for observing and investigating the Venice Lagoon. The project, which started in 2015 and is still in the process of expansion and development, consists of a website, on which films and interviews investigating the varied and complex aspects of the Venice Lagoon and the communities that inhabit it are archived. Users can navigate freely through the archive and trace a personal path through the testimonies and audio-visual documents, in order to build their own perception of the lagoon environment. https://www.metagoon.net

artistic research met anthropology. This encounter made it possible to understand the importance of being able to record and recount certain voices, the voices of those who, like him, can tell the story of a life lived in close contact with a complex ecosystem and its interactions (even with non-humans). Such lives shape history, albeit in a minor, intimate way, and their stories should be listened to and told.

In Matteo's then young career, several other interviews had preceded the one with Bruno, in other contexts and for other projects. It was felt that he had mastered the way of working and dealing with content in his investigations. But the meeting with Bruno had a different weight. Matteo felt the responsibility that this man was entrusting to him and, at the same time, the value of his testimony.

From that moment on, a long series of interviews began, aimed at not only documenting but also at establishing a kind of relationship, a less superficial and more intimate, emotional bond with the people interviewed. About a hundred interviews were independently carried out over nine years, but a persistent doubt kept creeping in: The results were certainly satisfactory, but they were still the outcome of a method developed by a self-taught researcher who had no knowledge of proper scientific methodological bases. There was a need for a comparison with someone who, in their career, had already widely applied the anthropological research methodology of the interview and the video interview in the lagoon area. In our story, it was art, moved by a desire for enrichment and exploration, which sought the contribution of anthropology. And, once again, fate guided the encounter: During an interview at the *Hydrobiological Station D'Ancona* of the *University of Padua* in Chioggia in January 2023, Alberto Barausse[6] suggested that we contact Rita Vianello,[7] a cultural anthropologist who had been researching the socio-cultural, environmental and cultural dynamics of the Venice Lagoon for many years.

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6   Associate Professor of Marine Biology at the *Department of Biology* in Padua.

7   Researcher at the *Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures* at the *University of Bergamo*.

Fig. 5: Still from an interview filmed by Matteo Stocco with Bruno Polesel in his Murano warehouse in November 2015.

Courtesy of Matteo Stocco

It is from this encounter that our lagoon reflection was born, the testimony of a series of conversations dedicated to confrontation, to examining reciprocal methodologies, to the search for connections, but, above all, to outlining and understanding the possibilities of further developing the work carried out so far. Hence, this text is meant to be not just a single testimony but, rather, a sort of conciliatory gesture, in which we hope that our paths, as well as the paths of other artists and anthropologists around the world, can beneficially intertwine again, recording new stories and bringing new emotions to light.

Interdisciplinary Dialogues. We, the Other and the Image

Matteo Stocco: Given your experience in the Venice Lagoon, have you ever found yourself adapting your approach to interviewing according to different contexts?

Rita Vianello: The starting point is always vague, we have a topic in mind and we begin by trying to obtain some initial information about it from the person we are interviewing – the person who, for us, is the expert on the subject. As a result of these initial answers, curiosity arises and new discoveries are made,

and all this leads to further questions, in more and more depth and more and more detail. It is the chain built with these different discoveries that allows you to develop the investigation. I think it is a bit like painting a kind of landscape on canvas, or a drawing, which is enriched with various elements. I have the idea of representing, for example, a navy, and I have to make it visible to others. I do this with words. Interviews don't always seem interesting to us initially because people, as we all do when we talk, can ramble on, they often tell us their impressions, their emotions and feelings. It is as if they are painting a mental, imaginary canvas for us. As an experience, this can sometimes become very intimate, almost touching. Then, of course, it depends on personal sensitivity, professional ethics, and it is always up to us to be discerning so that we don't disappoint those who offer us their trust and their time. My personal experience is that when we deal, for example, with environmental issues, it is precisely the information extrapolated between the lines of the interviews that often provides us with one of the main tools that helps us to read and interpret the environmental and landscape context in which the interviewees live and work.

MS: What value does image have for you in the interviews you conduct?

RV: Fundamental, its power is fundamental. Otherwise everything remains suspended in an abstract dimension. If we want to understand, for example, a trade – i.e. how it is carried out, what it is used for, where it developed and why, how it has changed over the years, and so on – it is important to show the workplaces. By talking about workplaces we can take pictures, but for us anthropologists, and for those who study trades in particular, there is a very difficult aspect to deal with. This terrible moment arises when our interlocutor describes the different working phases of their trade. Let us take a practical example in order to simplify this. When a fisherman explains how to tie what for him is a trivial knot in a fishing net, if he does it orally he usually fails (and, in my opinion, no one would succeed) because it is too difficult to describe the individual steps. As the anthropologist Giulio Angioni (1984), who worked extensively on learning trades in the last century, taught us, people generally tend to show how it is done with gestures because it is much easier. But gestures are also too fast for us and have been made mechanical by the habit of repeating them. This is where the role of the video image demonstrates all its value. Being able to film with a camera, to firstly understand and then disseminate, show tools and show them being used, is a great help. For example, in the world of

craftsmanship in the lagoon, if I write about the *sesti* (a template used to build boats),[8] which is still used today in the local shipbuilding industry, I can describe this tool in ten pages and still be unable to make someone understand what it is. But I only need to insert an image, or even better a video, in which I show it being used, and that's that. This is very useful for helping people to understand: not only us or enthusiasts but also, and above all, ordinary people, young people. I am convinced that a well-constructed video product can help make something attractive and interesting that, on the written page, would probably seem deadly boring. It would do a lot to help disseminate the results of research. And if the product not only turns out to be a quality production, but also adds an artistic dimension, this would be best. Being able to savour the light and emotions connected to places, gestures and people, for example, would be very enriching. Bearing this in mind, I will allow myself to offer a small criticism of the numerous ethnographic museums that are scattered throughout our territory. Today, practically every mountain village in Italy has its own small museum (think of the new realm of mountain holidays for families that has developed in South Tyrol). Upon entering these museums we can observe various objects on display, but how can we tell what their intrinsic value is? Generally, the exhibits are old, used and shabby tools. We can say that they are ugly and, in these contexts, they are very rarely artistic objects. This, however, is not because of any incapacity or ignorance on the part of those who created them, but because of their purpose. These are tools that must, first and foremost, perform their assigned task well; they must be strong, durable and functional. Consequently, when a museum exhibits, for example, an old hoe, what is the value of this object and this exhibition? What process transforms a work object into an object of value (and, for some, almost an artistic piece)? Have we turned it into a heritage object worthy of display because it is now disused and a witness to nostalgic worlds that no longer exist? Is this alone enough to recognise something as part of our heritage? Or would it be more correct if we also understood and shared the enormous wealth of intangible knowledge behind that object? That old scythe or the hoe that we used as an example and that someone certainly made and used. But do we know how it was made, and how it was used? Were there, for example, specialised, perhaps itinerant, craftsmen?

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8   Vianello Rita: Ferrying modernity: evolutions and transformations of the gondolier trade between the 20th and 21st centuries. In: La Ricerca Folklorica. Vol. 74. 2019. p. 145–161.

If we now return to focus on the instruments of the local Venetian shipbuilding industry, we discover a much more complex reality. Consequently, it is also much more difficult to present. A shipwright, a person who builds traditional wooden boats, from the gondola down, does not have an excessively large set of tools, compared, for example, with a carpenter, but these are unique and very special. The value of a gondola or the old oar, or even the special tool used to build it, lies first and foremost in the intangible knowledge that originates upstream and is hidden from our eyes. It is this knowledge that needs to be revealed. It is this range of knowledge that enables a person to use these tools, which are always the same to our eyes but, in reality, always turn out to be different, because every artisan who has used them in the past, uses them now and will use them in future will have to adapt them to their needs and preferences and the little professional secrets that they have perfected over long years of work.

All this long – perhaps too long – discourse is trying to make people understand that the true value of an object must also be shown and that this also applies (but, let it be clear, not only) to its use and its creation, which also 'show' the immaterial knowledge hidden within it. And this brings us back to the role that the image can play in revealing the secret life of objects or crafts.

Do you, as a video maker, agree with this initial thought of mine? And if so, how do you think you could intervene?

MS: I think that the image is fundamental, certainly. From my point of view, the image is almost always a point of arrival, which often starts from a much broader project that not only consists of the action of recording and post-production. I think that the image represents the point of emergence of an integrated system of information that must be organised together according to a narrative logic. Whether it is a short story or someone's personal history or the explanation of a fishing technique, the audio-visual product that is to be published will always be the result of a series of considerations, needs, meetings and research objectives that are planned beforehand and aimed at placing that specific product in a constellation of other elements, with which it will have to come into contact. Let me try to explain myself in a more concrete way: The various interviews that I collected on my platform were created for the development of science fiction screenplays set in the lagoon. In fact, I started to contact a series of people who could provide me with fundamental information in or-

der to investigate themes linked to the Venice Lagoon that would later help me in the writing of some screenplays for short science fiction films. Reviewing the testimonies collected, however, I realised that their evocative power could not just be shared and sublimated into fictional texts. This consideration led me to develop a web interface that could connect them together, potentially generating a single great story thanks to the interaction between the user and the graphic elements that make up the navigable parts of the web platform.

Now tell me, since you, unlike me, do not plan a script beforehand, how do you conduct an interview if things do not seem to go quite as you had hoped?

RV: This happens very often, especially when you talk to older people, to people who are often almost incredulous that you have an interest in their profession, their knowledge. In fact, you could almost say that they often interview me in turn, asking me why I do it, who I am, what my job is and things like that. In specific cases, a certain feeling of mistrust can emerge because many professions perceive themselves as outsiders. When you can offer people the opportunity to express their voice, the interview turns into an excellent tool of anthropological research. For example, it often happens that fishermen complain about the regulations laid down by politicians, by the world of science. It is as if they feel somewhat oppressed and managed from above, bypassed, so the interview becomes an outlet. And they digress. This is also to be understood as an enrichment, as it allows you to discover aspects that you otherwise would not know about. Even if this is not immediately perceivable as useful for the purposes of our research, it offers us in-depth knowledge of people's socio-cultural context. For the sake of clarity, let me offer a further example: When older people talk about their youth this helps us to conceptualise, because we can interpret the possible presence of a sense of nostalgia for something that has changed, or has not changed at all. Placing the person you are interviewing within the specific context of their life, environment and culture, helps you to really understand who they are and whether what they are telling us is their individual view or can be extended, compared, with the perceptions of others. Just think of the changes that are taking place within the lagoon ecosystem, changes that we observe, that technicians and scientists explain to us and, indeed, that professionals such as local fishermen notice. Obviously, you have to carry out many interviews with different people to understand whether these are personal visions and perceptions that are limited to a few or shared by many. They tell you about transformed places and landscapes

or fish with changed habits. If you do not know that particular place, landscape or fish, it all turns into something abstract. But if the image takes over and helps us, the tale becomes concrete and takes on those real contours that allow us to come closer to understanding it.

To sum up, when we have collected a series of interviews on similar subjects, we have created an archive of testimonies that we can compare with each other. This allows us to identify common lines that are useful for constructing a socio-cultural image of an area: a sort of socio-cultural landscape map that can be superimposed on the physical one. A map that allows us to explore more intimate and personal spheres such as the emotional ties that are created over time with places, people, non-humans and objects, as well as those linked to the sensoriality of smells, sounds and sight. I remember fishermen telling me that when motors were not widespread, there was not all the noise that there is today; the lagoon was silent and you could hear the lapping of the waves breaking on the banks of the canals, before they were all covered in stone. These are all images that are steeped in sensuality, emotions and memories of places that still exist but are no longer the same.

MS: When you start working on an article, after you have collected the interviews, how do you relate to the images?

RV: I usually use photos, either archival or taken by myself. But there is still a gap. Since it is a written text I can only use images, photographs or drawings, but all the footage and video material collected in the field, which many of us anthropologists use, will be missing. This is where multidisciplinary cooperation with your field might come into play. We could connect more content and thus avoid potential loss. Furthermore, while an article, especially an academic one, circulates only in certain contexts, the possibility of developing videos or clips, something visual and more immediate, would help me to not only disseminate the results, but also sensitise more people, especially young people, to the most pressing issues of our times, such as environmental issues. The image, or video, is more striking than the written word. I am not saying that these should replace the written part or the museum exhibition, only that a parallel collaboration should be experienced. Personally, I would like my research to be accompanied by video work whenever possible. It is one thing to tell about a fisherman but quite another to see a fisherman telling about himself, to see his boat, his house, the place where he lives and works. Even observing the way

he poses, gestures and moves can tell us a lot – about his being and his world. In this sense, the cross-media part also plays a key role in expressing my point of view.

MS: We came to talk about cross-media communication, about the potential that technology has today and, therefore, the multidisciplinarity with which we can publish research. Here, the web potentially becomes one of the main means through which your work could find a great platform, from the possibility of publishing texts, to the presence of images, audio visuals and audio recordings.

RV: I am convinced that the cross-media approach has great latent potential. What needs to be understood is how best to work across media and use this potential. But I think that this is more your area, so I will leave the final thoughts and conclusions to you…

Conclusions: The *Metagoon Manifesto*

I would like to focus my reflection on Rita's statement on the 'sector'. I think we should imagine an approach to research that is as participative as possible and capable of enhancing disciplinary, academic and professional differences in a dialogue-based perspective, where each and every one of us contributes to the orchestration of research by aiming to 'shape' it in a way that is the fruit of our common work. In fact, going beyond the cross-media approach, I think that there should be a multi-disciplinary thrust that is aimed at bringing together researchers willing to share their cultural and experiential backgrounds in order to deepen a research subject and publish its results through a complex multimedia product. Let me use Rita's example of the ethnographic museum: I really appreciated how she noted the need to exploit another tool, namely video, in order to be able to best narrate an artefact on display. This reflection says a lot to me about the need for several disciplines to come into contact, to contaminate each other, and there are actually already processes that reflect in this direction, towards the need to collaborate with other professionals and disciplines in order to achieve a common goal. And those who do the theoretical work have to take into account the suggestions of those who do the formal work: For example, suppose that we have to develop a platform similar to *Metagoon*. We will need to create a working group, let us say a constituent one with

the necessary skills to carry out the complex and profound mapping of a place. This means we will need an anthropologist, a person representing the world of science, a professional from the world of visual communication and data visualisation, an expert in the web-based development of complex interactive platforms and, finally, a professional in the field of documentary video and photography and perhaps, if available, an artist. Obviously, the working group could be expanded, but it is enough for the moment for us to know that other figures could (and perhaps should) be added. Now let me hypothesise a working scenario: I imagine that the anthropologist will talk to the video maker about how to set up an interview, while the video maker will talk to the anthropologist about how to approach a person to be interviewed and perhaps they will work together drafting questions. The marine ecosystem scientist will guide the designer in charge of graphics (and thus data visualisation) in line with settings that will not 'alter the scientific purity' of the shared data. At the same time, the entire team of researchers, being well aware of the communication needs inherent in the discipline of visual communication, will dialogue with the person who will develop the web interface (if there is a web platform). The latter figure would consequently assume the role of mediator and translator between the different disciplines. The ultimate goal, in my personal opinion, will be to collectively manage the construction of the end-user experience. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to bear in mind how this user will benefit from the information shared within the multimedia product and to constantly address the interaction modalities between different disciplines, especially in the design of research that aims to disseminate complex subjects to a general public.

It is therefore necessary to lay the foundations for usefully reflecting on how to build a working methodology, guidelines that interdisciplinary working groups can follow in order to share common horizons of thought, action and, not least, intent. Everything must always be the fruit of shared reflection and respect for the protocols necessary for the success of the project.

This is why I have been thinking for some time about working on a publication: the *Metagoon Manifesto*, a series of articles generated by the synergetic work of

an inter- and multidisciplinary team.[9] The objective is to consider several scenarios, both past and future, which allow us to reflect on the identification of a series of shared axioms in order to translate these into concrete actions.

To finish, I would like the experience gained in recent years with *Metagoon* to serve as a starting point for colleagues and for all those interested in experimenting with new research approaches. Through critical reflection on what has been done so far, I would like to identify a methodology that can be easily repeated. By giving space to anyone who wants to collaborate in the expansion of the platform's contents, in line with the available means and resources, *Metagoon's* experience can be useful and independently replicable in other contexts and places and by other researchers and filmmakers.[10]

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9   For example, a team composed of experts in the fields of participatory design, documentary video, web design, information design, anthropology, sociology and ecosystem science

10   Other important references consulted for this text include:
Angioni Giulio (ed.): Il lavoro e le sue rappresentazioni. In: La Ricerca folklorica, no. 9. 1984. https://www.jstor.org/stable/i264908.
Belting Hans: An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body. Princeton 2011.
Belting Hans: The End of the History of Art? Chicago 1987.
Beltrame Carlo, Medas Stefano, Vianello Rita (eds.): Il Progetto Arca Adriatica e la memoria del patrimonio nautico tradizionale a Venezia. In: La Ricerca folklorica, no. 75. 2020.
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Vianello Rita: Terracentric Visions and the Domestication of Aquatic Spaces: A case study of fishers' huts in the Venetian and Caorle lagoon. In: Shima – the International Journal of Research into Island Cultures, vol. 17 (2). 2023. p. 121–147.

8
Disorientation and Where to Find Oneself

Barbara Nardacchione

45°26′16.8″N 12°20′09.6″E

The hand leads the body,
clearing a path, moving aside disoriented passersby.
It cuts through the anonymous horde
that funnels through alleys filled with standardized memories.
The crowd is like the tide,
peaking at specific times of the day.
Holding one's breath
steps, selfies, *sarde in saor*, faces, shadows, bodies, *folpetti*, postcards, masks, *baccalà*[1]
all to be faced in apnea.
Crossing, no,
evading places.

Disorientation is a feeling that emerges as a profound sense of disconnection from our surroundings. Venice, as we know, has become a symbol of over-tourism and Disneyfication in the eyes of the world. These phenomena, deeply ingrained, ignite in residents a rejection of their own city, 'crystallized in its

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1   *Sarde in Saor*, *folpetti*, and *baccalà* are traditional Venetian dishes. *Sarde in Saor* is made of fried sardines marinated in a tangy sauce with onions, vinegar, raisins and pine nuts. *Folpetti* refers to small, boiled octopuses, typically served with olive oil, lemon and parsley. *Baccalà* is dried and salted cod, commonly prepared in Venice as a creamy spread called *baccalà mantecato* or as a slow-cooked dish known as *baccalà alla vicentina*.

form but profoundly transformed in the use and composition of the crowd moving through its alleys'.[2]

Venice, whose historic centre has suffered an unstoppable demographic decline for years, dropping below 50,000 residents last year for the first time. Venice, where the tourism monoculture overshadows all other economic sectors, closing businesses, month by month, that do not follow this direction. Venice, where finding a decent home at an affordable price has become a quixotic challenge.

The picture is not reassuring. And yet, by moving away from the everyday geography of this scenario, one realises the existence of a cultural and social foundation, a burgeoning substrate that, in recent years, has found a place of experimentation beyond the historic centre, shifting further, towards the estuary[3].

45°27′31.6″N 12°23′17.8″E

Fabio, the captain, gazes elsewhere,
in the vain search for the line separating the sky from the lagoon.
We are immersed in a milky atmosphere,
anchored still,
moved only by a few motor waves rocking the group.
Chiara, the researcher,
book in hand
'a nomenclature so dense here that even an ocean wouldn't match it'
she says,
'and it must be why we get lost'.
Thus immersed, us, lost
among *ghebi, velme, barene*,[4]

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2   Salerno Giacomo-Maria: Per una critica dell'economia turistica. Venezia tra museificazione e mercificazione. Macerata 2020. p. 201.

3   An *estuary* is a partially enclosed coastal body of water where freshwater from rivers and streams mixes with saltwater from the sea. These dynamic environments are characterised by rich biodiversity and serve as vital habitats for numerous species.

4   *Ghebi, velme* and *barene* are Venetian words and key components of the lagoon's ecosystem. *Barene* are salt marshes, *velme* parts of the lagoon bottom and *ghebi* little canals that cross the *barene* and *velme*.

'we look around and see only mists, strange lights, half-seen horizons'.[5]
Fabio, the artist, the cook
arranges the ingredients
[bulgur, parsley, spices, tomato paste, ajvar, oil]
Together, we knead on the central table of the *R.A.P.T.U.S.*[6]
[bean miso, lemon, salad, pomegranate molasses].
Lagoon-style *çiğ köfte*.

Many artistic research programmes that look towards the lagoon emerge as opportunities for gathering, walks, field workshops. What is sought? There is no single answer: detachment from a standardised system through a change in perspective, a desire for reconnection and a deep understanding of the environment, as well as the need to create space for experimenting with shared practices.

In 2022, *Tavole Conviviali: The Cross between Food and Ecology* was born – a research programme led by *TBA21–Academy*, in collaboration with Marco Bravetti of *Tocia! Cucina e Comunità*.[7]

'Cooking is a revolutionary act.' This is the statement of *Tocia!*, a lagoon collective that explores the landscape through the act of cooking. Through its situated research, *Tocia!* has been inspiring many other experiences, successfully creating a network of militant chefs, researchers, artists and activists.

This collaboration led to the first cycle of a research programme aimed at fostering dialogue around food and its impact on ecosystems. It originates from the urgency to address central issues in the lagoon (and beyond), such as the scarcity of fish, soil and water pollution, the need to support alternative methods of food production and distribution and the observation and implementation of regenerative practices.

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5   Barbaro Paolo: Ultime isole. Venice 2023. This excerpt was read by Chiara Famengo during an expedition held on 16.06.2024 as part of *A Diet of Resistance*, the third edition of *Convivial Tables* – the field research programme of *TBA21–Academy*, curated by *Barena Bianca*.

6   *R.A.P.T.U.S.* is the name of the boat on which the group sailed.

7   For more information on the research programme organised by *TBA21–Academy* see: www.ocean-space.org/research/convivial-tables.

'Salinity', 'Toxicity' and 'Invasive Species' are the themes introduced within the programme in a convivial setting, through interdisciplinary dialogue in informal contexts, such as a picnic during a foraging session on Sant'Erasmo island or around a table set up in an exhibition space.

45°26'13.9"N 12°20'43.0"E

A table
Among savage islands,[8] emerged
in the second nave of the church
welcomes diners
[elderflower and sea fennel, *Acmella oleracea*].
'Let us not assume that everything is edible
or ours to consume at will.'
[*Barena* wormwood[9], sea inula, young fig leaves, marigold].
'Let us learn how to transform certain elements
from harming to healing,
by roasting, stewing, pickling, poaching.'
[lemon balm, Vietnamese coriander, hyssop, Malabar spinach].
'Pause, observe, listen, measure (yourself).'[10]

As often happens at the table, during gatherings, each person brings their skills, memories and anecdotes into play. The suggestions of one diner become inspiration for another, fostering an integration of knowledge about a landscape represented by a dish – whether bland, flavourful, digestible or indigestible. Dishes, like landscapes, are complex systems.

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8   This refers to the exhibition *The Soul Expanding Ocean #4: Diana Policarpo. Ciguatera*, *Ocean Space*, Venice 2022. Commissioned by *TBA21–Academy*. Co-produced by *TBA21–Academy* and the *Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian*, in collaboration with *Instituto Gulbenkian Ciência*.

9   Also known as Artemisia or sea wormwood, this is a perennial plant that grows wild in soils that have contact with salt water. It is mainly used in cooking to flavour schnapps and in the liquor industry as a digestive in bitters.

10   Excerpts from Marambio Camila: Toxicity is Communal. In: Convivial Tables. The Cross Between Food and Ecology. Entrée: the Pannier of the Venice Lagoon (online publication).

Over the years, the programme has increasingly recognised that ecological and cultural challenges, even in an artistic context, must begin from the collective: giving more space to the interconnection of disciplines and practices, bringing the social and civic dimension back into focus. In a condition of mutual learning, art, research and activism unite, moving beyond a purely artistic discourse.

A Diet of Resistance, the third episode of the programme, aimed to draft a *Manifesto* of actions and good practices through group work, emphasising how our daily approach to food reflects an awareness of and a stance on environmental, social and economic issues. Thus, once again, moving to the lagoon, to that 'nomenclature so dense that even an ocean *wouldn't match it*' – as Barbaro would say – exploring places, knowing their actors, sharing experiences and embracing a renewed sense of belonging from which understanding and care for the landscape and the ecosystem, as well as a critical and creative vision, can arise.

45°26′00.8″N 12°20′41.9″E

The table, like our feet
has its legs sunk
into the re-emerged landscape
of *salso* and *salicornia*[11]
hardened by the July sun.
Gathered around
like around a wellhead
we share thoughts, sandwiches
[*nasone* tomato,[12] seaweed *caponata*,[13] and plums]
and wine to celebrate
the lagoon dusk.

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11   *Salso* refers to saline environments, while *Salicornia* are salt-tolerant plants that thrive in such areas and are commonly found in salt marshes and essential for stabilising soil and supporting lagoon ecosystems.

12   *Nasone* tomatoes are a specific variety of Italian tomatoes.

13   Seaweed *caponata* is a variation of the traditional Sicilian vegetable stew (*caponata*), which incorporates seaweed to enhance its flavour with a hint of the sea, complementing the dish's coastal roots.

And while the estuary and its islands are now the place to find oneself and recreate common perspectives, the hope is that these practices will also germinate inspiration for Venice and its historic centre, which must thrive on new visions and counter the rigidity of myopic ruling powers through the desires and actions of its inhabitants. Ecological challenges cannot exclude it. Manfredo Tafuri, speaking of Venice and tradition, says: 'What is called upon to endure in perpetual renewal, in constant refounding, is not a form, but a way of being in relation.'[14]

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14   Tafuri Manfredo: Venice and the Renaissance. Translation by Jessica Levine. Cambridge, Mass. 1989. p. 23.

9
On Axel Braun's Venice Project 'Machina Mundi/ Reign of Reason'

Petra Schaefer and Axel Braun

'If one can no longer live forwards, one simply changes direction.'[1]

In his visual essay, the Essen-based artist and photographer Axel Braun presents selected images from his artist residency at the *German Centre for Venetian Studies* in the summer of 2024. These stills are taken from video works that document, in slow motion, artefacts from the *Serenissima*. He moves the arm of his camera 'as slowly as possible', which results in a very calm narrative style.[2] By taking a cinematic approach to his presentation of such objects as the opulent tomb of the Doge Giovanni Pesaro in the Frari church (Fig. 5), he enables the viewer to contemplatively consider their historical contexts. For his video, Braun selects a detail of the two-storey seventeenth-century monument that presents the living Doge at the peak of his power, surrounded by allegories. But the artist shows neither the *Primus inter Pares* in the regalia nor the four women, who symbolise intelligence, nobility, wealth and erudition. As revealed by his photographic close-up, Braun is focussed on the columns of the object. He documents the figures of slaves, variations on the baroque *telamon* motif, whose black bodies contrast with the white stone. For his essay, Braun selects a still, in which tiny areas of black leg show through the torn garment.

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1   Leona Stahlmann: Diese ganzen belanglosen Wunder. Munich 2022. p. 354. The writer Leona Stahlmann, Artist in Residence of the *German Centre for Venetian Studies* in 2021, worked on this novel, which is set in the near future in a landscape of barren salt marshes that are already clearly showing the consequences of the climate catastrophe, in Venice, where she investigates the ecology of the lagoon.

2   Cf. conversation between Axel Braun and Petra Schaefer, 26.06.2024. www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrkRDnsznXU. accessed on 20.10.2024.

This pictorial strategy forces the viewer to look more closely, because a fleeting glance is not enough for them to grasp the context. The artist's aim is that, in this digital age, the keywords in the title *Slave/Doge/ Frari/Venice* should provide us with sufficient information to be able to rapidly look up the meaning and interpretation. On the other hand, he can assume that Venice connoisseurs are already able to place this detail.[3] The history of African slaves in Venice was researched earlier on the occasion of the Venice Art Biennale in 2003 by the US-American artist Fred Wilson, who has Afro-American and Caribbean roots and was born in the Bronx in 1954.[4] As a representative of North America, Wilson flanked the main entrance to the Classicist USA Pavilion in the Giardini with two oversized copies of the *telamon* slave figures from the Frari tomb, in order to pursue the question of whether there had been a PoC community in the history of the former Venetian State. Inside the Pavilion, he worked associatively and presented a range of objects that had formal associations with the subject, including a black Murano glass candlestick in eighteenth century style. Despite their formal diversity, the contents of the work of the two artists have much in common. Braun, like Wilson, uses the centuries-old black community in Venice as the starting point for his critique of the way in which the role of African people has been erased from European history.[5] Axel Braun takes up the threads of this post-colonial discourse in his study of the glass pearls from Murano that were created for the African Region, where they circulated and were exchanged for other goods (Fig. 6).[6]

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3   The Basilica of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in the Sestiere San Polo is one of the oldest and most visited churches in the lagoon-city, partly due to Tiziano Vecellio's painting *Assunta* on the main altar. The Doge's tomb mentioned here is located in the front part of the left aisle.

4   Wilson Fred: Parla di me come sono. In: La Biennale di Venezia (ed.): Sogni e conflitti. La Dittatura dello Spettatore. Venice 2003. p. 594–595.

5   Cf. conversation between Fred Wilson and Leora Maltz-Leca, 19.06.2023. www.youtub e.com/watch?v=H_CoFFvvtJk. accessed on 20.06.2024.

6   For more on the artistic investigation of glass pearls as a means of exchange and payment in colonialised regions, see the project by Frauke Zabel, Artist in Residence at the *German Centre for Venetian Studies* in 2023 www.dszv.it/new_alumni/frauke-zabel/ (accessed on 20.10.2024) and the collection of samples of Venetian glass pearls manufactured by Costantini Valmarana in the 1930s in the recent installation *Monte di Pietà* from Swiss artist Christoph Büchel in the *Fondazione Prada* at Palazzo Ca' Corner della Regina during the Venice Art Biennale in 2024. See the exhibition guide *Bollettino di ASTE Giudiziarie 7*, April-November 2024, Venice 2024. p. 11.

Fig. 1: Axel Braun, Nothing is Impossible in a Place Where Dreams Become Reality (Construction site of New Songdo City II), 2012.

Courtesy of the artist

In his visual essay, Axel Braun presents an array of exemplary photos that illustrate the diverse storylines of his project *Machina Mundi/ Reign of Reason*. Like individual objects in a huge kaleidoscope, they will come together in the final form of presentation, a three-dimensional mixed-media essay. Then Braun will combine photos, videos, archival documents and historical objects in a spatial installation, in which visitors can independently address individual subjects more deeply, in line with their particular interest. Hence, Braun's photos in this book are part of a wider context, in which he investigates different traces of the Anthropocene in Venice and the Venetian Lagoon. This investigation directs him towards the past. In the photo *The Fate (Madonna del Monte)*, 2024 (Fig. 9), he draws our attention to the silhouette of a ruin, set against the soft pink light of the dusk. But while Braun's evening image looks back upon the decay in the north of the lagoon, an earlier work from the overall project *DISTURBED HARMONIES [Anthropocene Landscapes]* turns to the future. His photo *Nothing is*

Impossible in a Place Where Dreams Become Reality (Construction site of New Songdo City II) from 2012 (Fig. 1) shows mudflats in glistening daylight that is simultaneously illuminating a sea of towering buildings in the background. Still a building site over a decade ago, this is now a dense residential district in the megacity of Incheon, just outside Seoul in South Korea. The coastal environment documented by Axel Braun no longer exists. Thus, in the eyes of today's viewer, this image is just as retrospective as the studies of Venice that are presented here.

Built on the Backs of Others

A Work-in-Progress Preview of the Case Study Machina Mundi/ Reign of Reason (since 2024)

Fig. 1: What Remains (Poveglia)

Nature at large will adapt to any form of anthropogenic devastation. Eventually, humans will suffer the most from the processes that their species has triggered. Humanity has repeatedly produced unprecedented creativity with impressive and often beautiful results. Unfortunately, the unintended consequences can be incalculable, and many achievements benefit just a chosen few, especially when they have been built on the backs of others.

Beauty, brutality, science and atrocity are often densely entangled. Despite being one of the most admired examples of human creation, Venice is no exception. This case study approaches the city as a fragile relict of a glorious past. It is a sample that enables us to observe the fundamental structures and vulnerable points of global networks.

Fig. 2: On Othering: Good and Evil (Relief on the Facade of The Scuola Grande di San Marco, Venice)

We need the other to define ourselves. Societies distinguish between their members and those who are excluded. However, successful isolation from foreign influences has been an exception in human history. Empires, in contrast, follow an inherent logic of expansion. This makes definitions of belonging even more vital for those who aim to assert and sustain power. To oppress, exploit and extract, it is necessary to know your kin and to exclude the rest from the rights that you claim for yourself. At the same time, offering purpose and justification for the profiteers is crucial. Nobody wants to be the bad guy. Thus, it is common practice to define moral standards accordingly. Sometimes, that which is believed to be good is evil.

Fig. 3: The Scam (Translatio Sancti Marci, Mosaic, Basilica di San Marco, Venice)
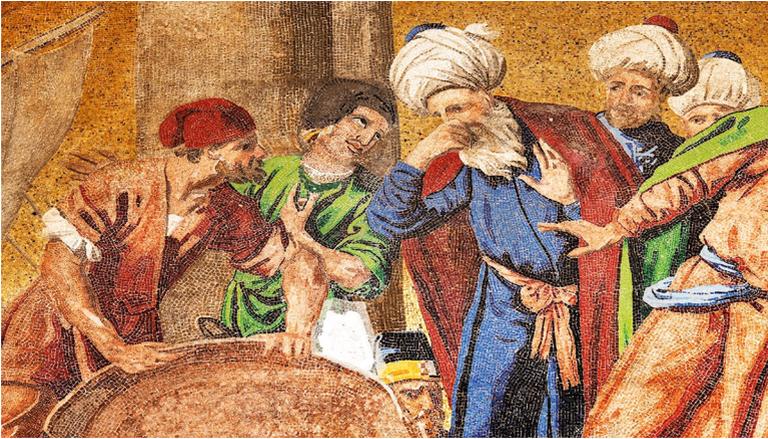
 Much has been written about the virtues and achievements of *La Serenissima Repubblica*. For centuries, the splendour of its material and non-material heritage has overwhelmed visitors with awe. Like Venetian art and architecture, its political and economic inventions have also been idealised and imitated worldwide. Nevertheless, the *Myths of Venice* are omnipresent in the symbols and allegories of the city's historical artworks. They result from repeated entanglements of fact and fiction that aim to consolidate power through cultural hegemony. Venice has never disguised its use of theft and looting to accumulate wealth. Instead, it proudly presented the bounty as a means of claiming ascendancy. At the same time, maintaining diplomatic relations with friends and enemies was a precondition for a successful mercantile network.

Fig. 4: Slave (Tomb of Doge Giovanni Pesaro, Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice)

From the early Middle Ages, the capturing, buying, shipping and selling of slaves was a substantial pillar of the emerging trade empire. While enslaving fellow Christians was already prohibited, pagan Slavs from the Balkans were among the first to be traded across the Mediterranean. At the time, there was strong demand in Middle Eastern and North African societies for subjugated workers and warriors. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, slavery became less accepted in Romance-speaking Europe, but the devastating effects of the plague resulted in a return to earlier standards.

From the Renaissance onwards, artworks depicting African slaves and servants confirmed their owners' status. Nevertheless, numerous wills illustrate that it was a widespread practice to free slaves after their masters' death – which ensured them both the convenience of slavery during their lifetime and an unhindered transition to heaven.

Fig. 5: Trade Bead (Rosetta Bead, 16th century, Museo del Vetro di Murano, CI. VI inv. no. 6652)

Murano's glass workshops created a monopoly for Venice that endured for centuries. When the trade in luxury goods declined in the Early Modern Age, the industry was saved by a rising demand for glass beads. Beads were a traditional currency for many Indigenous communities in Africa, Asia and the New World. Thus, Europe's emerging colonial powers and their slave traders recognised the advantages of Murano's knowledge and production capacities. While Venice had lost its prominent position in world trade, it could still benefit from the networks that were being created by its successors. The most notable of these was the triangular trade that connected Europe, Africa and the Americas with logistical efficiency. For more than two centuries, Venice was the leading supplier of the glass beads that archaeologists occasionally find in unmarked tombs around the globe. In a time in which Christian values and the innovations of the Enlightenment were improving the rights of Europeans, there was no hesitation in dehumanising entire populations in other parts of the world.

Fig. 6: The Incredulous Apprentice, Stone Mason's Capital (Palazzo Ducale, Venice)
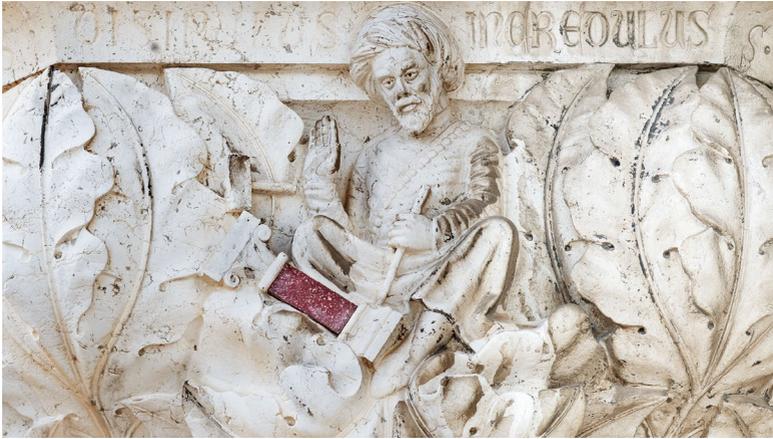
While its position on the lagoon provided security from its enemies, it imposed countless other challenges on the growing metropolis. Thus, Venice has always depended on the *Terraferma* and exchange with the outside world. Analogous to its expansion of power, controlling trade routes, battling enemies and establishing colonies became vital requirements. The city's built environment and material culture mirror these processes. Construction materials, knowhow and a workforce needed to be imported—sometimes through trade and persuasion and sometimes through theft and coercion.

Fig. 7: Pietra d'Istria (Montauro Quarry, Rovinj, Croatia)

Pietra d'Istria is just one example of this dependency. Without these exceptionally durable stones that have 'risen from the sea', the city would have vanished long ago. Almost every cultural practice that was mastered in the lagoon would have been unthinkable without imported ingredients, from wood and stone to metals and minerals. Thus, exploring and extracting were added to the list of the vital skills cultivated in Venice.

For centuries, humanity has understood itself as superior within the alleged duality of nature and culture. This has permitted the relentless exploitation of all available resources. Slowly, we are starting to understand the level of exposure of our species to the natural forces that we increasingly influence but cannot control.

Fig. 8: The Fate (Madonna del Monte)

The empire has been reduced to the crumbling remnants of its capital. The beauty and glorious history of Venice are its final assets. After centuries of trading the most exclusive goods, the city sells its scenery like a commodity. Will it eventually be choked by over-tourism or become an isolated resort that is only for those who can afford it?

Whatever happens, there are other, more substantial threats.
The cultural skills that once facilitated the unlikely rise of a city built on water have developed exponentially during the last centuries and created an ever-expanding technosphere. Venice is an entirely built environment. It is increasingly facing the devastating consequences of human interference in the Earth system. The lagoon has become a scale model for the global challenges of the Anthropocene.[7,8]

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7   Axel Braun is the author of all the images. Reproductions of artworks appear with the permission of the related institutions and copyright holders. Some images are stills from videos and 3D animations and will be part of a mixed-media essay.

8   The project was realised during a residency at *German Centre for Venetian Studies* supported by the Commissioner for Culture and Media of the Federal Republic of Germany and the *Dr. Christiane Hackerodt Stiftung*.

Part IV. Then and Now: Local Craft Knowledge and Heritage Making

10
Venetian Art Prints from Their Beginnings to Today's Sustainability Initiatives

Viola Rühse

In the 16th and early 17th centuries, Venice was an important centre of Italian printmaking.[1] This period continues to offer an inspiring cultural legacy to artists working in the city today. A small selection of artists as well as other people and institutions that made outstanding contributions to the history of Venetian printmaking, which spans more than five centuries, is presented below.[2] With regard to the present, this essay also focusses on sustainability aspects related to the development and use of less toxic printing processes and the situation of handicrafts and tourism in Venice. Particular attention is paid to the exemplary activities of the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* and the Fallani screen printing workshop.

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1   Pavan Elena/Cabion Giovannella: Preface, in: Fara Giovanni Maria/Landau David (eds.): Renaissance in Black and White. The Art of Printmaking in Venice (1494–1615). Verona 2024. p. 9. The earlier tradition of book illustration was supportive for woodcut production in Venice (Jenkins Catherine: A Painter's Medium: Etching in Verona and Venice. In: idem et al. (eds.): The Renaissance of Etching, New York 2019. p. 161–200, here p. 165).

2   In some cases, people who only briefly stayed in Venice also had a major influence on printmaking. The focus is on artistic printmaking, which can, however, straddle the border between art and craft. The topic of the 'cheap print' is excluded (see e.g. Salzberg Rosa: Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice. Manchester 2014). The literature on printmaking prior to the 20th century usually only mentions the important artistic positions of men. More research is required into women in Venetian printmaking.

In the history of Venetian art, printmaking is still overshadowed by other genres, particularly painting.[3] This is due to old preconceptions, such as the idea that prints are only created for documentary purposes.[4] Furthermore, they are often not recognised as works of art due to their nature as reproductions.[5] This lack of appreciation may also be related to the fact that not enough is known about their complex technical aspects and that, therefore, the subtleties of expression in prints are insufficiently recognised and appreciated.[6] Despite several exhibition projects, knowledge of Venetian graphic art is mainly limited to specialists,[7] with the last two decades of contemporary printmaking in particular having been subject to research, mainly in Italy.[8] There is also a lack of up-to-date scientific overviews that go beyond the period of the Republic.[9]

The History of Venetian Printmaking

In the late 15th and 16th centuries, the political situation in Venice was considered relatively stable and trade flourished.[10] Although a university would not

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3   Zeitler Kurt: Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten. In: idem (ed.): Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten. Munich 2022. p. 9–51, here p. 9.

4   Craievich Alberto/Barbara Guidi: Two Collections for One Exhibition. In: Fara Giovanni Maria/Landau David (eds.): Renaissance in Black and White. The Art of Printmaking in Venice (1494–1615). Verona 2024. p. 17–21, here p. 17.

5   Ibid.

6   Trentin Giorgio: 1ª mostra collettiva di incisori veneti moderni [1953]. In: Sbordone Giovanni (ed.): Incidere, incidere, incidere. Giorgio Trentin tra etica dell'arte e impegno politico. Proceedings of the conference at the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia*, 11 December 2013. Florence 2015. p. 109–114, here p. 109.

7   Gribaudi Mariacristina: Foreword. In: Fara Giovanni Maria/Landau David (eds.): Renaissance in Black and White. The Art of Printmaking in Venice (1494–1615). Verona 2024. p. 11.

8   Internationally, for example, only Eric Denker researched the revival of printmaking in Venice around 1900. See, i.a., Denker Eric: Reflections & Undercurrents. Ernest Roth and Printmaking in Venice, 1900–1940. Seattle 2012.

9   For example, the exhibition catalogue *Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten* only deals with Venetian prints from their beginnings to around 1800. Zeitler Kurt (ed.): Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten. Munich 2022.

10   Salzberg Rosa: Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice. Manchester 2014. p. 8.

be founded in Venice until a few centuries later, academic exchange took place in, for example, monasteries and confraternities as well as other humanist circles.[11] This situation was favourable for cultural production, especially for book printing and the graphic arts from the end of the 15th century. In the course of the 16th century, at least 690 printers produced more than 15,000 titles, many with illustrations.[12] Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, which was printed by Aldus Manutius in 1499 and contains 172 woodcuts, is particularly well known.[13]

Prints were also sold individually and in series. Early 16th-century Venetian printing, for example, was characterised by innovative large-format woodcuts.[14] The six-part bird's-eye view of Venice attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari (Fig. 1) that was printed by the Nuremberg dealer Anton Kolb and was the largest woodcut of the time with an overall size of 137.0 x 284.0 cm, is especially renowned. After Albrecht Dürer visited Venice, his prints also had a powerful influence on the artists and the printing trade in the city. Dürer was also widely copied, as exemplified by the engraving of his *Marienleben* (*Life of the Virgin*) that Marcantonio Raimondi created for Venetian publishers around 1506–1508.[15]

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11   Filippi Franco: The art of printing in Venice. In: Cultural Association Aliusmodi: Venice and its lagoons, World Heritage, a dialogue between cultures: which future? 2017. www.venicethefuture.com/schede/uk/323-aliusid=323.htm. accessed on 03.01.2025.

12   Koschatzky Walter: Die Kunst der Graphik. Technik, Geschichte, Meisterwerke. Herrsching 1990. p. 61.

13   Colonna Francesco: Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. Venice 1499.

14   Biffis Mattia: The Large Formats. In: Fara Giovanni Maria/Landau David (eds.): Renaissance in Black and White. The Art of Printmaking in Venice (1494–1615). Verona 2024. p. 123–131.

15   Petri Grischka: Der Fall Dürer vs. Raimondi. Vasaris Erfindung. In: Münch Birgit Ulrike et al. (eds.): Fälschung – Plagiat – Kopie: künstlerische Praktiken in der Vormoderne. Petersberg 2014. p. 52–69.

Fig. 1: Jacopo de' Barbari (?), publisher: Anton Kolb, Bird's-eye view of Venice from the south, 1500. Woodcut printed from six blocks on six sheets of joined paper, 137.0 x 284.0 cm (total dimensions), London, Online Collection of the British Museum – https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1895-0122-1192-1197.

When creating engravings based on their paintings, Venetian artists such as Titian and Jacopo Tintoretto worked with very good printers, who sought to express painterly qualities in their prints. For example, in order to transfer the rich colouring and impressive lighting of Titian's paintings to prints, Cornelis Cort innovatively developed a line that, by strongly swelling and then tapering, enabled fine transitions.[16] In addition to religious and mythological motifs, Cort also created numerous views of buildings and cities. These emphasised the unique character of Venice as a flourishing city with a special connection with the sea and, by depicting the exceptional living conditions resulting from this connection, contributed to the myth of Venice's *singolaritá*.[17] With their specific characteristics – their rapid reproducibility and the ease of transporting them, even to distant countries – prints not only promoted the reputation of the artists, but also served to represent the *Serenissima*.[18]

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16   Kristeller Paul: Kupferstich und Holzschnitt in vier Jahrhunderten. Berlin 1922. p. 274.

17   Zeitler Kurt (ed.): Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten. Munich 2022. p. 10.

18   Further advantages and cultural effects of prints can be found in Fara Giovanni Maria/Landau David: Invitation to an exhibition. In: Fara Giovanni Maria/Landau David (eds.):

From the late 17th century, *vedute*, particularly in the form of etchings, enjoyed a growing popularity amongst travellers and collectors that was also encouraged by the increase in tourism during the four decades following the end of the Great Turkish War in 1699.[19] As a result, artists in Venice began to return their attention to graphic art. For instance, Luca Carlevarijs innovatively integrated elements of everyday Venetian life into his *vedute*, while Canaletto placed urban life even more strongly at the centre of his cityscapes (Fig. 2). Giovanni Battista Tiepolo also experimented with printmaking and created his complex *capricci* and *scherzi*.[20]

Fig. 2: Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal), The market on the Molo in Venice, 1735–46. Etching, 14.5 × 21.3 cm (trimmed sheet), New York, Online Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art – https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/814812.
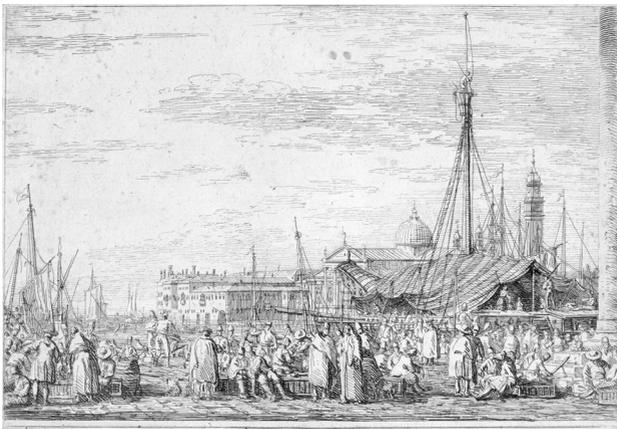
Courtesy of the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* Online Collection (Open Access Image Use)

Renaissance in Black and White. The Art of Printmaking in Venice (1494–1615). Verona 2024. p. 51–74, here p. 64–65.

19   Zeitler Kurt (ed.): Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten. Munich 2022. p. 16–17.

20   Other important protagonists of 18th-century Venetian printmaking are presented in Zeitler Kurt (ed.): Venedig. La Serenissima. Zeichnung und Druckgraphik aus vier Jahrhunderten. Munich 2022. p. 9–51.

The *Accademia di belle arti di Venezia* and Printmaking, and Other Initiatives to Promote Printmaking in Venice

Although engraving was not yet an independent discipline in the first decades after the *Accademia di belle arti di Venezia* was founded in 1750, it was mastered by the important painters and architects who worked there, such as Canaletto and Tiepolo.[21] A separate school for copperplate engraving was founded in the context of the Napoleonic reforms, but this was primarily dedicated to the reproductive prints that were in great demand at the time.[22] Galgano Cipriani was responsible for teaching this subject. He was known for his art reproductions, which, however, lacked personal originality and innovative approaches.[23] Cipriani was succeeded by Antonio Costa in 1851 and then, after Costa's death in 1874, the Academy's school of engraving initially remained closed due to a lack of students. At that time, printmaking in Venice, as in other Italian centres, was mainly carried out not by artists but by professional printmakers with no higher artistic ambition.[24]

At the end of the 19th century, there was an etching revival in Venice. Many foreign and Italian artists used the technique, particularly to create views of the city. The etchings produced by James McNeill Whistler during a stay of several months in Venice in 1879/1880 were very influential in this respect (Fig. 3). He also focussed on the inconspicuous, picturesque features of the city, inspiring Italian artists such as Fabio Mauroner and Emanuele Brugnoli, who paid even more attention than Whistler to places in Venice frequented by workers (Fig. 4).[25] Due to the renewed interest in graphic art, a *Scuola libera di incisione* was opened at the *Accademia di belle arti di Venezia* in 1912. Emanuele Brugnoli was initially entrusted with its management before, in 1932, a combination of his advanced age and political factors led to hand over to Giovanni Giuliani, who mainly depicted work in factories and on building sites in his prints. The

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21   Masau Dan Maria: La Scuola di incisione nella storia dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia. In: Comune di Venezia (ed.), Scuola d'incisione dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia 1978–1985. Venice 1985. p. 9–14, here p. 9.

22   Kristeller Paul: Kupferstich und Holzschnitt in vier Jahrhunderten. Berlin 1922. p. 518.

23   Ibid. p. 519.

24   Del Bianco Alessia: La rinascita dell'acquaforte a Venezia. In: Marinelli Sergio (ed.): Aldèbaran III. Storia dell'Arte. Verona 2015. p. 217–242, here p. 217.

25   Denker Eric: Reflections & Undercurrents. Ernest Roth and Printmaking in Venice, 1900–1940. Seattle 2012. p. 85.

first chair for graphic art was officially established for Giuliani, although the revival of etching was already over by this time.[26] In 1954, he was one of the founders of the *Associazione degli incisori veneti*, which aimed to use national and international exhibitions to revitalise the genre in and around Venice, 'where printmaking was isolated in a stifled province'.[27]

Fig. 3: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Passage Under a House in Venice, 1879–1880. Etching/drypoint, 23.5 x 30.2 cm, Amsterdam, The Rijksmuseum Online Collection – https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/ nl/collectie/object/---537b5732dbfcb55295d9be736ee1faea.

Courtesy of the *Rijksmuseum* (Open Access Image Use)

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26   For the reasons for the end of the *etching revival*, see: Denker Eric: Reflections & Undercurrents. Ernest Roth and Printmaking in Venice, 1900–1940. Seattle 2012. p. 101.

27   Quoted from Guadagnino Mario: [Testimonianza]. In: Sbordone Giovanni (ed.): Incidere, incidere, incidere. Giorgio Trentin tra etica dell'arte e impegno politico. Proceedings of the conference at the *Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia*, 11 December 2013. Florence 2015. p. 75–80, here p. 76.

Fig. 4: Emanuele Brugnoli, Campo Santa Margherita, undated. Etching, 30.5 x 40.0 cm, Trieste, Fondazione CR Trieste.

This image is in the public domain as the artist passed away more than 70 years ago, in accordance with international copyright regulations. The reproduction of this artwork is therefore unrestricted. Source: Fondazione CR Trieste

The art critic and former resistance fighter Giorgio Trentin, another co-founder of the *Associazione degli incisori veneti*, endeavoured to promote artistic printmaking by organising the *Biennale dell'incisione italiana contemporanea* from 1955 to 1968.[28] In 1969, Silvano Gosparini, who also worked as a publisher, the art critic Enzo Di Martino and the artist Nicola Sene (real name: Lilli Olbi) founded the *Scuola Internazionale della Grafica* to promote graphic art. Riccardo Licata, William Stanley Hayter, Henry Goetz and others taught the innovative, experimental graphic techniques that were very fashionable in France at that time. Several woman printmakers, such as Matilde Dolcetti, Carla Horat and Rina Riva, were also teachers at the school, where many Italian graphic artists attended courses. In addition to this, the *Centro Internazionale*

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28   Trentin Bruno: La libertà viene prima. La libertà come posta in gioco nel conflitto sociale. Nuova edizione con pagine inedite dei Diari e altri scritti. Florence 2021. p. 239–240.

della Grafica, to which the school belonged, also ran a print shop, a publishing house and a gallery under the direction of Gosparini.

Selected Contemporary Initiatives for Sustainable Printmaking in Venice

In 1992, the teaching operations of the *Centro Internazionale della Grafica* were spun off and placed under new management. Since then, the *Scuola Internazionale della Grafica* has focussed on teaching rather than the art market. To this end, it has promoted activities such as collaborations with American universities. Roberta Feoli De Lucia joined the school in 2013, since when, with the support of her colleagues, she has been working intensively to promote less toxic printmaking. In general, the increasing popularity of the sustainability movement since the turn of the millennium has also led to greater interest in 'green' printmaking.[29] Although public awareness of the ecological crisis increased in the 1960s and 1970s, toxic materials continued to be used in art.[30] It was not until the 1980s that improved health standards in industry began to impact the art sector and more precautionary measures such as gloves and air filters were used in, for example, university workshops.[31] As a result, new, non-toxic materials were developed and used, some of which were based on old materials while others were newly created. Less toxic processes also offer new creative possibilities that are being explored by artists.[32]

Parallel work and research into less toxic printing processes has been carried out in various countries by figures including Eva Figueras and Ad Stijnman, Keith Howard, Liz Chaflin (Zea Mays Printmaking) and Francesca Genna, who also published the first book on this topic in Italy.[33] At the *Accademia di belle arti*

29   Schroth Stephen T./Gonshorek Daniel O.: Artists' Materials. In: Wehr Kevin (ed.): Green Culture: An A-to-Z Guide. Los Angeles, etc. 2011. p. 34–35, here p. 34.

30   Pogue Dwight: Printmaking Revolution. New York 2012. p. 14.

31   Ibid.

32   Green Cedric: Green Prints – Background, 2011, https://www.greenart.info/galvetch/backgrnd.htm. accessed on 03.01.2025.

33   Mercandetti Fabiola/Innocenzi Marco: Dalle origini dell'arte grafica (bulino, pastello) al non toxic. Metodi e storia delle tecniche. Gruppo Giri. In: L'Occhio dell'incisore (blog), 13.1.2020. http://occhiodellincisoreblu.altervista.org/dalle-origini-dellarte-grafica-bulino-pastello-al-non-toxic-metodi-storia-delle-tecniche-gruppo-giri/?doin

di Venezia, Maria Causa has been promoting sustainable printmaking through teaching and artistic research for several years.[34] However, the 'green' activities at the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* in Venice stand out particularly positively as they are highly influential across the workshop and teaching sectors as well as having a very wide international reach.[35] For example, only non-toxic inks and water-based paint strippers are used and great importance is attached to recycling. In addition, various special study programmes on the subject are on offer and guest artists who have worked intensively on less-toxic printmaking are invited to spend time at the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* (Fig. 5). The basics of 'green' printmaking are also taught in other study programmes at the institution. In this way, knowledge about green printmaking is being passed on to not only young students but also experienced professional artists and amateurs from Italy and around the world, who can then apply it in their artistic practice.

Challenges for Printmakers in Venice

The *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* has been able to survive for so long mainly thanks to international cooperation, including with US universities, and its constant development. For printmakers, however, working in Venice is a challenge. It is difficult to open workshops and operate them with sufficient profit, especially given the high rents in the city and the altered purchasing behaviour of tourists, who have traditionally also been customers. This is fuelling the disappearance of the art of printmaking and the knowledge associated with it.[36]

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g_wp_cron=1734340079.9665908813476562500000. accessed on 03.01.2025. Genna Francesca: Materiali e metodi per l'incisione sostenibile. Alcune esperienze. Palermo 2015.

34   Causa Maria, Curriculum Vitae, 2018. https://www.accademiavenezia.it/upload/docs/ docenti/file/Causa_Maria_.pdf. accessed on 03.01.2025.

35   E-mail information from Roberta Feoli De Lucia (*Scuola Internazionale di Grafica*) on 25 December 2024 and oral information from Alessia De Bortoli (*Scuola Internazionale di Grafica)* in summer 2023.

36   Several non-artistic print shops in Venice have closed due to a lack of profitability and digitisation.

Fig. 5: Lucio Schiavon, Aldo Manuzio, from the Celebrazioni dei 1600 anni di Venezia series (for Linea Uno posters), 2021. Two-colour screen print hand-printed at Fallani, Venice, 70.0 x 50.0 cm.

Courtesy by Lucio Schiavon

Between 1951 and 2022, the number of inhabitants in the historic centre of Venice fell from 174,800 to 52,996. In addition, mass tourism has established itself in the city over the last 40 years. The city's commercial establishments cater almost exclusively to tourists and have led to very high rents; many souvenir shops sell cheap, mass-produced goods from China that are not sustainable. Venetian handicraft, on the other hand, can be considered inherently sustainable as its products remain in use for a long time. Its production processes are embedded in the local economy and society and it uses resources sparingly.[37] It also has an intangible value and is relevant to Venetian culture.[38] Venice, however, has a particularly large number of day trippers who hardly consume anything. This has also led to a general decline in the number of artisans in the city. The 2019 floods and COVID-19 were further challenges, as many workshops were affected by the water and the absence of tourists led to a loss of income.

The well-known and traditional Fallani screen printing studio – the only workshop specialising in serigraphy in Venice – was threatened with closure in 2018/19 after it could no longer remain in its previous premises. The studio's founder, Fiorenzo Fallani, came into contact with screen printing, which was particularly popular in Pop Art at the time, in the 1960s[39] and opened his own serigraphy workshop in 1968. Fallani's editions are characterised by a special skill that, according to the art historian Tonio Toniato, enabled him to achieve special 'chromatic, plastic and even tactile effects'.[40] Fiorenzo Fallani ran an experimental laboratory in the Italian pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale in 1970 and occupied a chair in screen printing at the Academy from 1978 to 1992. During and after this time, he continued to work in his workshop. In total, he produced over 1,000 graphic editions for 200 artists, including such well-

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37   Kragulj Florian/Grill Anna Katharina: Literaturuntersuchung Nachhaltigkeit und Handwerk, 1.1.2021. p. 36. research.wu.ac.at/ws/portalfiles/portal/31565355/Nachhaltigkeit_und_Handwerk_final_web.pdf. accessed on 03.01.2025.

38   See also Sandgruber Roman/Bichler-Ripfel Heidrun/Walcher Maria, Traditionelles Handwerk als immaterielles Kulturerbe und Wirtschaftsfaktor in Österreich. Federal Chancellery, Vienna (ed.) 2016. p. 38–39.

39   McShine Kynaston: Introduction. In: idem: Andy Warhol: A Retrospective. New York 1989. p. 13–23, here p. 16.

40   Quoted from the leaflet for the exhibition *Le serigrafie di Fiorenzo Fallani a Sassari*, Palazzo della Frumentaria in Sassari, serigrafiaitalia.cplfabbrika.com/5905/le-serigrafie-di-fiorenzo-fallani-a-sassari-fino-al-10-giugno/?pdf=5905. accessed on 03.01.2025.

known names as Emilio Vedova, Mimmo Rotella, Joe Tilson, Mario Schifano, Max Bill, Renato Guttuso and Shepard Fairey.

In order to preserve his father's wealth of intangible knowledge, Gianpaolo Fallani took over the workshop in 2012.[41] He was only able to find new premises in 2019 thanks to the support of the *Gervasuti Foundation*, which was established in 2004 by the heir to a traditional Venetian carpentry business. However, Gianpaolo Fallani did not receive any state support in his search for a new space or for the preservation of his father's valuable art-historical archive. In recent years, he has repeatedly participated in important activities dedicated to the promotion of sustainable handicrafts in Venice. In 2017, for example, he took part in the project *Mestieri sostenibili in una città fragile* of *Ca'-Foscari University*, in which young people in particular were introduced to the Venetian craft tradition.[42] Since 2018, he has also been a member of *Homo Faber*, an initiative of the *Michelangelo Foundation for Creativity and Craftsmanship*, which is committed to preserving and passing on craft skills at an international level.[43]

Sustainable Tourism and Venetian Printmaking

Fallani also sells prints in his studio in his own showroom – including some inexpensive ones that are suitable as souvenirs for tourists but also appeal to locals. Graphic art has always been a good starting point for collectors, although this group of buyers is currently very small and many people know too little about art prints.[44] But graphic art – like the vinyl record – has an opportunity

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41 Gianpaolo Fallani attended an arts and crafts school and then worked in the field of digital printing. In 2018, he was awarded the *MAM – Maestro d'arte e mestiere* (Master of Arts and Crafts), www.maestrodartemestiere.it/en/libro-d-oro/2018/gianpaolo-fallan i. accessed on 03.01.2025.

42 Ca' Foscari University of Venice: Website of the *Mestieri sostenibili in una città fragile* project, www.unive.it/pag/17853/. accessed on 03.01.2025.

43 Fallani is featured in the online *Homo Faber Guide* (www.homofaber.com/de/discover/g ianpaolo-fallani-silk-screen-printing-italy. accessed on 03.01.2025) and has also been involved in the major *Homo Faber* biennials that have been organised in Venice since 2018.

44 In the online *Homo Faber Guide*, Gianpaolo Fallani also refers to the desideratum that more educational work needs to be done on the quality and value of art prints (www. homofaber.com/de/discover/gianpaolo-fallani-silk-screen-printing-italy. accessed on 03.01.2025).

to benefit from the analogue revival. It is therefore necessary to educate the public about the quality and value of handmade graphics.

This explains the importance of the initiative of the *Garance & Marion* gallery in Venice. Opened in 2021, this specialises in prints, which is unusual today for a gallery due to the fact that the profit margin on prints is lower than the margin on, for example, paintings. The gallery's commitment to sustainability is exemplified by its cooperation with Fallani as a local screen printing workshop for limited editions, which eliminates long transport routes.[45] Bottega Cini, founded in 2020, is also endeavouring to increase the market presence of Venetian artisanal products via a concept store right in the middle of the *Ponte dell'Accademia*, where Fallani is also represented. Bottega Cini's focus also fits in very well with the comprehensive sustainability strategy presented a year later by several institutions and companies on the occasion of Venice's 1,600th anniversary celebrations. This strategy further emphasises the need to support 'quality companies' and products made in Venice. The *Venice World Sustainability Capital Foundation* was established in 2022 to implement this strategy.

Fallani also offers short courses to tourists that explain the technique and let them try it out for themselves. There are also one-day courses at Fallani and the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* that are similarly attended by creative visitors to Venice. Between 2019 and 2022, as part of the European project *Smart strategies for sustainable tourism in LIvely cultural DEStinations – S.LI.DES*, Ca'Foscari University and others created routes that enable tourists to explore traditional arts and crafts in Venice and also participate in Fallani's courses.[46] By encouraging guests to stay in the city for several days, this also promotes the diversification and sustainability of tourism in line with the 2021 sustainability strategy mentioned above. It also supports the valorisation of printmaking as a cultural asset.

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45   The website of the *Garance & Marion* gallery in Venice is available at: garance-marion.com/fr-en/pages/chi-siamo-galleria-venezia. accessed on 03.01.2025.

46   The S.LI.DES project was funded as part of the Interreg Italy-Croatia programme; the project website can be found at: programming14-20.italy-croatia.eu/web/slides. accessed on 03.01.2025.

Summary

Printmaking in Venice has a long and complex history, although it is overshadowed by the history of painting, architecture and sculpture. Only Venetian printmaking between the Renaissance and 1800 is well known internationally, but the city also experienced flourishing phases in the following centuries, of which the public could be made more aware. Even today there is a lively, albeit smaller, printmaking scene in Venice. The teaching and research of the *Accademia di belle arti di Venezia* and *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* focus, in particular, on contemporary, sustainable techniques.

Graphic artists in Venice produce quality products that are aimed at visitors and locals alike and are more sustainable than the souvenirs produced in China for mass tourism. They also contribute to Venice's image as an art metropolis. However, the marketing and distribution of graphic products and the communication of their artistic and cultural value need more public support, especially due to the sharp rise in retail rents and the excess of mass-produced souvenirs. In recent years, Venice's graphic artists have also increasingly offered courses and workshops to visitors that encourage sustainable quality tourism. For this to continue, however, these graphic artists need public support so that their workshops can be retained and new ones opened, despite the high rents. The *Venice World Sustainability Capital Foundation*, among other organisations, should become more involved here.

11
Glass: Millennia-Old Excellence Between Innovation and Sustainability

Matteo Silverio

Glass is one of the oldest and most fascinating materials ever crafted by humans. Its origins date back to 5,000 BCE, when craftsmen in Egypt and Mesopotamia started producing this unique material, which is admired for its beauty and versatility. The Phoenicians then spread glassmaking techniques throughout the Mediterranean, transforming it into a prestigious and widely used material. Later, the Romans refined these techniques and introduced new methods – such as glassblowing – that allowed for the creation of lighter and more complex forms.

During the Middle Ages, the Republic of Venice became a reference point for glass art, with the island of Murano establishing itself in 1291 as a global centre of excellence in glass production. In Murano, glassmakers developed innovative techniques that enabled them to produce blown glass of extraordinary purity and mirrors and colourless crystals of the highest quality. These skills were jealously guarded by artisan families and passed down from generation to generation. Each item produced on the island was the result of a long and complex process that required skill, experience and creativity. Glass working was therefore not merely a craft but an art form, the fruit of an ongoing dialogue between creativity, technique and respect for tradition.

This prominence, which lasted for centuries, began to decline during the 1960s. The rise of the glass industry had a tremendous impact on Murano, which gradually lost its central role. This crisis intensified further in the early 2000s. Globalisation and new challenges related to sustainability have posed serious challenges to the island's economy: Deeply tied to its traditions, Murano struggles

to face the transformations dictated by our century and to maintain its relevance and competitiveness in the contemporary context. The need to combine historical heritage with the demands of the present and future inevitably calls for a rethinking of traditional production practices, along with an openness toward innovation and new technologies.

Serendipity

My encounter with Murano glass happened almost by chance. After spending a period abroad, where I had the opportunity to collaborate with Carlo Ratti, Director of the *MIT Senseable City Lab*, and to develop a multidisciplinary, research-oriented approach, I returned to Venice in the summer of 2016.

The initial idea was to dedicate that summer to rest and to reflect on new life projects. However, for someone restless like me – always seeking new challenges – inactivity is a difficult concept to accept. My wife, a native of Murano who comes from a family with a long tradition in the glass sector, put me in touch with a local furnace that needed technical consultancy. With a degree in architecture and a strong interest in research and innovation, I found myself immersed in a world almost suspended in time, where artisanal mastery was expressed through a dedication and passion that immediately fascinated me. Meeting the master glassmakers felt like a step back in time: Their ability to shape molten glass into objects of extraordinary beauty was the result of years of experience and a deep love for their craft.

Yet, I could not help but notice a certain resistance to technological innovation. Although the Murano furnaces are custodians of a centuries-old tradition, they seemed crystallised in a production model that, on the one hand, guaranteed product authenticity but, on the other, limited opportunities for developing and adapting to new challenges in the global market.

This observation contrasted sharply with my natural inclination toward research and innovation, which seeks to harness seemingly improbable synergies between various fields of knowledge. I began to see Murano glass not only as a material tied to tradition but also as an opportunity to experiment with new techniques and new languages – a chance to build a bridge between craftsmanship and new technologies.

The Glass Matters Project

It was from these reflections that the *Glass Matters* project was born in 2017, with the goal of establishing a dialogue between Murano's artisanal tradition and new technologies. With the support of *Ca' Foscari University of Venice* and the *Promovetro Consortium of Murano*, we managed to involve six Murano glassworks in a workshop where the artisans had the opportunity to become familiar and experiment with some digital fabrication tools (CNC milling, laser cutting and 3D printing). The beginning was not without challenges: The mistrust toward technologies that seemed to threaten their art was palpable. However, thanks to their open-mindedness and willingness to embrace change, the glassmakers began to explore the possibilities afforded by these new tools and discover how they could expand their creative options without altering their identity as artisans.

The results were surprising. During the first edition of *The Venice Glass Week*, we presented a series of works that combined Murano's artisanal mastery with digital technologies. This project opened up new avenues for collaboration between artisans and designers, highlighting how technology does not necessarily represent a threat but can, in fact, become a powerful ally in exploring new forms of expression. The success of *Glass Matters* marked the beginning of a more open dialogue between Murano's traditional practices and the world of technological innovation, demonstrating how even a sector so deeply rooted in its tradition can find new ways to express itself and thrive.

Building on the success of *Glass Matters*, I began collaborating as a consultant with various glassworks on the island, pursuing research and development projects oriented towards design. Thanks to a multidisciplinary approach, I was able to introduce new perspectives and methods of work that had not been explored before. Among the most significant collaborations, the one with Stefano Bullo, a young master glassmaker and the owner of *Vetrate Artistiche Murano*, proved to be particularly fruitful. Together, we embarked on a research path aimed at overcoming the limits of traditional leaded glasswork, an essential feature of stained glass but one with increasing technical and ecological issues.

Fig. 1: Costantini Glassbeads, Kanz Architetti, Matteo Silverio, LUME lamp, 2017.

Courtesy of Matteo Silverio

After numerous experiments, we developed a flexible interconnection system that led to the creation of a collection of manipulable glass vases called *Touch-Me!* (Fig. 2). Thanks to their particular geometry, these vases can be shaped by the user, transforming the relationship between the object and its viewer and reversing the perception of glass as a fragile, untouchable material. The project was first presented to the public in 2019 during the *New Glass Now* exhibition organised by the *Corning Museum of Glass* and received widespread acclaim for

its originality and innovation. Later, it won the award for the best work created by artists under 35 at *The Venice Glass Week 2020*, further consolidating the value of this experimentation.

Fig. 2: Stefano Bullo, Matteo Silverio, Touch-me vase, 2019.

Courtesy of Stefano Bullo and Matteo Silverio

A New Approach to the Management of Glass Waste

Waste management is a critical challenge for all production chains. Every living being generates waste, and humans are no exception. However, our society produces a significant amount of waste, much of which is neither recycled nor reused and ultimately pollutes the environment. It is only recently that this issue has become the subject of public debate and specific policies.

Murano is no exception: About 50% of the glass processed on the island becomes waste,[1] amounting to approximately a thousand tons per year destined for landfills. The main problem is that this glass, enriched with pigments and substances that alter its composition, cannot be recycled along with regular packaging glass. Consequently, the glassworks are forced to bear high disposal costs and then purchase new raw material, perpetuating a vicious cycle of waste and inefficiency. Globally, the situation is equally critical: It is estimated that around 130 million tons of glass waste are produced each year.[2] Most of this waste is not recycled but ends up in landfills or undergoes downcycling.

The scenario becomes even more paradoxical when we consider that sand, the basic element for glass production, is the second most exploited natural resource in the world after water, and its intensive extraction is causing severe environmental and geopolitical problems. Furthermore, transforming sand into glass requires a considerable amount of energy, making the waste of this material even more senseless.

The *rehub* Project and Sustainable Innovation

In 2019, after working on a project commissioned by the *Expo Dubai 2020 Committee*, I wondered if it was possible to find a sustainable and low-impact solution that enables us to reuse glass waste. The idea was to develop a method for revaluing locally produced waste, avoiding transportation and reducing energy consumption. Starting from Murano but with the goal of extending this approach to all places that lack an efficient glass recycling system, the objective was to combine artisanal tradition with new technologies – to unite research, design and art.

It was a rather ambitious project, but we gave it a try. After several years of experimentation and development together with Marta Donà, we arrived at a

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1   Barucco Maria Antonia/Cattaruzza Elti/Careno Paola/Centenaro Stefano/De Benedetti Filippo: Murano Pixel. Economia circolare per gli scarti di vetro. Treviso 2022.

2   Aranvinthan Thiru/Ferdous Wahid/Lokuge Weena/Manalo Allan/Mendis Priyan/ Schubel Peter/Siddique Rafat/Wong Hong/Zhuge Yan: Recycling of landfill wastes in construction – A review on global waste generation, performance, application and future opportunities. Darling Heights 2021.

new process that allows glass waste to be transformed into a paste that is easily workable at room temperature. This paste, similar to clay in consistency, can be used in various industrial processes, such as rolling, stamping and injection moulding. Additionally, thanks to a patented extruder, the paste can also be 3D printed (Fig. 3), paving the way for a wide range of applications – from architectural surfaces to design objects. Our innovative process, which requires 70% less energy than traditional glass processing, enables the creation of sustainable products that are free from plastics or resins and use secondary raw materials.

Fig. 3: Matteo Silverio, rehub, Proprietary 3d printer extruding revero (glass paste), 2024.
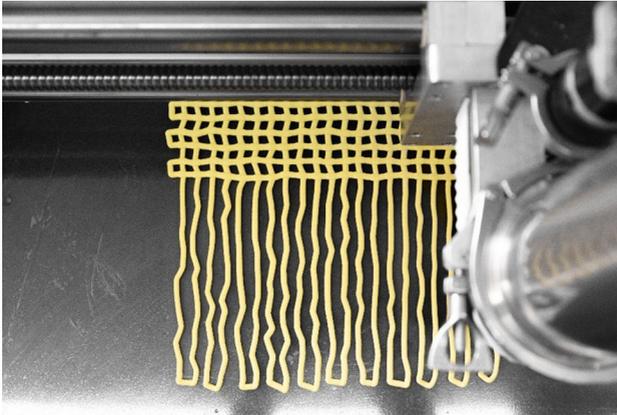
Courtesy of *rehub*

In 2022, we founded *rehub*, an innovative startup that leverages the developed process to create new products from glass waste (Figs. 3–5). The objects made by *rehub* testify to the possibility of a more responsible resource management and demonstrate how a centuries-old tradition like Murano's can become a driving force for innovation that is capable of improving environmental quality.

Fig. 4: Matteo Silverio, rehub, Terazzo-inspired tile (100% made of glass-waste), 2024.

Fig. 5: Matteo Silverio, rehub, Terazzo-inspired tile (100% made of glass waste), 2024.

Courtesy of *rehub*

Courtesy of *rehub*

Our process can be applied to not only Murano glass but also other types of non-recyclable glass, allowing us to aim for a positive impact on a global scale. Through the products that we create, either independently or in collaboration with companies in the fashion and design sectors, we prove that even waste considered irrecoverable can, in fact, be revalued.

rehub is not just a business project; it is a true innovation and research hub, where artisans, designers and researchers can explore new creative and productive possibilities together. In a context like Venice, where the balance between tradition and innovation is crucial, promoting and demonstrating that sustainable development is achievable is not only a goal but a necessity.

Venice and the island of Murano, steeped in history, now face unique challenges that demand innovative and sustainable solutions. Investing in new technologies and environmentally responsible production methods not only

helps to preserve the city's artisanal heritage but also creates a new legacy rooted in a balance between progress and respect for the environment. Innovation thus becomes a pillar for Venice's future, where sustainable development can revitalise the local economy, rejuvenate the glass sector and ensure that the city remains an example of cultural excellence and resilience.

Looking to the future, we aim to continue expanding our activities and developing new projects that can help transform Murano into a centre of excellence for the circular economy and sustainability. We are convinced that Murano glass, with its millennial history and extraordinary beauty, can become a symbol of rebirth and innovation, demonstrating that even the oldest traditions can find new ways to thrive in a constantly evolving world.

The challenges of the 2030 Agenda require an innovative and responsible approach: At *rehub*, we are ready to do our part in building a more sustainable and inclusive future.

Part V. In Their Own Words: Conversations with Cultural Professionals in Venice

12
'Art Can Act as an Agent for Change'
Conversation with Karole P. B. Vail (Director, Peggy Guggenheim Collection)

Cristina Baldacci and Christina Hainzl: We are living in an uncertain time, marked above all by the ecological question and increasing polarisation. The *Peggy Guggenheim Collection (PGC)* **has undertaken both a profound reflection and a series of initial measures that address the questions facing humanity today. One of these was the series of meetings** *Art 4 a Better Future* **that was organised in collaboration with** *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)* **at** *Ca' Foscari University of Venice* **and** *CUOA Business School***. What museum activities – starting with the experience gained by the** *PGC* **– can help to raise awareness and address the challenges of contemporaneity? And what open questions did the meetings with** *NICHE* **leave for the work of the** *PGC***?**

Karole Vail: First of all, I think that the *PGC* has been very conscious of sustainability matters for a long time. This consciousness extends beyond economic sustainability to include social sustainability and a commitment to inclusivity. The museum strives to act in a way that is as environmentally friendly as possible, which is particularly challenging for a small museum like ours, especially one that is located in Venice. Even before sustainability became a widely discussed topic, the museum was already working to literally open its doors to new audiences. The underlying belief was, and remains, that art is not just for the 1% or the 0.001%, but for 100% of people.

At the *PGC*, we believe that art can act as an agent for change. Artists have always believed that, while they may not be able to change the world entirely, they

can contribute to change in meaningful ways. Art can pave the way for a better future and provide a new kind of empowerment for humanity. The *Guggenheim Museum* and the *Guggenheim Foundation* were founded on this belief in the possibility of change, better understanding and even spiritual development, with the goal of achieving something better and more positive. This mission continues at the *PGC*. During the pandemic, this idea became especially evident. We recognised that art is crucial. While we're not literally saving lives, we believe that art can offer significant help and support. It can be a source of generosity and solace. In this respect, I think that art is absolutely essential.

Museums have realised, especially since the pandemic and in light of dramatic cost increases, that they must continue to operate as platforms for dialogue, collaboration and reflection. Museums are places where people can experience beautiful works, but also works that challenge and provoke them. As such, museums have become spaces for public discussion and debate.

The *Art 4 a Better Future* project with *NICHE* was an excellent and timely opportunity to share ideas and discuss sustainability issues in partnership with a major university, as well as with corporate businesses. It was significant that corporate actors were involved, as they too are beginning to realise the importance of participation. We must, however, remain vigilant about greenwashing. Many companies, and even some institutions, feel compelled to project an image of being 'green' or 'compliant' without necessarily taking meaningful action. In the case of sustainability, I think that we can sometimes tend to be a little selfish, but real change requires genuine effort from everyone, no matter how small that contribution might be. This is why it's so important that we all play our part.

If we, as a museum, can contribute to raising awareness about climate change, then we should. This collaboration with *NICHE* and the three meetings we held with university professors and corporate representatives were significant steps. Hopefully, we can continue to organise similar events in the future.

These meetings also opened a space for dialogue about possible collaboration between art and technology. Artists have long been interested in this relationship. Today, more and more artists are engaging with artificial intelligence and exploring its creative potential.

I believe *Art 4 a Better Future* was an excellent beginning for us. It's part of a broader discourse that we're trying to address within the limitations of our institution. The *PGC* is a small museum, and it wasn't originally designed as a museum – it's a house. This poses unique challenges as we seek to make it sustainable, but we're committed to navigating those challenges to the best of our ability.

CB and CH: How can a museum take ecological aspects into account today in the preparation and execution of exhibitions? And how can curatorial practices within a museum institution approach so-called 'ecologies of care'?

KV: One of our biggest challenges relates to exhibitions and the origin of the works that we present. As a former curator, I understand the difficulty of preparing a show when the most fitting works are scattered across the globe. There are certain continents from which we've decided not to borrow works, but minimising transport and crate costs isn't always easy.

For some exhibitions, I've had to make the decision to avoid any loans as much as possible from the U.S. The reason is twofold: first, the financial cost, and, second, the ecological footprint. We have to make an effort here. But then comes the dilemma – if you exclude all works from certain regions, are you compromising the quality of the exhibition? Will it still fully represent the artist, the theme and the overall message that you're trying to convey? Sometimes, bringing in a specific work allows visitors to experience something unique that they might never have seen otherwise. So, it's always a question of finding the right balance.

Transportation is one of the most significant challenges. Costs are skyrocketing but, beyond this, there's the environmental impact. To mitigate this, we're increasingly using remote video couriers. This practice gained momentum during the pandemic and, in some ways, it's proven more effective. Through video, you can zoom in on details, often providing a clearer view of the work. However, there are limitations. As someone who's served as a courier in the past, I know that there's a level of security that comes with being physically present to supervise the work – to be there with it, day and night. For very valuable pieces, we're unlikely to abandon the practice of in-person couriers. But, whenever possible, we've embraced video couriers as a viable option.

There's also a secondary benefit to sending curators as couriers. It gives them the opportunity to conduct research in the destination city – research that might not have happened otherwise. If we move to more video couriering, we'll have fewer of these in-person research opportunities. Again, it's all about balance.

But beyond the practical considerations, it's also about moral consciousness. If we're serious about reducing transportation, we have to set clear limits. For some newer projects, I've told our curators: 'No works from the U.S. this time – we're only working with pieces from Italy and Europe.' Sometimes this means saying no to a single work that would need to be transported across the Atlantic. In other cases, if we're bringing in multiple works from one location, it's more justifiable. If I'm already bringing over five or six works, then it's more worthwhile. But with single pieces, the impact – both financial and environmental – is too great.

The broader issue extends beyond museums. The art world as a whole needs to address its response to these challenges. Do we really need so many biennales and art fairs? It seems like there's an art fair every other day. This constant movement of art around the globe comes with significant costs, both financial and ecological.

Beyond exhibitions, we've also made efforts in our retail operations. We've eliminated plastic bags in our shops, replacing them with recycled paper bags. We print as much material as possible in Venice or within the Veneto region, supporting the local economy while also reducing transport-related emissions. Our T-shirts and scarves are made from eco-friendly materials, and we even stock *Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)* certified pencils.

Where possible, we also partner with local artisans and makers. This effort is about more than sustainability – it's about promoting the rich craftsmanship and artistry that Venice has to offer. Supporting local artists and artisans helps to preserve the city's cultural heritage, and that's an essential part of our mission.

CB and CH: What also came out during the *Art 4 a Better Future* meetings is that you are working together with scientists to develop a green protocol for conservation and restoration?

KV: Yes, definitely. We had one particularly interesting project that involved using lichens and tree leaves for the conservation of cultural heritage. The lichens were placed both inside and outside to monitor the air, as they are excellent indicators of air quality. The leaves, on the other hand, were used to absorb pollution. This approach was highly successful and quite remarkable.

We've also been fortunate to participate in several European projects, working closely with the European Union. From 2015 to 2018, we were part of the *NANORESTART* project, which focused on the development of nanogels for conservation. Then, from 2019 to 2022, we participated in the *APACHE* programme, which focused on the development of active, intelligent packaging materials and display cases. As part of this project, we received a specially designed display case for sculptures. This display case meets the highest standards for preservation, providing optimal air quality and climate control – essential features for a museum environment.

We're currently involved in another European Union project called *GREENART*. Our conservator is becoming increasingly aware of the holistic approaches that are crucial to effective conservation. While these methods sometimes require some trial and error, they're largely effective and represent the direction in which we want to move. Embracing these holistic, environmentally conscious approaches is essential for the future of conservation and restoration.

CB and CH: Is it right that this is an ongoing process that varies widely from artwork to artwork, also because each artwork is an object in itself that has specific needs and also requires specific acts of care?

KV: Yes. But we're very fortunate because our museum is quite small. This also means that our collection is not so large, which in some ways is an advantage. It's more manageable, and it allows us to focus more attentively on individual works of art. This enables us to engage in grant programmes, special projects and collaborations.

We work very closely with the *Opificio Pietre Dure* in Florence, and this collaboration is incredibly valuable. The *Opificio* is one of the most prestigious conservation institutions, and being able to work with it brings significant benefits to our collection. Ultimately, our goal is to preserve these works for future generations. Ideally, these pieces will still be here in 500, or even 1,500 years. That's

the hope, and everything we do is aimed at ensuring their longevity and survival.

CB and CH: The educational programme for schools is one of the flagships of the *Peggy Guggenheim Collection*. There are many interdisciplinary educational activities that are dedicated especially to children and teenagers. Do they address ecological issues as well?

KV: First of all, we're an educational institution and there have been school programmes and family programmes at the *PGC* for decades. I think that we've been very much at the forefront, amongst the avant-garde, in promoting school programmes and bringing children to the museum. Let's face it, most people don't grow up with art at home, and many don't realise that they can go to a museum. Unfortunately, there's still a bit of hesitation or fear about entering a museum, and that's the last thing we want. Museums need to be welcoming, but not all of them are. I hope that we're as welcoming as possible. This means engaging the staff and making sure that they understand that the museum is a place of sharing, education and community. The younger you can bring in children, the better.

We have a wide range of family programmes and children's programmes, but we also think about older audiences. In the summer, for instance, we open the museum earlier for older visitors – people aged 70 or 75 and above – so that they can visit when it's less hot and less crowded. This is a nice time for them to enjoy the museum and its exhibitions. Our aim is to welcome people of all ages, from the very young to the elderly, because everyone has the right and a desire to experience the museum. We want to make it accessible and educational, but it also has to be enjoyable. Yes, it's serious, but it also has to be appealing and friendly.

In recent years, we've been developing more programmes focused on general accessibility and inclusion. One example is *Doppio senso*, a tactile journey through the museum for visually impaired people. The visually impaired have just as much right to be in the museum as everyone else, and we have to facilitate this. Another initiative is *Io vado al museo*, a collaboration with a university that uses the translanguaging method to bring migrants into the museum. The goal is to enable people from different linguistic backgrounds

to talk together and to demonstrate that each language is as important as the next. This initiative is about fostering a sense of community and inclusivity.

We also have *Kids' Day* and various family days, along with *A Scuola di Guggenheim*, which includes programmes specifically for teachers. These programmes get terrific responses from schools across the Veneto region. When you see young kids sitting on the ground, looking at a painting, you hope that they're taking something with them. Maybe they'll start drawing differently, or perhaps they'll tell their friends or parents that they want to return to the museum. That's the ultimate goal – to create a lasting impression that encourages a lifelong engagement with art and culture.

CB and CH: Last year, recognising the impact of museums on the environment, the *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum* in New York appointed an Associate Director of Sustainability in order to follow a greener path. Has this decision also influenced the *PGC*'s green policies? Are you developing a common protocol that affects the entire constellation of Guggenheim museums?

KV: Not really. In New York or Bilbao, they can do that because they're much bigger and have a dedicated team or department. I'd love to be able to have solar panels, for example, but you can't do that in Venice. We recently conducted a sustainability study with *Metroeconomica*. They performed a sustainability analysis for us using the LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) methodology. As we expected, the greatest emissions are linked to the transport of works of art. But we also realised that we're remarkably sustainable despite these transport challenges and the fact that international students and fellows come to the *Peggy Guggenheim Collection* from all over the world, many of whom fly here. We admit to being culprits in that respect.

On the other hand, when it comes to economic sustainability we generate substantial business for Venice and the Veneto region. The economic benefits of this are significantly greater than any environmental externalities or shortcomings. I wish that we could do better regarding our environmental impact, but we do much to support the economic livelihood of our neighbourhood and of the Veneto in general.

We don't have a formal green team as they do in New York, but we try to be as respectful as we can in small ways. We focus on proper waste disposal – although this is quite expensive in Venice – and we've switched to using LED lights.

CB and CH: What are the next green steps for the *PGC*?

KV: Well, I don't think that there are many new steps that we can take, other than just improving on what we're doing as much as possible and remaining very aware of our actions in terms of sustainability. At this point, I don't think that it's realistic to be completely green. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we live in Venice and that we have a responsibility to do our part, whatever that might be. We're very pleased with our sustainability results and our contribution to the economy. Our goal is to continue improving little by little, especially in terms of transport issues, and to generally strive to be less wasteful.

CB and CH: There is something Janus-faced about thinking of sustainability and Venice. Venice as a place of cultural heritage, threatened by decay and overtourism in the middle of the sensitive ecosystem of the lagoon. And, at the same time, Venice as a reference point for many sustainability events and projects, as a vibrant cultural and scientific scene that deals with the environmental issue. You live in Venice; how do you perceive and deal with this ambivalence?

KV: Well, it's very difficult and very frustrating. It's so difficult because you don't want to tell people that they can't come – everyone should be able to experience Venice. We've been working for many years to break down barriers, and part of that effort has been to make travel more accessible. Ironically, that very success has contributed to the problem of overtourism.

I firmly believe that tourism cannot be a monoculture in Venice. This is true for other places as well – like Barcelona or Malaga – where residents have protested against the overwhelming influx of tourists. Tourism is, of course, an essential part of the city's economy, but it should only be one part of a larger, more balanced system. We don't want Venice to turn into a museum. We already have museums, but we don't want Venice to become one itself.

We know that there has to be political will. And there's probably a lack of strong political will to create the right infrastructures for 'normal' people who are not

going to buy a palazzo on the Grand Canal. What we need are families with two or three children who can actually live here. This means providing good schools, activities and futures for them, as well as ensuring the presence of regular shops. Unfortunately, there aren't many regular shops left. This makes it difficult to do basic things like grocery shopping.

I'm going to contradict myself here. In some ways, it's good that there aren't too many regular shops. We've perhaps grown too used to having too much choice. If there's less choice, it's sometimes easier to make a decision. The problem, however, is that the reduced choice often affects essential items. When I walk from Santa Maria del Giglio or San Maurizio to San Marco, it feels like I've entered a duty-free zone at an airport. The way the shops are positioned, decorated and highlighted gives it that feeling. I know that this isn't unique to Venice – every major city in the world now has these high-end shops – but I still don't understand why we need them there. It beats me.

It's so sad because, even here in Dorsoduro, there was a lovely little shop that sold beautiful old, antique glasses and objects. It recently closed, and now there's another shop selling junk – yet another junk shop. It's not that I want to take jobs away from the people who work in these stores, but surely there needs to be a better solution.

I don't believe in the monoculture of tourism. That's what has to change. But, as I said before, there's probably a lack of true political will – both in the city and at a national level – to bring about significant change. I'm not sure how you achieve this because I'm not an engineer, architect or city planner. But surely there must be brilliant ideas out there for transforming Venice into a truly liveable city – a place where people genuinely want to live, not just visit. Perhaps this also means that tourism needs to be a little more restricted.

CB and CH: Museums are part of Venice's fragile social ecosystem, and Venice itself is becoming increasingly musealised. How should institutions like the *PGC* position themselves to help keep the city socially and culturally alive in the future?

KV: Well, we have to welcome everyone and be more inclusive than ever. We have to ensure that our programmes of inclusivity and general accessibility are more prevalent than ever. Ideally, we would develop more of these pro-

grammes, but we're also a small team, so there's only so much that we can do. That said, I think that we already do quite a lot.

In some ways, museums – and museums like the *PGC* in particular – should serve as a model of what the city can be. A model of excellence that's open to progress, inclusivity and welcome. But this must be done in a respectful way that isn't solely geared towards tourists but also focused on the needs and interests of residents.

13
'Themes Which Concern Contemporary Artists Are Often Present in the Past Too'
Conversation with Bruno Racine (CEO and Director, Palazzo Grassi – Punta della Dogana | Pinault Collection)

Christina Hainzl: We are living in an uncertain time, marked above all by the ecological question and increasing polarisation. The Pinault Collection contains many works that address the challenges facing humanity today. What museum activities could help to raise awareness and take care of these pressing issues?

Bruno Racine: I would say the traditional activities — which are, of course, for a museum, exhibitions, conferences, public programmes and educational activities. That's the way we do it. I can give you an example, not in Venice, but in Paris at the Bourse de Commerce last year. There was an exhibition entitled *Avant l'Orage* (Before the Storm). The exhibition specifically focused on all of those themes, but through the language of art, which is a unique and distinct approach. It's about not only illustrating potential consequences but also fostering awareness.

Interestingly, people often visit such exhibitions already aware of these issues. So, in that sense, the exhibition's role is to deepen or reinforce this awareness rather than to introduce it from scratch. I wouldn't necessarily say that it's about creating awareness from the ground up, but it certainly has the potential to strengthen it, especially for those who are already engaged with contemporary art. The audience for contemporary art, like the visitors to the Bourse de Commerce, often comes with a certain level of prior awareness. These activities

can help to expand and deepen their understanding, making the impact more meaningful and enduring.

However, there is also public art, which, of course, can be seen by everyone. Public art can sometimes provoke reactions or spark controversies, but it's also part of a broader public debate that takes place outside the walls of a museum.

Of course, all of this also depends on the commitment of the artists themselves. Some artists, although they may be deeply concerned with ecological issues on a personal level, do not necessarily express these concerns in their work. To have an impact in this area it's important to showcase, or commission, works by artists who are open to engage with these questions. And it's worth noting that these artists are not necessarily the youngest ones.

CH: Is it difficult to take ecological aspects into account when preparing or executing an exhibition?

BR: It's not difficult because it's actually quite practical. There's a wide range of approaches that we can take. For instance, reusing the installations from one exhibition for the next. We also try to avoid the unnecessary transportation of artworks. For example, if we have a painting in Australia and it's not essential to the exhibition, we'd usually renounce it due to the cost and the ecological impact of shipping it. We prioritise sustainability wherever possible. The materials used for the installation can often be recycled. We're also working on ways to recycle lighting and to optimise heating and air-conditioning. Many of these aspects are highly technical, but they're increasingly being taken into account — not just for ecological reasons but also for economic reasons, as they help to reduce costs. I'd say that these considerations started becoming more prominent around eight to ten years ago.

CH: Some larger institutions have set up sustainability or environmental departments. Others see this as a holistic process. What is your view? And what do you still consider under-recognised in museum organisation in terms of the ecological turn?

BR: No, it's altogether different for us. We are a team of 25 people, so having an environmental department wouldn't make sense. Even in larger institutions, the role of ecological awareness needs to be embraced by everyone. It's a

transversal, horizontal responsibility rather than something that can be siloed into a single department. The role of such a department, even in larger organisations, is more about coordination, about managing long-term projects and fostering reflection rather than directly overseeing operations.

For instance, the exhibition department must almost automatically integrate ecological considerations into its work. Here, we had a training session on digital sustainability for the entire staff. It's about all the small gestures and actions — the everyday practices — that contribute to a more sustainable way of operating.

CH: Museums of contemporary art often raise questions that relate to our current challenges. Sustainability is also about conservation and restoration. How does the Pinault Collection at Palazzo Grassi meet these challenges?

When Pinault purchased the Palazzo Grassi, only minimal adjustments were made. We did, however, change the lighting system, and the electrical infrastructure was updated. We are also in the process of changing the heating system; that's not restoration but maintenance in order to ensure the conscious use of resources.

CH: I would like to add a question about the collection, which consists of a large number of contemporary artworks. Aren't there also conservation problems or challenges in storing them?

BR: Yes, absolutely. This is a question that would be better answered by the staff in Paris. But what I can say is: It's a huge collection — several thousand pieces.

Contemporary works of art generally pose very specific and often difficult conservation challenges. The materials are sometimes fragile, and the configuration of the works can also be problematic. Storing them properly requires unique solutions, and I would say that it's not an exaggeration to claim that each piece is a challenge in itself. Every artwork has its own specific issues. For certain artists' works, long-term preservation can be especially difficult, and it's not always guaranteed.

Of course, you could argue that ancient paintings have their own conservation challenges as well. However, the methods for conserving and restoring those

works have become much more scientific over the past three or four decades, since the 1980s. Before that, restoration often involved something akin to repainting. But now, the process is much more respectful of the original work and its integrity.

Many works of art are made from items found on the street or even from rubbish.

Digital works, however, present an entirely different set of conservation challenges. I know a bit about this from my experience running the National Library, where they had to deal with millions of digital files. Ensuring their long-term survival is costly and requires sophisticated systems. From an ecological standpoint, this raises further concerns because these systems consume a lot of energy.

When it comes to contemporary art, this is a significant issue for many works. Some pieces are more straightforward to conserve, such as conceptual drawings, where the artwork is essentially an instruction on a sheet of paper. But for other contemporary works, especially digital ones, the preservation challenges are substantial.

CH: There is something Janus-faced about thinking of sustainability and Venice. Venice as a place of cultural heritage and of too many tourists and, at the same time, as a place threatened by decay in the middle of the sensitive ecosystem of the lagoon. Venice is also a reference point for many sustainability events and projects. At the same time, Venice has a vibrant cultural and scientific scene that deals with the issue. You live in Venice; how do you perceive this situation?

BR: It's a contradiction. I mean, I would say that it's a contradiction that we have to live with, because you can't claim Venice as a World Heritage Site and then leave it empty. It's not just about the heritage; it's also about the unique situation of the city. It's actually quite remarkable to think of building a city on islands in a lagoon. You wonder why they made that choice. It's against almost all rational factors, except for one: protection. It served as protection from invaders. Now, however, we have a different kind of invader — peaceful tourists, of course — but their impact is no less profound. People are trying to find ways to regulate tourism, but it's not easy. The city is small, and it will always re-

main attractive to a growing number of people. Frankly, if there were a clear solution, it would have been implemented already.

During the years in which there is the International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, our public numbers are higher, and people are more willing to come. The interesting thing is that the Venice Biennale's duration has been extended, and the idea behind this is that, by having longer opening times, we might be able to distribute visitor flows more evenly. But the political debate has recently focused on tourists who don't spend the night in Venice. These tourists now have to pay a five-euro entry fee. I won't dwell on the efficiency of this system, which has been tested, but what strikes me is that the city has not been able to maintain a minimal level of permanent inhabitants.

It doesn't seem as if there's been a clear policy to maintain, let's say the policy of keeping a steady population in the historical part of the city. Thousands of students, for instance, could be part of the solution. They're not permanent inhabitants, but they stay long enough to frequent bars, small shops and other local businesses. During COVID, when I arrived in 2020, it was striking to see the city so empty. Most of it was deserted, and that's not a desirable situation. You can't return to what the city was 60 or 70 years ago, but perhaps a different balance could be struck. Part of the city's charm lies in its narrow streets and unique character, but this, of course, also poses challenges.

CH: What could be the future development of the city?

BR: A few days ago, I was thinking about this issue. Humanity will soon number even more billions, and the pressure from tourism will inevitably increase. It's a problem that's not exclusive to Venice. You find it in Paris, Rome, Florence — in every tourist city where beauty is concentrated in small spaces. It's unavoidable. But Venice has an additional challenge that Rome or Paris don't face: the rising water levels caused by climate change. The impact of climate change is more destructive here than in Paris. While a heatwave in Paris can be unbearable, the consequences of rising waters in Venice are far more existential. Venice could also be seen as a kind of laboratory for the future, for testing how we might respond to these changes. In that sense, it's both a curse and an asset.

CH: Museums are part of Venice's social ecosystem, and Venice itself is becoming increasingly musealised. How should institutions like Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana position themselves in the future?

BR: We're an international institution open to local cultural realities. Since there aren't so many theatres or cultural spaces like this one, we see our role as contributing to this cultural fabric. It's deliberate, and our activities are free of charge, anyway.

CH: You once said in an interview that it is more interesting to discover 'how much is contemporary in the old than to think in terms of a simple chronological orientation'. Do you think that this is an idea that can help us face the future?

BR: For the general public, contemporary art — like contemporary music — is often seen as a separate world. There's a barrier. It's interesting to show that themes which concern contemporary artists, such as ecology, war and genocide, are often present in the art of the past. Connecting contemporary art to art history could be a way to bridge this gap, and I believe that this connection could be explored more systematically.

I'm not suggesting that we reduce contemporary art to historical references. Contemporary art is often subtle and sometimes appeals more to the margins of society. But I do think that the gap is too big. Even the way we present exhibition texts — I'm not sure that they effectively communicate to the majority of people. Punta della Dogana is an interesting example of how a historical building can be reused for entirely new activities. It respects its historical identity while being transformed at the same time. It's different from places that are preserved but feel lifeless. Punta della Dogana, like the Bourse de Commerce in Paris, goes further. I think that they're bolder in their approach.

14
'What It Takes and What It Means to Actually Become a Regenerative Organisation'

Conversation with Markus Reymann (Co-Director TBA21 and Director of TBA21-Academy's Ocean Space)

Cristina Baldacci and Christina Hainzl: We are living in an uncertain time, marked, above all, by the ecological question and increasing polarisation. As part of *TBA21–Academy*, *Ocean Space* has undertaken both a profound reflection and a series of activities in Venice that address the questions facing humanity today. What are the methodological and thematic peculiarities of *Ocean Space*'s approach as regards the climate crisis – and, in particular, ocean studies – as an art organisation?

Markus Reymann: *TBA21* itself was founded in 2002 by Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza and, therefore, *TBA*, *Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary* – that's what the abbreviation *TBA21* stands for – and it was meant as a collection that lives in the public sphere. What Francesca realised early on, when they opened the Foundation in Vienna, was that going around art fairs and galleries and just buying objects and then putting them in the public sphere through exhibitions was not necessarily the way they wanted to engage. And when I say 'they', I mean Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza and her chief curator at the time, Daniela Zyman, who is still part of the organisation. So, understanding this, they decided on the way they wanted to go; and this is the methodology that is true for *TBA21* as a whole, meaning both the collection and the Academy. It is the mode of producing, which is commissioning.

And so, for many years, a key interest was societal issues. In 2010, approaching the ten-year anniversary in 2012, Francesca decided to start a new project within the Foundation, which operated completely differently and looked at the environment. This was somehow the design brief for what later became the Academy. We came to the conclusion that there were two things that were of major interest. One was change, the causes and effects of change: How do you trace change, what are the conditions for positive change and how do you create these conditions? Many artists had a research-based but very engaged practice on the border between art and activism. The other thing that we identified – that became stronger later on – was the importance of creating spaces for transdisciplinary exchange that really cross disciplines; not like in academia, where everybody is an academic and where, for example, biologists, chemists and physicists work together. We had a fabulous seminar in Vienna for the opening of *The Morning Line*, which was a work by Matthew Ritchie. It's a public sculpture, but inside this public sculpture there are six sound spaces and inside these is a sound architecture. Then we used this sculpture as an instrument, and so there were artists, architects, astrophysicists and so on, talking to each other. This was another rather unusual thing.

CB and CH: How did all this take shape in practice?

MR: To start the project – or design the Academy – we made two proposals. On the one hand, we were looking for systems within the environment that actually embodied change or could let us feel change in a very visceral way. This is how we came to the ocean as a system that is always moving, always in flux, yet is intricately interconnected and gives us the chance to really trace the causes and effects of change. But we really had to expand our understanding of what that is. On the other hand, our second proposal was to not make art for a while but, rather, to commit ourselves to a period of deep research, led by artists in transdisciplinary teams. We wanted to do this with this idea of embodiment and of thinking from and with rather than thinking about. So we were able to use a boat and brought these teams together on the boat for two weeks at a time to think from and with the ocean, so that we could think from and with change.

The terminologies 'ocean' and 'Academy' were always meant as provocations, because this is obviously not an academic effort. The idea is somehow to think about who has the right to define knowledge as useful or non-useful. How do

we make the walls that are created around knowledge more porous and how do we create more exchange between these cycles?

CB and CH: You realised that the ocean was an urgent matter rather early on, didn't you?

MR: Yes, we very quickly understood that the urgencies around the ocean back then in 2011 were as dramatic as they are now, it was just that very few people were talking about them. And when we introduced this idea and wanted to talk and think about it in the art world, through colleagues, a lot of people were quite taken aback. They asked: 'Why would you do art and ocean?' They didn't understand.

With this realisation that the situation was urgent, and with all these artists with very engaged practices bringing this information to us, we needed to ask ourselves if it was really enough to raise awareness in a niche within a niche within the niche of contemporary art and ocean, or did we have to engage differently? And so, we decided to engage differently. This meant that we wanted to dedicate ourselves on a case-by-case basis to see how an intervention from our side could serve the situation best. If we thought that a policy intervention or a legal intervention was needed, we would embark on that. If a conservation site was needed, we would embark on that. If an educational programme was needed, we would create that. And with every single one of these efforts, we would actually embark upon it as if it was an artistic commission. We wanted this approach to be itinerant. We didn't want to situate it at first. But going around conferences on climate issues and participating in these large framework events, we realised that people that should be talking to each other wouldn't talk to each other. Somehow, we were able to make this match, because we entered into this world as an oddity, as an art organisation, which meant that we were non-competing, we were non-threatening and we could bring people together who would otherwise not get together. On the other hand, we realised that culture and art have no role in these conferences at all. Despite the *United Nations* having *UNESCO*, artists and cultural producers – like women or Indigenous people – are still not a major stakeholder group. So, it's wrong to say that art and culture are alone in not being recognised as areas of knowledge-building. I would say that, as of late, there are more and more efforts to reach out to the art scene, but this is still thought of as communication. This is somehow a battle that we are trying to fight.

But we really believe in art and culture as transformative agents within situated contexts. At some point, we said that we actually need to put this to the test. And that is how we came to Venice. Venice has had this very strange habit of reflecting on itself and the world with the lens of art for over a hundred years. This way of making questions physically experiential through the arts is obviously one of the defining factors of Venice. It also traditionally sits at the intersection of all kinds of exchanges and is very open as a city. If you have something to offer, Venice gives you a space. And finally – and even if this is not true anymore, it was absolutely true at the time – Venice was the iconic frontline of climate change in Europe. Therefore, it made a lot of sense for us to situate this hypothesis in Venice. When you see historic images of Venice, everybody had access to the water everywhere, and it seems as if there was a very intimate relationship with the water. Now Venice is a super urban space, access to water is highly regulated and people actually forget that they are on a small island floating in a lagoon.

CB and CH: You have taken water, hence the ocean, as a starting point to define a new methodology?

MR: Precisely. In terms of methodologies, I think that this oceanic thinking leads to a number of things. You really understand the ocean as a living entity with multiple voices and that these voices foreground the multiplicity of voices and viewpoints. Another point is fluidity and the way in which the ocean is a kind of conceptual tool – if we don't want to talk about it as an ecosystem – that really forces us to unhinge ourselves from land-based binaries and think with this fluidity and change. These are all things that flow into the methodology.

Other things that we always try to give include time – which is becoming scarcer and scarcer in the art world – but also interdisciplinary exchange and an emphasis on field studies. Because when you look at oceanography today, hardly anybody goes to sea anymore. They think about the ocean from models and laptops. So, this kind of embodied research has always been very important.

I think that these are the common methodologies and, obviously, every artist, every curator, brings a methodology. In this sense, we are trying to be very open and non-descriptive and to foster the best conditions for anybody that we work with.

For example, we noticed very early on that there is a need for mediation, because we all use similar terms, but every discipline understands them differently and individuals interpret the terms within the disciplines differently. This need for a facilitator or mediator is very often overlooked. Sadly, the intervention often falls into the trap of being either a performance of science or a visualisation of data. Both are valuable and insightful in enabling a 'general' audience to understand the processes of science, and if these are brought to them by artists, this is fantastic. But I think that there is an added value in these conversations and collaborations that is not necessarily teased out if they are just the transaction of 'I give you information, you give me visibility.'

CB and CH: *Ocean Space* and *TBA21–Academy* have a special focus on research and educational activities, which are mostly community-based. How do you manage to maintain the balance between local and global/planetary and how does the Venice community respond in terms of (co)participation and coaction?

MR: In general, there is one thing that gives you an insight into our understanding of the global and the local. One of the challenges that we see is that, in many areas between science and policy and also communication, people still believe in the equation that says that we need more data to create more knowledge and that this knowledge will lead to action. This formula has been shared for 40 years and yet, if we look at the climate crisis, CO_2 emissions are still rising and, if we look at biodiversity, biodiversity is collapsing. This equation – data=knowledge=action – doesn't really work.

This is exactly how we are looking at this kind of global and local conversation, because more and more neuroscientific evidence suggests that the pathway to action is actually a lot shorter when our starting point is empathy, context and meaning, rather than pure knowledge. And so, when we run international research projects for fellowship programmes, we try to situate these locally. The current exhibition is conceived and very much situated in Oceania, around the idea of extraction and the potential of deep-sea mining. These are not presented literally and you need to engage with the works to unpack this deep concern about deep-sea mining. But, obviously, when you talk about Tonga and its archipelagic situation you can make this transition – and you can make the transition to Venice as well. We need to take Venice as an archipelago very seriously, and many other small islands have very similar concerns.

I think that the opening was difficult for the Venetian community to understand and was hard to read as an effort that was being made for them. Despite the fact that we have always, from the beginning, made an effort to open before the Venice Biennale and to make sure that the Venetian community understands that this effort is being made for them and not only the international art audience. Of course everything is bilingual, Italian first and then English and all of that, but we opened with Joan Jonas, who is a major international American artist, and this was read as 'ah, here comes another international organisation showing international art.' It was actually only during COVID that this perception of *Ocean Space* and its intention changed dramatically. Because, as soon as Venetians were able to leave their houses, we put a light installation on the facade of *Ocean Space* so that people would understand that something was going to happen. Then there was the moment when you could actually bring people together, but not yet in closed spaces. We started organising walks, guided by specialists. These specialists could be scientists or fishermen or sustainable mussel farmers, and so on. They would guide and narrate these walks from *Ocean Space* to a point in the city of importance to them and they would share their expertise. These walks were thematically curated and organised to relate back to the work that we were preparing so that we would be ready to show it at some point. In terms of the other international organisations in Venice, I'm sure that we were the only ones doing this kind of programming.

Then, when we were able to open for nine weeks, we did everything to be as careful and considerate with our visitors' health as possible. This shifted the perception of *Ocean Space* dramatically. When the second lockdown was lifted and we were able to receive people, we organised a programme that was concluded by three local singers, singing traditional sailors' songs in Venetian and this was such a magical moment. The room was full of Venetians because no one else was allowed to travel to the city at the time. I think that this really was the moment when the idea landed and people understood that it was meant for them.

CH and CB: How important, for *Ocean Space*, are collaborations with other research and cultural organisations in Venice, and how has the Venetian contemporary art ecosystem been evolving since you arrived in town?

MR: I think there are two sides to this. On the one hand, it's probably true that, in general, the conversation and discourse around any form of climate engage-

ment is heavily polarised, especially in Venice. I think that Venice is very much conditioned by competition. It's a relatively small space. We now have fewer than 50,000 inhabitants on the islands, so this is a big village that, with up to 31 million visitors every year, is highly transient. Therefore, everyone is competing for attention and visibility. And then we obviously have all the Biennales that are always connected to competition, and the Giardini, with all of the national pavilions that compete with each other. So this is an environment that is heavily shaped by competition, yet our understanding of the approach to the climate crisis is that this needs to be an effort of the greatest possible collaboration, which means that this is, inherently, a paradox. Therefore, we wanted to see how an international organisation that comes to Venice and wants to understand itself as a Venetian organisation can actually give this platform to local collectives and to people that are involved in restoring the ecosystem or doing exemplary projects. And to see how we can use this space of the arts where we are, where people expect us to somehow push the boundaries and, I think, have come to understand that it's not unusual to have a philosopher, an oceanographer and a physical oceanographer speaking and freely speculating about the future of Venice as a kind of subaquatic environment or as a lake.

This is something that we wanted to utilise. On the one hand, contemporary art has freed itself from rigid disciplines and audiences have got used to really unexpected conversations and programming. On the other hand, I think that, while the climate crisis and environmental and ecological questions have become a huge topic within the art world, organisations are still very reluctant or slow to change their way of operating. And so, we have been thinking internally for years about what it takes and what it means to actually become a regenerative organisation. How do we think about our material flows, our material input, in a way that is not extractive but actually becomes more conducive to life – in the social and the cultural sphere as well. We have been investigating this and really consider our material inputs and material flows. Either everything that we use is reused by ourselves in later exhibitions or we find someone that will take it on from the very beginning. There are many kindergartens in Venice that have elements from exhibitions at *Ocean Space*. If we do events, the catering is vegetarian/vegan. So we are really trying to embody these discourses ourselves.

And we have become a *Zoöp*. A *Zoöp* is a governance model that was thought up by the *Nieuwe Institute* and pioneered by the researcher Klaas Kuitenbrouwer.

It is based on a regenerative philosophy. Within the governance model of the organisation – in our case, our *Advisory Board* – there is a position entitled 'the speaker for the living'. The role of the holder of this position is to analyse every activity through the lens of its conduciveness to – or extractiveness from – life. Conduciveness to life is interpreted very widely and is about humans and more than humans. Every year we embark on four activities. One of these is analysing the agency of *Ocean Space*: What are the bodies that *Ocean Space* acts upon and what are the bodies that act upon *Ocean Space*? How do our material flows impact on these bodies, and how do we intervene in these in such a way that they leave behind more than they take? Therefore, we experiment with governance, material, workforce and hours and stuff like that.

CB and CH: Which aspects of the ecological turn do you still consider as being under-recognised in museums and art organisations?

MR: In general, it's very difficult to say, but one thing that is probably true for most museums is that they have an incredibly large carbon footprint. In many places that I've encountered, conversations around museum real estate are governed by heritage issues. In other words, they can't be touched. But if you think about the footprint: If we were able to provide or equip the huge roofs of museum or exhibition spaces with solar panels, they could be immense providers of energy. Museums could be an inspiration and a provocation, a disruption maybe, but real energy communities could also be built around museums and exhibition spaces.

I think this challenges our idea of what is heritage and how you can intervene in heritage. The paradox becomes very clear in Venice. On the one hand, this is a self-declared sustainable capital of the world because there are no cars. On the other hand, if you're restoring a house, it's impossible to put a solar panel on your roof. So, the paradox of what we understand as heritage is definitely something that needs to be addressed. I think that museums very often provide radical ideas, but that the way in which these ideas are institutionalised is a challenge. We enter exhibition spaces, we want to be moved, disrupted, inspired or provoked, but then we can close the door behind us and there's no bridge or transition to the real world. And again, this is somehow especially evident in Venice because of the Biennale. We have the real privilege of being confronted with these incredible ideas from different angles, year on year, but

somehow these ideas rarely permeate the city itself – and Mestre and the mainland even less so.

Having tried to engage with the Venice Biennale for years now, I've realised that the set-up and the mandate of the Venice Biennale aren't designed to enable the city to profit from its capacity to generate ideas, but only from its visitors. I was very pleasantly surprised by the Canadian pavilion this year, by Kapwani Kiwanga's work, because it is actually situated in Venice. Venice often becomes the stage and the backdrop for all of these ideas and the Venetians are not necessarily invited to participate, but they are meant to serve the Venice Biennale. When I went to the Kochi Biennale for the first time, in Kerala in India, the excitement in the city that the Biennale was coming was tangible across the population, from tuk-tuk drivers to restaurateurs to doctors and so on. In Venice I don't think that the Biennale makes an effort to actually energise the Venetians to any great extent.

CB and CH: What is next for *Ocean Space*?

MR: Next year, in 2025, the exhibitions will come from the Caribbean. This is the conclusion of the latest cycle of *The Current* curatorial fellowship programme and the last exhibition that we showed that came out of that programme was last year's exhibition *Thus waves come in pairs*, which was led by Barbara Casavecchia. Next year we will have Yina Jiménez Suriel from the Dominican Republic, who is looking at contemporary, emancipatory processes in a space such as the Caribbean that is still heavily impacted by its colonial past. She is doing this by thinking about questions around the ocean and connecting them to the very unique experiences of the Caribbean.

The way that I would like *Ocean Space* to develop its programming is by incorporating even more ecosystem restoration practices, because I believe that as long as we think of ecosystem restoration or regeneration and its practices or the care for our immediate environment as things that we do to avert an oncoming drama or catastrophe, they will always be perceived in terms of loss. They will always be perceived as things that we have to do because otherwise there will be a catastrophe and, therefore, they are perceived as impeding upon the freedom of people. But if we actually incorporate them as cultural practices, they will be understood as things that we do to care for our environment just as we care for our next of kin, our families and our friends, and so on, and as part

of our responsibility as citizens rather than something that we do to be good people. I think that this will dramatically shift the perception of what it means to care for the environment. And so, we want to incorporate these practices more and more into our public programme. We've been doing this through the *Convivial Tables* where we've been investigating the changing landscape of the environment through the lens of food and food practices. We've been doing this since our second year, but we want to go deeper. Wherever they are present, I see *Ocean Space* and *TBA21* becoming stronger in their efforts to become active agents within the city or within the localities where they operate.

I think that one of the biggest challenges for Venice is housing. The housing crisis is a problem if we want Venice to remain an active and dynamic place for the generation of ideas or initiatives. As long as the *airbnb* model is not rethought and regulated and the young people that come to study at *Ca' Foscari University* can't afford to live and stay after graduating from the university, even though they actually want to contribute something to the place that they live in because they are developing ideas for it – as long as this is not solved, Venice will remain – and probably become more and more – this museum in which we marvel at the ingenuity of people and this kind of feverish engineering dream. But Venice is also an absolute monument to the Anthropocene and so, at the pinnacle, we overcome all kinds of conditions to build such a marvel. I think that this is something that really needs to be urgently addressed.

And then there is obviously the ageing society in Venice, which is quite dramatic. In Italy, the social fabric and family ties are still quite strong, but you feel these being torn in Venice because of the city's business model. Intergenerational exchange and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, practices and traditions are tearing and, without wanting to romanticise this, I think that it is tangible. A key question – and this is obviously beyond cultural institutions – is how to tackle the housing crisis. This is definitely something that we have to raise awareness about and I think that we need to create these intergenerational encounters and, somehow, facilitate the conditions that avoid the social fabric of Venice being torn any more.

CB and CH: You linked *Ocean Space* to the *UN Decade on Ocean Science*. Would you like to change the programme of *Ocean Space* when the UN's ocean decade ends in 2030?

MR: We are very present in these conversations around and with the United Nations. Next year is the third *UN Oceans Conference* which will be co-hosted by Costa Rica and France and held in Nice. For the first time in these contexts the French government has restructured its stakeholder process, the civic society process, to include art. They've organised the process in seven clusters: NGOs, civic society groups, science and so on, and cluster seven is *Ocean Art and Science*. And they've mandated us, *TBA21*, to lead the facilitation process. We're also curating a large exhibition around the time of the conference itself and commissioning a couple of new works.

Once again, we understand that this is a collaborative process. This is not an opportunity for us to somehow claim leadership or ownership over the space but, actually, we see this as a coordination or facilitation process for giving all other practitioners – and there are not that many – visibility in this space in a coordinated manner. I'm saying this in order to give you an insight into our presence in these spaces and our participation in these conversations, because we're thinking about the actual significance of the fact that the United Nations doesn't have a stakeholder group made up of the arts, art practitioners or cultural producers. A number of people are discussing what could come after 2030, after the end of the Sustainable Development Goals and after the *UN Decade on Ocean Science* – and some consider that culture should be more present. There are different considerations. One of these is that culture should become a Sustainable Development Goal itself. Other people – and I think that this is the more interesting school of thought – are considering replacing *Sustainable* Development Goals with *regenerative* ones, because they understand that sustaining the crisis is not good enough and that culture is central to this. This means that the important thing is not the goal itself, but connecting all the other goals, because people understand that we become the images that we create and the stories that we tell ourselves. There was a shocking study that analysed all the content, the scripts and everything else, created in Hollywood between 2016 and 2022 and discovered that only 3% of that content dealt with climate change, climate change-related language and climate change-related technologies. So, if one of the biggest cultural producers on the planet doesn't address this topic, or only addresses it in documentaries that talk about the crisis, it's not surprising that people feel that this is somehow a problem. I think we need to turn to art and culture to actually imagine a planet that is worth living for and worth fighting for rather than only thinking about the crisis that

we are stuck in right now and the despair that this creates because there is no hope and no way out.

15
'Venice as Method!'
Conversation with Francesca Tarocco (Director, THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities – NICHE)

Cristina Baldacci and Christina Hainzl: *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)* at *Ca' Foscari University of Venice* has undertaken a process of profound reflection and a series of activities that address the climate crisis and the many urgent questions facing humanity today. What are the features of *NICHE* as a research centre devoted to environmental humanities?

Francesca Tarocco: *NICHE* is a research institute devoted to transdisciplinary environmental humanities and water studies, *Ecological Art Practices* and public engagement initiatives. It seeks to act as a bridge between knowledge silos in the context of environmental studies and takes the lead in drawing connections and comparisons between existing disciplines, in order to stimulate radically new ways of understanding ecosystems and our highly anthropised environment. We recognise that the environmental issues that face our global community are entangled with questions of human behaviour, convictions, religious ideas and values and that critical approaches to human-environment interactions – past, present and future – are essential. To address these issues, we have created twelve interdisciplinary research clusters, in collaboration with scholars and practitioners at *Ca' Foscari University* and beyond. These include *Waterscapes*, *Technoscience and Justice in Multispecies Worlds*, *Mediterranean Environments*, *Ecological Art Practices* and so on. The Centre has developed several main strategic aims. All are connected with advanced strategic research in the environmental humanities, but in different ways: (1) To create support for advanced strategic research; (2) To connect researchers across fields and

geographical locations, including support for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research; (3) To connect our local science system to international research networks, which includes developing partnerships with scientifically strong environments in other countries and, thereby, creating the conditions for improving its international standing in selected fields of knowledge; (4) To foster collaboration and joint research with non-European scholars and institutions, with a focus on Asia, North America and Africa; (5) To take part in public engagement initiatives with the *Ca' Foscari University* community and local organisations in Venice as well as internationally. Cooperation, trust, fairness and accountability are our key principles. We have chosen to prioritise collaborations with both local and international practitioners, including environmental lawyers, artists and policy makers. Our goal is to work with our partners in a non-hierarchical and collegial way. We share our network with others and help younger practitioners to connect with relevant institutional partners. Importantly, our strategic partnerships are often informed by research carried out in relation to the Venice Lagoon and other wetlands, and fragile waterscapes and ecosystems.

CB and CH: Since *NICHE* is working in a very inter- and transdisciplinary way, what would you say could be the role of universities – and of research centres like *NICHE* – in the socio-ecological transformation process of today's society?

FT: In the past few years, we have focused on establishing a research environment whose purpose is primarily to promote and encourage scholarly and artistic activities in areas that are not normally restricted to a single academic department. We work with senior scholars as well as emerging and early-career researchers from around the world – from, for instance, the *University of Oxford, UCL, Duke University*, the *University of Augsburg*, the *University of Melbourne*, the *Rachel Carson Centre, New York University, Rutgers*, the *International Center for Cultural Studies in Taiwan*, the *Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Haus der Kulturen der Welt* and the *Technical University of Munich*, and so on. We organise public events, screenings, gatherings, research seminars and lecture series. We have also worked towards establishing strategic partnerships and connecting with other groups, institutions, research centres and individuals around the world that work on topics related to environmental humanities.

These are some of the questions we ask: How can we come together, embrace the change offered by the current disruption, and build greater resilience? Which aspects of traditional practice have not served us well – as people, professionals and institutions? And how can we rebuild more sustainably, more equitably? What is the role of museums and research centres in bridging divides and bringing communities together and building empathy, understanding and belonging?

We firmly believe that the task of reconceptualising planetary change for the human imagination calls for a wide range of disciplinary knowledge and practices. Shared problems, places and scales must form the basis for collaborative work in the environmental humanities, in partnerships with natural sciences and in the creative arts. In fact, shifting the frameworks of environmental research to be more consciously inclusive and diverse can enable the emergence of concepts of the physical world that better include humans and take ethics beyond humans to consider more-than-human subjects.

At *NICHE*, we focus in particular on water and water methodologies in dialogue with a wide variety of new water justice movements that have emerged during the past 20 years or so. For instance, we recently hosted the *Confluence of European Water Bodies* in collaboration with the *Embassy of the North Sea*, *ILP Mar Menor*, *TBA21-Academy*, the *Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature* and the *Italian Buddhist Union*. These movements are transdisciplinary, multi-actor and multi-scalar coalitions that, for instance, challenge dominant water management approaches to rivers and lagoons. A few examples are ecological flow clinics, movements promoting dam removals, federations designing new rules for shared catchment governance, citizens' initiatives developing river-related environmental health projects and grassroots think tanks. These movements have the potential to revolutionise environmental debates, practices, laws and policies in the direction of new, equitable and nature-rooted water governance. However, they are often excluded from policy, and academia has so far paid very little attention to them. We need better tools for understanding these emerging water ontologies, normative frameworks and commoning strategies. At *NICHE*, we therefore aim to study, understand and support all those involved with water, waterscapes and climate justice as a way of contributing to a more equitable water governance that is at one with nature.

CB and CH: Why are environmental humanities as important as (natural) sciences in addressing socio-environmental topics? And how does *NICHE* build bridges between these two fields of research?

FT: How science historically emerges from interactions with the environment and, in turn, affects environmental history via societal practices, is a central question for many of our research clusters, in particular the Waterscapes cluster. This is investigating the dynamic entwinement of nature, episteme and agency on the basis of the study of territories that are defined by moving waters, such as the Venice Lagoon, the Kaveri Delta in India, the Mississippi River, the basin of Tenochtitlan (the former Aztec capital and present-day Mexico City) and the Mekong River. As water is indispensable for life, its regulation and control have always constituted a fundamental asset of power as biopower. We do not consider our cases in isolation but as local developments which, rooted in various cultural pasts, have become increasingly interconnected, eventually reaching a planetary significance and uniting to establish a concept, namely the scientific projection of the Anthropocene as a geo-anthropological system that embraces both geology and culture. However, this concept is empty if it is not brought back to its roots, that is, as human agency at the confluence of nature, scientific knowledge and technological-transformative labour. Water-related human activities, from agriculture to fishing, the extraction of energy, transportation and the supply of drinkable water, are deeply inscribed in the territories that we are considering here from the vantage point of 'Venice and the Anthropocene'. That is the title of a wonderful new eco-critical guide book that you, Cristina, co-edited (together with Shaul Bassi, Lucio De Capitani and Pietro Daniel Omodeo), in collaboration with the Venice-based independent publisher *wetlands*.

CB and CH: What aspects of the ecological turn do you still consider under-recognised in universities and educational institutions?

FT: During the past few years, some universities and educational institutions have started to increase their focus on human-induced changes (e.g. anthropogenic impacts, climate change) in ecological research. This shift in the ecological focus likely reflects the global influence of humans on the world's ecosystems. And the heavy focus on anthropogenic themes reflects, in turn, the increasing need to understand the role of human-influenced changes in complex ecological systems.

CB and CH: How relevant is Venice as an observation point for the climate crisis? And how much has this influenced the decision to open a research centre for environmental humanities on the Venice Lagoon?

FT: The delicate multispecies ecosystem that is Venice requires our full attention. Fortunately, the imperative to imagine differently and better is one to which many activists, artists and thinkers, as well as ordinary Venetian citizens, are now responding. Our Centre is very much part of this larger ecosystem. As the Founding Director of *NICHE*, I was very aware of this from the beginning and I am incredibly grateful to all the wonderful people who have helped us along the way. I also hope that *NICHE* can grow to become a partner for many other water cities that are similarly plagued by overtourism. Our focus on water in the establishment of research clusters has been a successful strategy. The international centrality of these issues has provided – and will continue to provide – multiple opportunities for collaborative partnerships with other universities, research institutes and diverse communities. The connection between *NICHE*'s location and its research focus is a vital aspect of its success. This unique city is a tool to think with. As I often say: 'Venice as method!'

CB and CH: How important are collaborations with other research and cultural organisations in Venice? And how has the Venetian contemporary cultural ecosystem been changing since *NICHE* was initiated?

FT: They are really important. We collaborate with many of the key institutions in the cultural ecosystem of Venice, including *Ocean Space*, with whom we created a joint fellowship to investigate the issues of *Rights of Nature*, and with *Fondazione Prada*, with whom we collaborated on the wonderful exhibition, *Everybody Talks about the Weather* (2023). Of course, Venice is also home to international cultural exhibitions, e.g. the Biennales of Art and of Architecture, and we have forged innovative collaborations with many artists, curators and practitioners. We focus in particular on working with artists and performers who have an interest in co-producing environmental knowledge and action. In the past few years, we have worked with the Samoan-Japanese artist Yuki Kihara, the London-based *Cooking Sections*, the Venetian artist Giorgio Andreotta Calò, the Australian curator Natalie King OAM and, more recently, with Sonia Levy, Elena Mazzi and Chiara Famengo (and the list goes on).

CB and CH: Indeed, ecological art, ecocritical art history and theory and 'green' curatorial and museum practices play an important role within *NICHE* research activities and knowledge dissemination, especially for public engagement and local community involvement. How much impact or agency do you think that art can really have in understanding and facing environmental challenges?

FT: As you, Cristina, know very well, since you are its principal investigator, one of the twelve research clusters at *NICHE* focuses on *Ecological Art Practices* through a series of events specifically addressing *Art Ecologies*. The cluster mainly questions the relationship between art and the environment, intertwining ecocritical approaches, radical imagination and creative sustainability. It aims to both create inclusive occasions for interdisciplinary exchange – among scholars and cultural practitioners working across the field of contemporary art practice and theory – and foster international collaborations with (art) research centres and commons. This is a key aspect for *NICHE*: We believe that artists should play an increasingly central role in contemporary society. Especially in terms of generating awareness and forms of agency, imagining new forms of living together that are as sustainable and inclusive as possible, taking care of each other – human and more-than-human – and respecting nature and its rights. *NICHE* is also very supportive of local communities and artistic projects that develop forms of activism. For instance, we are collaborating with *Microclima*, a research-driven non-profit organisation that deals with the natural world, cultural heritage and the public sphere. *Microclima's* latest endeavour, with the artist Giorgio Andreotta Calò and the experimental food platform *Tocia!*, is the preservation of the island of Sant'Andrea, one of the last islands in the Venetian archipelago (together with Poveglia and a few others) not to have become prey to real estate and overtourism. Thinking about a different Venice that is closer to the needs of those who live here and to the wellbeing of its ecosystem is still possible, especially when we think and act together.

CB and CH: There is something Janus-faced about thinking of sustainability and Venice. Venice as a place of cultural heritage threatened by decay and overtourism in the middle of the sensitive ecosystem of the lagoon. And, at the same time, Venice as a reference point for many sustainability events and projects, as a vibrant cultural and scientific scene that deals with the environmental issue. As one of the few residents and the Director of *NICHE*, you have

a long understanding of and personal experience with Venice: How do you perceive and deal with this ambivalence/paradox?

FT: When my partner and I moved back to Italy after many years in Asia, we knew that we could only live in Venice. We were lucky to find a beautiful home near the Basilica dei Frari. We feel lucky and privileged to be here, to walk everywhere all the time, and have learned to row and go by boat. We try to contribute to sustaining the city's civic infrastructure. But, alas, we sometimes have to run away when the city is overwhelmed by tourists. Yes, Venice faces a pressing and complex issue: overtourism. The city is often overcrowded, especially during peak seasons, leading to congestion in the narrow streets and on public transport. This influx of visitors puts immense pressure on Venice's fragile infrastructure by damaging historical sites and buildings, disrupting the daily lives of residents, and straining local resources and services. Additionally, the rise of short-term rentals and souvenir shops catering primarily to tourists has led to the displacement of local residents and traditional businesses, altering the city's cultural fabric. There is a pressing need for innovative, community-driven solutions in order to create a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the preservation of cultural and environmental heritage.

CB and CH: What are *NICHE's* next main projects and objectives?

FT: We are very, very active and I am going to mention just a few things here. It is very clear that, in its programming, the Centre makes space for experimental and emergent forms of knowledge production, honouring and incorporating diverse forms of knowing beyond traditional, disciplinary, academic scholarship. For instance, we continue to work with Indigenous practitioners. In June 2024, we co-organised a one-week Indigenous art school in collaboration with the *Indigenous Art School of Santa Fe* and the US pavilion at the Venice Biennale – and in October we had a second iteration of the public programme of the US pavilion, organised together with *Bard College Center for Indigenous Studies*. We are also collaborating with the artist and activist Maria Madeira, who is represented in the Timor-Leste Pavilion at this year's Venice Art Biennale (2024). Together with Madeira and the curator Natalie King we have organised a three day symposium on sea, soil and solidarity in collaboration with the Portuguese and South East Asian national pavilions at the Venice Biennale. The Centre is also fostering and supporting the significant expansion of the programme of

the *UNESCO Chair on Water, Heritage and Sustainable Development,* which is led by the historian of science Pietro Daniel Omodeo. The chair is active within the *UNITWIN/UNESCO* programme, which promotes inter-university cooperation and networking to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge sharing and collaborative work. The chair also functions as a think-tank and builder of bridges between academia, policymakers and civil society. In May 2025, our annual lecture will be delivered by David Gentilcore, a global expert on water cultures. In previous years we hosted lectures by Serenella Iovino and Elizabeth Povinelli. In June 2025, we will host a conference on Geoanthropological Metabolisms, which will be organised by our Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Research Fellow Justas Patkauskas and will feature a keynote from the Japanese philosopher Saitō Kōhei. We have also started two new Public Engagement Series: one on *Art Ecologies* that you, Cristina, coordinate, and the Dialogues on Science and Society series, which is coordinated by the anthropologist Roberta Raffaetà in collaboration with scientists and policy makers.

16
'From the Margins'

Conversation with Marco Baravalle (Researcher, Curator, Activist and Founding Member of Sale Docks)

Cristina Baldacci: There is something Janus-faced about thinking of sustainability and Venice. Venice as a place of cultural heritage threatened by decay and overtourism in the middle of the sensitive ecosystem of the lagoon. And, at the same time, Venice as a reference point for many sustainability events and projects, as a vibrant cultural and scientific scene that deals with environmental issues. As one of the few residents and as a researcher, curator and activist – as a co-founder of the *Sale Docks* independent art space, which was initiated in 2007 by the occupation of an abandoned salt-storage facility in the city centre – you have a long understanding and personal experience of Venice. How do you perceive and deal with this ambivalence/paradox?

Marco Baravalle**:** Yes, I think, to a certain extent, that this is a classic paradox. In other words, places where certain types of exploitation or extractivism are more evident can also spark resistance and draw attention. A classic example here in Venice could be the *Comitato No Grandi Navi* (Committee Against Big Cruise Ships), which aimed to stop cruise ships from passing through the city. Luckily, we succeeded: The cruise ships no longer pass through Venice.

Seeing a cruise ship passing through, from the point of view of someone walking in the street, is so visually striking – it highlights the disproportion between that kind of vulgar extractivism and the materiality of the city – that it almost becomes natural to feel indignant about such an imbalance. And this indignation makes it easier to organise a reaction. In fact, the struggle against big

cruise ships has been going on for about thirteen years. The way it started is also very interesting.

The first time we thought about organising a demonstration against the big cruise ships, we didn't yet have the idea of forming a committee. It wasn't because we had technical knowledge about the environmental and urban damage that was linked to the cruise industry. Nor was it tied to broader ideas about extractivism or climate change. It actually started because some residents in the Santa Marta neighbourhood – particularly some elderly people – were deeply annoyed by the fact that these enormous cruise ships docked right in front of their houses, disrupting their TV signal.

Do you see how this type of paradox works? Maybe it's not even a paradox; it becomes a natural consequence. When there's extractivism – when there's clear evidence of disregard for the balance of the city – people find ways to react, even if everything starts with something as seemingly trivial as a disrupted TV signal.

CB: How relevant is Venice as an observation point for the climate crisis? How can we think of a more 'sustainable' cultural model starting from Venice and its lagoon?

MB: First of all, let me say that I am among those critical of the word 'sustainability'. We use it a lot and that's okay, but I would say that sustainability can be a concept to which we can only draw our attention in tactical terms. I really think that neoliberalism is so responsible for the climate crisis and the ecological crisis that the solution of the problem would be to radically transform the system; that is, to get rid of it. It will never become sustainable. You can call this anti-capitalism or post-capitalism, which is a term that probably has more currency in the art and academic fields because it sounds a little more moderate (although it isn't). In Venice, there is a quite important academic and scientific community working on climate change. Venice has two universities, and it's a coastal city. So, like every coastal city, it's at the forefront of climate change. It's therefore quite logical that institutions and universities also address the topic.

CB: What are the main actions that need to be taken and that you have been pursuing as an art curator and cultural activist? For example, referring to one of your most recent activities, as a member of *IRI-Institute of Radical Imagi-*

nation, you co-curated – together with Emanuele Braga, Gabriella Riccio and Federica Timeto – the book *Art for Radical Ecologies* (2024). Did you conceive it as a kind of 'manifesto' for climate and social justice?

MB: The book is structured somewhat like a manifesto. It contains sixteen articles that discuss the positioning of art workers within the struggle for climate justice. It's not an art book about climate change; it's about the positionality of art workers who should take some responsibility in these types of struggles and it considers art institutions as – hopefully – active participants in this fight.

The way the book came about is interesting. It's not a traditional collection of essays. It emerged from a process that lasted a year and a half, beginning in Venice. It began in Venice because, during the summer of 2022, and then again in the summer of 2023, we organised two *Art Workers Assemblies* to reflect on the intersection between art activism and climate change within the context of the *Venice Climate Camp*. The assembly brought together artists and non-artists. That's how it began: We gathered for the first assembly, discussed, collected materials, regrouped online several times and then met again in person a year later to continue the discussion. In mid-October 2023, we convened one last time in person in Milan, during the *World Congress for Climate Justice*.

The book focuses on art, but its foundation wasn't an art space, museum or biennial. At its core are two climate camps and a congress of activist organisers. We co-wrote this 'manifesto', which is composed of various articles about positionality, the subject of the struggle, and the role that art institutions should take in this context. Only after a year and a half of what we might call militant investigation and assemblies did we invite various figures from both inside and outside the art world to theoretically engage in the form of a few articles. The contributors included, for instance, Françoise Vergès, the decolonial feminist, and Manolo Borja Villel, a museum director, as well as a number of artists and activists.

What I focused on most in the book – and this was also the subject of the article I wrote – is how art can serve as a space where historical materialism and new materialism can intersect, rather than running parallel or working in binary opposition.

CB: In its long history, the Biennale has certainly constituted a major cultural and economic opportunity for Venice. But, at the same time, it has also contributed to profound and not always exclusively positive changes in the Venetian artistic and cultural ecosystem, especially in these more contemporary times that are subject to the neoliberal demands of the global art system. How has the city's cultural ecosystem changed since *Sale Docks* was initiated?

MB: Well, that would require a long answer, but I'll try to sum it up. We occupied *Sale Docks* in 2007 for a reason: As precariously employed art workers, we were witnessing the growing role of contemporary art and culture in the city's economy. We looked at this from a class perspective, trying to update the post-workerist theory of the 'social factory' and imagining a way to self-organise against the exploitation of our work and the occupation of the arts by neoliberalism, whether in the form of private investments or neoliberal public policies.

But what were we witnessing? On the one hand, we saw that the Venice Biennale was growing, in terms of both the number of visitors and the number of national participations. This meant that, despite the usual discourse about the outdatedness of the model of the Venice Biennale – because it is still based on the representation of a world divided into nation states – this model still works. In the marketplace, it really works. Every state, every government wants to be at the Venice Biennale; everybody wants to see the pavilion of this or that country. And also, under Paolo Baratta (President of the Venice Biennale from 1998 to 2001, and again from 2008 to 2019), the Venice Biennale grew significantly in commercial terms. As a company, it worked quite well, and it still does.

However, what we underlined is that the 'Biennale complex' (that is, not only the official exhibitions or the Film Festival but also, and especially, the hundreds of events that flourish around the Venice Biennale every year) is created by a multitude of precariously employed workers whose destiny seems to interest no one – cannon fodder for the cultural industry. We also denounced how, despite the 'radical art' shown at the Venice Biennale, the event fuelled real estate rent rises due to the business of renting spaces for official and unofficial collateral events, contributing to the gentrification of a city already in acute crisis due to the dramatic decline in residents.

On the other hand, we saw the beginning of something that has now become an everyday matter in Venice: the city being used as a window onto the art of the many global billionaires who are investing their fortunes in opening art spaces, museums or foundations. From Pinault to Thyssen-Bornemisza, Berggruen and Victoria Mikhelson, the daughter of Leonid Mikhelson. From my perspective, we are living in a city where art equates, more and more, to capital. I really think that this is a problem because, when the distance between art and capital disappears, it is as if cultural biodiversity is being killed – like a silent killing. It is a killing that you don't perceive if you don't have alternative ways of viewing or practicing artistic production. You end up thinking that this way is the only way, that it is only through individual superstar artists or individual superstar curators, and only through the philanthropy of global billionaires, that you can invest in art projects in Venice.

The recent case of the *Scuola Piccola Zattere*, for example, which was opened by Victoria Mikhelson, is very problematic because the money comes from gas and oil. Her father is one of the biggest private investors in the fossil fuel industry, with very strong ties to Russian imperialism and war. He is one of Putin's closest allies and an investor in Russia's military enterprise in Ukraine.[1] And now his money is being invested in Venice through his daughter. Of course, they will propose projects about queerness, ecology and, why not, decolonisation. In my opinion, this is an example of what real decolonial activists call 'toxic philanthropy'.

CB: Have you tried to offer a counter-model to this alleged scenario with your commitment within *Sale Docks*? It cannot be denied that major private investments in art and culture have also produced long-term virtuous relationships and beneficial effects for the city's community.

MB: *Sale Docks* is our attempt to prove that it's possible to do things differently. So, we're not simply criticising the system. Since 2007, we've been experimenting with an actual alternative. Instead of being supported by global financial capital, we rely much more on grassroots solidarity. We are a space that is not managed through a rigid hierarchy. There is no director, or curator, but there

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1   Konstantin Akinsha: How Money Stained with Ukrainian Blood Feeds Contemporary Art in Venice. In: Desk Russie, 2024. desk-russie.info/2024/12/23/how-money-stained-with-ukrainian-blood.html. accessed on 24.01.2025.

is an open assembly that is really 'open': If you want to come next week, you can come. It's a project that I would call a situated project, and I mean 'situated' in the way that feminist theory does. It does not mean 'local'. It means that *Sale Docks* does not pretend any neutrality; it addresses the contradictions in which it operates and which are local and global, sometimes at the same time. To be fair, we're not pure either. But we try to experiment with art as an actual critical tool and, even more, as a small part of a transformative project. This transformative project includes, for example, the action for transforming Venice into a more liveable city from a social and ecological point of view.

CB: How important are collaborations with other research, cultural and activist organisations in Venice?

MB: *Sale Docks* is a collective endeavour. There's no way that you can do something like this alone. *Sale Docks* is not only a collective; it is part of a history. It has its own organisational culture which has its theoretical roots in Italian workerism of the 60s and 70s – and it has its political roots in the 70s, with the Italian *Autonomia Operaia* movement. Luckily, we are not fetishizing the past. I think that we are very different from movements in the 70s, from many points of view. But we are an expression of a certain culture. And again, *Sale Docks* started as a collective and is part of an ecosystem of occupied and activist spaces in Venice. It is extremely difficult to experiment with art in such a way that it has a truly transformative impact when you are working alone, simply because the system tends to make you invisible and put you at the margins. Of course, there is a very important reading of margins, which is the reading that bell hooks gives. I agree with bell hooks when she says that margins are spaces of productivity, because you can perceive the centre from the margins, whereas the margins are not perceived by the centre. From the margins, you have a wider picture of reality and a greater possibility of organising resistance. But margins are also difficult to leave. When you are marginalised, you are marginalised from a cultural and financial point of view. So, if I had made my choices alone, I would probably have been completely excluded.

CB: It's interesting to see how countries that are still culturally and artistically (and, hence, also politically) at the margins enter the system of the Venice Biennale trying, at least in the beginning, to find a different way, one based on care and solidarity. Just to offer a recent example: As *NICHE*, the *Centre for Environmental Humanities* at *Ca' Foscari University*, we collaborated

this year (2024) with the pavilion of Timor-Leste (that was curated by Natalie King and represented the work of the artist Maria Madeira). It was Timor-Leste's first participation at the Venice Biennale and, for the pavilion's public programme, we built a cultural dialogue and alliance together with other pavilions. This can also be a way of rethinking the Biennale model in more 'sustainable' terms and, hopefully, broadening the discourse; it can become an effective way of making biennials agents of change in a time of planetary crisis. You have been concerned with another sore point of cultural work, which, in Venice, is closely connected with the Biennale as a recurring but also 'seasonal' event exhibition: precariousness. In May 2023, together with *Sale Docks*, *IRI-Institute of Radical Imagination*, and other associations, you initiated an assembly of art and cultural workers whose name is emblematic: *Biennalocene*. What are its main objectives and actions?

MB: That story started in 2023 with a request from the German pavilion of the Venice Architecture Biennale, which asked me to propose a curatorial project. That year, the pavilion, titled *Open For Maintenance*, focused on the topic of labour, and I decided to involve both of the collectives with whom I am working: The *Institute of Radical Imagination* and *Sale Docks*. We proposed what we called 'a performative investigation on cultural work in Venice'. The German pavilion accepted it. What we basically did was interview the group of Venetian art workers – from the cultural entrepreneur up to the migrant woman who works as a janitor in the museum – who have precarious jobs. This is everyday life for most of the young art workers in Venice: art handlers, curators, performers, museum guards, culture mediators and so on and so forth. We then transformed all the information gathered during the interviews into a dramaturgy by writing a very simple theatre piece. Afterwards, we staged this dramaturgy as a performative assembly in the public realm, in the courtyard of 'Le Casette', a social housing development on the island of Giudecca, which is one of the last examples of such working class social housing in Venice. Some of the performers were the workers themselves, those who did not fear retaliations from their employers. For those who were worried about what their employers could do if they discovered their participation, we hired professional actors. Not wanting to stop with just a performative investigation, we wanted to go one step further because of the presence of *Sale Docks* in Venice. So, the performance, which was attended by many locals, ended as an invitation to an actual assembly held two weeks later at *Sale Docks*. We expected no more than a dozen people to show up but,

against all odds, around a hundred people joined us. The assembly was very intense and, I would say, well attended. Since then (June 2023) we have been meeting regularly, mostly every month in the context of the *Biennalocene*. What we decided to do as a first step to keep the group together was to co-write. We often use co-writing as a strategy to boost collective work and facilitate the coming together of different people. So, we decided to co-write something that, after five months of collective work, we titled the *Metropolitan Charter for Cultural Work*: twenty-five articles in which we list a series of urgent issues that art institutions should address in order to fairly treat their workers. Of course, it wasn't simply an exercise. What we have been doing since then is to propose the 'charter' to cultural institutions. We are not expecting them to adopt it out of the blue, but this is a way to prepare the ground for a confrontation to begin.

CB: It is also a way to create more awareness in art and cultural institutions, to promote a greater sense of responsibility. I mean, you have written another 'manifesto', haven't you?

MB: I don't know if it's a manifesto, it's more a practical tool. We have also been collaborating with an independent union called *ADL– Associazione Difesa Lavoratori* (Association for the Defence of Workers) and with a national collective of workers, most of whom are employed in museums and in the management of Italy's cultural heritage. This group is absolutely great and is called *Mi Riconosci?* This also tells you about how we don't really care about the ownership of the projects we initiate. Of course, the work of art, the performance, was a collaboration between the *Institute of Radical Imagination* and *Sale Docks*. But now, in its second phase, *Biennalocene* has become an open assembly where, once again, different groups of people can simply come together.

Long story short: What I want to underline is the unique fact that we are talking about a work of art, a performance, that is also an investigative process, which, in turn, leads to the creation of an independent self-organised assembly of workers. So, it has an immediate social impact. We really thought about it because there was a space opening inside the Venice Biennale, even if the Biennale as a foundation had nothing to do with it. Indeed, the commissioner – a national pavilion – was still part of the context of the Biennale. The big question for us was how to avoid simply legitimising the Biennale with our supposedly

'radical content'; how to use it to boost our process of self-organisation beyond its temporal limits.

CB: It was also an attempt at creating *Institutional Critique* – although this is now a historicised term and probably no longer suitable for the context – from within the Venice Biennale, from within the institution itself, wasn't it?

MB: I think that it's something different compared to the experiences of the first and second waves of *Institutional Critique*. What we tried to do was to establish a double space. We tried to be against the institution from within and, at the same time, to reinforce existing autonomous spaces (*Sale Docks*) and create new ones (the *Biennalocene* assembly). I'm absolutely fine with critically addressing institutional spaces, at least some institutional spaces. I want to be clear: I do compromise. I don't think that purity is the answer but I'm not willing to accept any institutional commission when there are unclear economic and political implications (e.g. toxic money, apartheid or genocide politics). I would simply say: 'No, thanks!' But, although I don't think someone would ask me anyway, let's imagine that it could happen. On other occasions, I think that it's still important to work in the field that we call the art field, but with some goals in mind. What goals? Counter-hegemony, counter-visuality, the under-commons. This counter-hegemony is still possible as long as the institutional space is not the only space in which you present your work. Let's say, using a pirate metaphor, that you can be an 'institutional pirate' – that you have your own island to which you can divert your resources because your work, your politics, your resources, would otherwise simply land in the system. You can struggle in the institutional field but, if you simply work in it, no matter how radical the content that you handle, if it simply falls within the machine, then that machine chews you. *Sale Docks* is our pirate cove – if we want to use the pirate metaphor again. Once more, the post-workerist grammar comes to help. It is essential to organise 'institutions of the commons'. This is something that also belongs to the project of 'abolition democracy'. We need to fuel processes through which we can get rid of the toxic-colonial institutions of racial capitalism and, at the same time, we need to imagine and implement an alternative infrastructure.

CB: Criticism is useful but, in many cases, not enough, especially if it is an end in itself or aimed solely at destroying something that, however wrong or objectionable, already exists. You need to propose alternatives.

MB: I think that it's not sufficient because the artwork as we know it now feeds on very radical content. Earlier, you mentioned this year's Venice Biennale: I really think that the Venice Biennale curated by Adriano Pedrosa is a very clear example – and I'm not talking about the quality of the individual artworks because their quality is probably amazing and I don't want to judge this – of the way the curatorial project deals with, for example, queerness, blackness and Indigeneity. It deals with these as if, to date, the absence of queerness, blackness, and Indigeneity was simply a cultural fact and had nothing to do with, for example, the violence of colonisation. As if, out of the blue, one could say: 'Sorry, guys, we didn't see you, but now it's your time'. So, the risk is that queerness, blackness and Indigeneity are reduced to a style, or to the next buzzword.

Apart from a few projects, most of this year's Venice Biennale presents artworks without problematizing the political framework: Queerness, Indigeneity and blackness are totally frictionless. It poses absolutely no threat to the institutional structure or to Western epistemology. We talk all the time about Western colonialist epistemology, but – you know – decolonising Western epistemology means more than simply working on historical archives. It means addressing, for example, current colonial relationships. And you saw the reaction of the Venice Biennale to the *ANGA* campaign, which demanded the withdrawal of the Israeli pavilion. It was Sangiuliano, the former Minister of Culture who answered directly in place of the Venice Biennale, reaffirming the unconditional solidarity of a post-fascist government with the government of Israel.[2] Of course, I didn't expect the Venice Biennale to refuse Israeli participation; it's probably something that the foundation cannot even legally do. But the double standard is evident. See the difference with the case of Ukraine. Two years ago, the Venice Biennale was very keen, and rightfully, to condemn Russia's imperialist war. The Biennale was right in being supportive of Ukraine, but it wasn't supportive at all of Palestine. So, do you see these double standards that are in place?

CB: The risk is that the voices of artists and the power of their works are levelled by a certain curatorial mode that makes them more easily categorised

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2   Gareth Harris: Israel Will Not Be Excluded from Venice Biennale, Says Italian Culture Minister. In: The Art Newspaper, 2024. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/02/28/israel-will-not-be-excluded-from-venice-biennale-says-italian-culture-minister. accessed on 24.01.2025.

and musealised. This is certainly nothing new in the history of museums and exhibitions, which, through collections and displays, construct a certain kind of narrative, gaze, stereotype and taste. Perhaps, speaking of large, recurring exhibitions, the only one that really managed to subvert the system recently was *documenta 15*, which was entrusted to the Jakarta-based artists' collective ruangrupa. They turned the Western curatorial mode upside down, exponentially expanding (curatorial) multi-authorship by adopting the example of the art commons.

MB: You are absolutely right. In 2022, I wrote a review comparing the then Venice Biennale to ruangrupa's *documenta*. I argued that, on one side, in Venice, you had an exhibition about the commons, and on the other side, in Kassel, you at least had an attempt to organise an exhibition as a commons, and this changes things. Of course I'm not saying that 'lumbung' (the Indonesian word for a communal rice barn, where the surplus harvest is stored for the benefit of the community) is the solution to everything. Neither am I saying that *documenta 15* was perfect but, rather, that you couldn't really miss the difference between Venice and Kassel if you visited both at more or less the same time. And, indeed, the very artsy part of the art world didn't like *documenta 15* at all.

CB: As a final question, let's talk about your future projects. What are you working on at the moment?

MB: Well, we're thinking about initiating a research process into what serious decolonial activists call 'toxic philanthropy'. Again, this is hopefully going to take the form of a collaboration between the *Institute of Radical Imagination* and *Sale Docks*. 'Toxic philanthropy' is a term that was widely used in 2021 by *Strike MoMA*, a campaign led by a coalition of decolonial groups. The most well-known among them is probably *Decolonize This Place*. Based in New York, the coalition researched the Board of Trustees of *MoMA* and revealed that it was full of billionaires and entrepreneurs who make a lot of profit out of war economies by producing weapons, fossil fuels and so on. *Strike MoMA* is a campaign that, in 2021, developed different actions in only ten weeks. It highlighted the fact that such a model of museum cannot be reclaimed anymore. It should be abolished. It is interesting that 'abolition' is a term that has a long history. Its roots lie in the movements that fought to abolish chattel slavery in the U.S. Later, it was reactivated several times, mainly by African American movements. It was reactivated in the 60s against the industrial prison complex, and, in the con-

text of *Black Lives Matter*, against the police as an institution that continues the tragedy of white supremacism in the U.S. Now, this is something that makes us reflect a lot: this application of abolitionist terminology to museums. So: slavery, prisons, police and now museums. This also marks a very clear difference compared with the movement of 1968. If you see what the *Art Workers Coalition* in 1969 said about *MoMA*, it was very different. They still wanted to reclaim *MoMA* as a possible space. Now, decolonial activists are telling us: 'Look, some art institutions are not reformable because they're too imbued with colonialism, extractivism, gender and class violence'.

So again, long story short: What we're thinking about – and who knows if this project will ever see the light of day – is a mapping process for 'toxic philanthropy' and also for toxic public funding linked to art, at least in Europe. At the same time, it is a mapping process for a counter-infrastructure of art institutions, both activist and non-activist, who commit to a different model of art production. Hopefully, this can be used not only as a knowledge tool, as a research tool, but also as a tool for further mobilisation and for boosting an art that is more autonomous in regard to this type of toxic environments and toxic funding.

Appendix

17
Notes on the Contributors

Part I.

Christina Hainzl is Head of the transdisciplinary *Society in Transition Research Lab* at the *University for Continuing Education Krems* and an affiliated researcher in *Art Ecologies* at *Ca' Foscari University of Venice*. She studied art history and political communication in Salzburg, Florence, Rome and New York. Her current work addresses conflict and visualisation (with a focus on the MENA region), the Venice Archipelago and the disharmonies of the Anthropocene. She also works as a curator.

Mario Peliti is a photographer, architect and publisher of photography books. From 1995 to 2002, he directed the *Galleria Minima Peliti Associati*, an exhibition space that presented works by renowned photographers such as Sebastião Salgado, Bert Stern and Gabriele Basilico. He also co-founded the *Galleria del Cembalo* in 2013, a further exhibition space exploring the interplay between photography and other art forms. Mario Peliti established the *European Publishers Award for Photography* and has overseen the publication of more than 100 photography books. Since 2006, he has been developing the *Venice Urban Photo Project*, a comprehensive photographic survey of Venice. His exhibition *HYPERVENEZIA* at *Palazzo Grassi* (2021) showcased this ambitious undertaking.

Alice Ongaro Sartori is a researcher and curator in visual culture and publishing. A PhD student at the *University of Hamburg*, she studies antifascism in Italian art on paper and fascist memory from the 1960s onward. She is part of *wetlands*, a publishing house dedicated to issues of social justice and environmental sustainability. She has previously collaborated with the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* in Rome (2022) and was a co-curator of the first three editions

of *Floating Cinema*, MICROCLIMA (2016–2022) and of *TBA21-Academy's Ocean Space* public programme (2019–2021) in Venice.

Part II.

Cristina Baldacci is an art historian and an associate professor of the History of Contemporary Art at *Ca' Foscari University of Venice* (*Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage*). She is an affiliated faculty member at *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)*, where she coordinates the *Ecological Art Practices* research cluster and the *Art Ecologies* series. She is also research affiliate at the *Platform for Sustainable Development (SDGs), University for Continuing Education Krems*. Her research interests focus mainly on art, nature and ecology; art and the Anthropocene; archiving and collecting as artistic practices; and appropriation, montage and re-enactment in contemporary art – all topics on which she has published extensively.

Giorgio Andreotta Calò lives and works between Italy and the Netherlands. He studied sculpture at the *Academy of Fine Arts* in Venice, where he now teaches. In his years of training he attended the *Kunsthochschule* in Berlin and was an assistant to Ilya and Emilia Kabakov and artist in residence at the *Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten* in Amsterdam. His work has been presented at major events, including *La Biennale di Venezia*, in particular in 2011 and 2017, when he featured in the Italian pavilion; and *Pirelli HangarBicocca* in Milan, where an extensive solo exhibition of his work was held in 2019. In Venice, he actively collaborates with institutional and independent realities in the lagoon area, including *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)*, *Ocean Space – TBA21-Academy* and *Microclima*.

Natalie King is an Australian curator and writer and Enterprise Professor of Visual Arts at the *University of Melbourne*. She has curated three national pavilions at the Venice Biennale: *Maria Madeira: Kiss and Don't Tell*, inaugural Timor-Leste pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2024; *Yuki Kihara: Paradise Camp*, Aotearoa New Zealand at the Venice Biennale 2022, and Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2023; and *Tracey Moffatt: My Horizon*, Australian pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2017. She is President of *AICA-Australia* (*International Association of Art Critics*, Paris) and she has contributed to numerous publications from *Phaidon* books,

Flash Art International, *LEAP*, *Ocula* and *Art + Australia*, etc. She was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

Adrian Praschl-Bichler works as a senior scientist at the *Platform for Sustainable Development* of the *University for Continuing Education Krems*. The art historian studied for his master's degree at the *University of Vienna* and is a specialist at the interface between art history and psychology. His research focuses on the perception and the processing of art, often with the help of empirical methods. How does art affect people? And why do they react in a specific way?

Part III.

Matteo Stocco lives in Venice where he works as a video maker. His interests range from creating audio-visual products with cross-media features to producing short documentaries. The central theme of his work is the narration of complex ecosystems through the archiving of oral stories and the construction of fictional scenarios. Together with Matteo Primiterra, he is part of the video makers collective *Kinonauts* and the collective *Zoographer*. In 2015, he created the *Metagoon* platform, whose content has been exhibited in group shows and screened at international film festivals. He also teaches video making in the *Department of Audiovisual Heritage Sciences and Media Education* at the *University of Udine*.

Rita Vianello obtained her PhD in ethnology at the *University of Brest*, France, in co-supervision with the PhD program in social history at *Ca' Foscari University of Venice*. She is currently a researcher in anthropology (tenure-track position) at the *University of Bergamo* and was previously a researcher and lecturer at the *University of Venice*. Her research is characterised by an interdisciplinary approach, leading her to collaborate extensively with geographers, biologists and environmental science experts. Her interests focus on trades related to aquatic environments, the impacts of climate change on coastal communities, technologies for environmental protection and related conflicts, and the evolution of both tangible and intangible local knowledge.

Barbara Nardacchione is an independent curator and art historian based between Venice and Padua. Her research focuses on the manifestation of art outside exhibition contexts, with an interest in sound art and community

engagement in participatory processes. She has curated sound and public art projects and written for art catalogues and magazines. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in landscape studies at the *University of Padua*. Since 2021, she has managed the public programme of *Ocean Space* (*TBA21–Academy*), a Venice-based centre for exhibitions, research and public programmes catalysing ocean literacy and advocacy through the arts.

Petra Schaefer studied art history, German literature and Christian archaeology in Heidelberg, Bologna and Bonn. She works at the *German Centre for Venetian Studies* in the field of art promotion – fine art, architecture, literature and composition. In addition to her curatorial activities, she is an editor of art catalogues and an author. Petra Schaefer has been a correspondent of *Weltkunst*, the art magazine of *DIE ZEIT*, since 2010.

Axel Braun is an artist and photographer. His work is dedicated to landscapes in the Anthropocene, (failed) utopias in art and architecture and constructions of reality using photography and other media. Since 2006, he has received international recognition and support. His projects have been presented in various solo and group shows, e.g. at *HMKV* at *Dortmunder U*, *Krakow Photomonth* and *Kunst Haus Wien*. In 2024, he was artist-in-residence at the *German Centre for Venetian Studies*.

Part IV.

Viola Rühse is head of the *Center for Image Science* and a course director at the *University for Continuing Education Krems* (*Department for Arts and Cultural Studies*). She studied History of Art and German Language and Literature at the Universities of Hamburg and Vienna and the *Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig*. Her current research focuses on photography, modern and contemporary art, film and critical theory. She also works as a photographer and curator.

Matteo Silverio is a Venetian architect and researcher who specialises in computational design and digital fabrication. He has worked with Murano glass for over ten years, combining the Murano tradition with new technologies. His projects have been published in magazines and books and exhibited in prestigious museums and institutions such as *Mint* and *Saatchi Gallery* in London, the *Design Museum* in Dubai and the *Corning Museum of Glass* in New York. He is

a co-founder of *rehub*, an innovative Murano-based startup that has developed a process that gives new value to non-recyclable glass waste.

Interview Partners:

Karole P. B. Vail has been Director of the *Peggy Guggenheim Collection*, Venice and of the *Guggenheim Foundation* for Italy since mid-June 2017. A former curator at the *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, where she worked from 1997 to 2017, Ms. Vail has served as exhibition curator or co-curator on many projects including *Peggy Guggenheim: A Centennial Celebration* (1998), *Art of Tomorrow: Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim* (2005–2006), *From Berlin to New York: Karl Nierendorf and the Guggenheim* (2005), *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present* (2016) and *Giacometti* (2019).

Bruno Racine has been the CEO and Director of *Palazzo Grassi – Punta della Dogana | Pinault Collection* in Venice since April 2020, overseeing contemporary art exhibitions and programmes. He is a French cultural and administrative professional with extensive experience in leading cultural institutions. From 2007 to 2016, Bruno Racine held the position of President of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)*. Before that, he was President of the *Centre Pompidou* from 2002 to 2007 and chaired the *Haut Conseil de l'éducation* from 2005 to 2013. Between 1995 and 2002, he served as Director of the *Académie de France à Rome – Villa Médicis*.

Markus Reymann is Director of *TBA21-Academy's Ocean Space* and Co-Director of *TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary,* which is based in Madrid, where the foundation works in association with *Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza*, and has its other poles of action in Venice and Jamaica. In 2011, together with Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, he co-founded *TBA21–Academy*, the foundation's research arm, which seeks to foster a deeper relationship with the ocean and other bodies of water by working as an incubator for collaborative inquiry, artistic production and environmental advocacy. Since 2019, *TBA21–Academy* has hosted exhibitions, research and educational and public programmes at *Ocean Space* in Venice.

Francesca Tarocco is Full Professor of Buddhist Studies and Chinese Religions in the *Department of Asian and North African Studies (DSAAM)* at *Ca' Foscari Uni-*

versity of Venice and Director of *THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE)*. Her interdisciplinary research and teaching is situated at the intersection of Buddhist and Asian Studies and is informed by scholarly traditions in history, religious studies and sinology. She has published extensively on media, visual culture, technology, ecology, sacred space and the genealogy of the term religion in East Asia, and is currently working on a book project on Buddhism and Technology in Modern China.

Marco Baravalle is a researcher, curator and activist. He is a member of *Sale Docks*, a collective and independent space for visual arts, activism and experimental theatre located in an abandoned salt storage facility in Dorsoduro, Venice, Italy. Founded in 2007, its programming includes activist group meetings, formal exhibitions and screenings. He is a member of *IRI-Institute of Radical Imagination*, a collective that invites activists, artists, curators and cultural producers to share knowledge on a continuous basis with the aim of defining and implementing zones of post-capitalism in Europe's South and the Mediterranean. Baravalle teaches the phenomenology of contemporary art at *NABA-Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti*, Milan, curatorship at *Ca' Foscari University Venice* and visual culture at the *Free University of Bozen-Bolzano*. He has co-edited two books and published articles on the relationship between art, activism and ecologies.

18
Abstracts

Part I.

Christina Hainzl: *Mario Peliti – On Venice*
Taking place at dawn, and passing through winter, spring, summer and autumn, Mario Peliti's *Venice Urban Photo Project* presents a mosaic of Venice in over 20,000 photographs. Against the backdrop of the city's pressing problems with *aqua alta* and overtourism, Peliti portrays Venice in the form of structures and materials: stone, concrete, iron, glass. The article follows the traces of Peliti's work and its different views of the Venetian urban ecosystem. His photographs document and question these developments, challenges and coexistences. They enable us to rethink the fragile relationship between people and the environment.

Alice Ongaro Sartori: *Venice Doesn't Exist. Deconstruction as an Aesthetic Tool on Screen*
This paper examines Venice's identity through Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction, focusing on six contemporary video artworks. The deconstruction of Venice's stereotypical image is a tool for highlighting underlying and underrepresented aspects of a constantly evolving reality, intertwined with its ecosystem. Matteo Stocco's web archive and film fragment the city's narratives, while Sonia Levy's underwater perspectives highlight Venice's materiality. Antoni Muntadas revisits urban *dérives*, juxtaposing changes from 1978 to today, and Andrea De Fusco's visual essay addresses Venice's potential disappearance and the aesthetics of destruction. Yuri Ancarani's *Atlantide* delves into marginalised youth on the lagoon's islands, and Sara Tirelli's VR project deconstructs the city's imagery to explore European identity in decline. These hybrid works – bridging video and cinema – redefine Venice as an unstable

and multifaceted cultural and natural ecosystem, a 'thinking-machine' in the Anthropocene, revealing hidden narratives and challenging fixed representations.

Part II.

Cristina Baldacci: *Alternative Venice. A Look at the Last Twenty Years of Artistic Autonomy, Activism and Research*

Laboratory, observatory, model: As a city on the water and part of a lagoon archipelago that has always been strongly anthropised, in its environmental, social and cultural complexity and uniqueness, Venice is today considered an ecosystem that symbolises and tries to cope with the repercussions of the climate crisis. Imagining and practising possible alternatives to the stereotypical reality of a Venice agonising under the waves of ever-higher water, unstoppable depopulation and excessive mass tourism – the three major causes of fragility for the city and its lagoon – is a necessary form of resistance for those trying to regenerate, and not only preserve, both its environmental and its socio-cultural biodiversity. By adopting strategies against the neo-liberalist cultural hegemony, environmental groups, cultural associations and independent art collectives are among the most active and tenacious militants. This chapter aims to offer an account of some of the most effective – even if apparently unsuccessful – independent art and curatorial practices of the last two decades in Venice, which, through their reflections and actions, try to answer a fundamental ethical-political question: *What is to be done?*

Giorgio Andreotta Calò: *Letter to Salvatore Settis on the Island of Sant'Andrea*

Written in the form of a letter, this artist's reflections on one of the last islands in the Venetian archipelago that has so far escaped touristification addresses a fundamental question: *What is to be done?* Without seeking a direct answer from its recipient, the text defines itself as a manifesto for the island of Sant'Andrea and its *Forte* (fortress). Once a defensive outpost for Venice, the *Forte* is reimagined as a space to be defended and preserved in its current transitional state. With this change of perspective, the *Forte* becomes a place for reflection on humanity's destructive tendencies and on the possibility of artistic *non-action*, with a strong philosophical-ethical and ecological connotation. Sant'Andrea thus emerges as a monument to deceleration and to a (new) ecological balance between the natural and the anthropic.

Natalie King: *Coexistence and Care: Notes on Curating Three National Pavilions at the Venice Biennale*

This essay reflects on the author's curation of three national pavilions at the Venice Biennale situated in the Giardini, *Tracey Moffatt: My Horizon*, Australian pavilion, Venice Biennale 2017; the Arsenale, *Yuki Kihara: Paradise Camp*, New Zealand pavilion, Venice Biennale 2022, and offsite in Spazio Rava, *Maria Madeira: Kiss and Don't Tell*, the inaugural Timor-Leste pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2024. The author examines the history of the Venice Biennale and the role of the biennial more broadly as a platform for transnational solidarities. While considering these three curatorial case studies within the lagoon habitat of Venice, the author ponders the role of slow curating, coexistence and care as a key relational modality. She draws on the archipelagic writings of Édouard Glissant as a way to formulate an interdependent system of relations.

Adrian Praschl-Bichler: *The Architecture Biennale as a Platform for Socio-Ecological Interventions*

In the heart of the city of Venice, which is threatened by climate change and mass tourism, the Architecture Biennale acts as a platform for socio-ecological interventions. Architects are increasingly recognising the significant role of architecture in addressing environmental issues and social challenges. This article emphasizes the ethical responsibility of architects. From the starting point of Warwick Fox's ethical *theory of responsive cohesion*, it is argued that architecture should prioritise ecological and environmental compatibility in its creations. The article then presents a range of innovative projects from recent biennales that address architecture's potential for contributing to the socio-ecological transformation of society.

Part III.

Matteo Stocco and Rita Vianello: *The Expanded Enquiry: Reflections on an Interdisciplinary Approach Between Anthropology and Multimedia*

The Expanded Enquiry by Rita Vianello and Matteo Stocco explores an innovative interdisciplinary approach that merges anthropology and multimedia, focusing on the socio-cultural and ecological transformations of the Venice lagoon. This multifaceted environment, which faces challenges such as ecosystem crises and overtourism, requires new research methodologies. The authors advocate combining traditional anthropological practices – centred on narra-

tive collection – with visual storytelling through film and digital platforms to deepen understanding and convey emotional aspects of human experience. The piece highlights the value of interviews enriched by visual documentation as a way of preserving intangible knowledge and crafts, underscoring the necessity of collaboration between anthropologists, filmmakers and other experts. The authors present *Metagoon* as a case study, illustrating how cross-media and collaborative approaches can enhance public engagement and the dissemination of complex research findings, paving the way for future participatory, multimedia-driven projects.

Barbara Naradacchione: *Disorientation and Where to Find Oneself*
The text explores the theme of physical and emotional displacement in the Venetian context. As the city's historical centre grapples with demographic decline, overtourism and economic shifts, the sense of disconnection intensifies. Yet, beyond the city's core, a cultural and social substratum is emerging, particularly in the lagoon and its surrounding areas, where artistic research and community-driven initiatives are fostering new ways of engagement. The *Convivial Tables* research programme is described here as a case study. It combines food, ecology and community, addressing local environmental challenges. Through communal meals and collaborative practices, this initiative emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue, mutual learning and critical/creative commitment.

Petra Schaefer and Axel Braun: *On Axel Braun's Venice Project 'Machina Mundi/ Reign of Reason'*
Beauty, brutality, science and atrocity are often densely entangled. Despite being one of the most admired examples of human creation, Venice is no exception. Axel Braun's artistic case study approaches the city as a fragile relict of a glorious past. It is used as a sample that enables us to observe the fundamental structures and vulnerable points of global networks. Framed by the crumbling ruins of a majestic empire, his mixed-media essay touches on controversial aspects of Venetian history related to theft and looting, the slave trade and the extraction of resources. Against the background of the devastating consequences of human interference in the Earth system, the contribution reflects the ambiguity and evanescence of cultural achievements.

Part IV.

Viola Rühse: *Venetian Art Prints from Their Beginnings to Today's Sustainability Initiatives*

In the 16th and early 17th centuries, Venice was an important centre of Italian printmaking. This period continues to offer an inspiring cultural legacy for local artists today. A small selection of artists as well as other people and institutions that made outstanding contributions to the history of Venetian printmaking, which spans more than five centuries, is presented below. With regard to the present, this essay also focuses on sustainability aspects related to the development and use of less toxic printing processes and the situation of handicrafts and tourism in Venice. Particular attention is paid to the exemplary activities of the *Scuola Internazionale di Grafica* and the Fallani screen printing workshop.

Matteo Silverio: *Glass: Millennia-Old Excellence between Innovation and Sustainability*

This paper explores the intersection of Murano's ancient glassmaking tradition and contemporary technological innovation, driven by the pressing need for sustainability. Through the *Glass Matters* project, a dialogue was started between Murano's artisans and digital fabrication technologies such as CNC milling, 3D printing and laser cutting. The results revealed how innovation could enhance creative possibilities without compromising the authenticity of craftsmanship. Furthermore, the *rehub* project proposes a new approach to glass waste management by transforming non-recyclable glass into a sustainable, versatile material. This innovative process reduces energy consumption by 70% and opens up new applications in design and architecture. *Rehub* represents not only a business model but also a hub for research and sustainable development, demonstrating that even ancient traditions can evolve to meet modern environmental challenges and positioning Murano as a centre for the circular economy.