

BIENNALE ARTE 2017

13.05 → 26.11

VENEZIA,
GIARDINI ARSENALE



La Biennale di Venezia, the 57th International Art Exhibition *VIVA ARTE VIVA*

13 May - 26 November 2017

The 57th International Art Exhibition, titled *VIVA ARTE VIVA* and curated by Christine Macel, is organized by La Biennale di Venezia chaired by Paolo Baratta. The Exhibition is open to the public from Saturday May 13th to Sunday November 26th 2017, at the Giardini and the Arsenale venues. The preview took place on May 10th, 11th and 12th, the awards ceremony and inauguration was held on Saturday May 13th 2017.

VIVA ARTE VIVA unfolds over the course of nine chapters or families of artists, beginning with two introductory realms in the Central Pavilion, followed by another seven across the Arsenale through the Giardino delle Vergini. 120 are the invited artists from 51 countries; 103 of these are participating for the first time.

Words from the Curator, Christine Macel:

“Today, in a world full of conflicts and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human. Art is the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions. Art is the favourite realm for dreams and utopias, a catalyst for human connections that roots us both to nature and the cosmos, that elevates us to a spiritual dimension. Art is the last bastion, a garden to cultivate above and beyond trends and personal interests. It stands as an unequivocal alternative to individualism and indifference. It builds us up and edifies us. At a time of global disorder, art embraces life, even if doubt ensues inevitably. The role, the voice and the responsibility of the artist are more crucial than ever before within the framework of contemporary debates. It is in and through these individual initiatives that the world of tomorrow takes shape, which though surely uncertain, is often best intuited by artists than others.

VIVA ARTE VIVA is an exclamation, a passionate outcry for art and the state of the artist. *VIVA ARTE VIVA* is a Biennale designed with artists, by artists and for artists, about the forms they propose, the questions they ask, the practices they develop and the ways of life they choose.



YeeSookyung, *Translated Vase_Nine Dragons In Wonderland*, 2017, made of industrial pottery fragments found around Seoul.

Rather than broaching a single theme, *VIVA ARTE VIVA* offers a route that moulds the artists' works and a context that favours access and understanding, generating connections, resonances and thoughts. The journey unfolds over the course of nine chapters, or families of artists, beginning with two introductory realms in the Central Pavilion, followed by another seven across the Arsenale through the Giardino delle Vergini. Each chapter represents a Pavilion in itself, or rather a Trans-Pavilion as it is trans-national by nature but echoes the Biennale's historical organisation into pavilions, the number of which has never ceased to grow since the end of the 1990s. This semantic nod addresses the often debated relevance of the national pavilions, whilst going beyond it, as each chapter mixes artists of all generations and origins. There is however, no physical separation between the various pavilions, which flow together like the chapters of a book. From the Pavilion of Artists and Books to the Pavilion of Time and Infinity, these nine episodes tell a story that is often discursive and at times paradoxical, with detours that mirror the world's complexities, a multiplicity of approaches and a wide variety of practices. The Exhibition is intended as an experience, an extrovert movement from the self to the other, towards a common space beyond the defined dimensions, and onwards to the idea of a potential neo-humanism. This movement of the self towards the unknown, where experience and speculation are at the forefront, is in and of itself a response to a conservative environment, defying bias, distrust and indifference.

VIVA ARTE VIVA also seeks to convey a positive and prospective energy, which whilst focusing on young artists, rediscovers those passed away too soon or those who are still largely unknown despite the importance of their work. These discoveries and recoveries give way, in each pavilion, to a communion of artists from several generations, offering perspectives on questions that were often broached as early as the 1960s and specially the 1970s. These issues are revisited by artists in today's world of constant anthropological and societal change. The artists' interpretations hinge on forms that reflect the concerns of the civil society. After all, art may not have changed the world, but it remains the field where it can be reinvented.

Starting with the Pavilion of Artists and Books, the Exhibition reveals its premise, a dialectic that involves the whole of contemporary society, beyond the artist himself, and addresses the organisation of society and its values. Art and artists are at the heart of the exhibition, which begins by examining their practices, the way they create art, halfway between idleness and action, otium and negotium. The Roman otium, and its Greek predecessor scholè, originally understood as a privileged moment, is nowadays improperly translated as idleness of pejorative connotation, or leisure, which is not far removed from entertainment. The word otium, in contrast with the business world or negotium, from which the artist can never really escape, implies a space for free time, for inactivity and availability, a space of productive idleness and mind work, of quietness and action, a space where the work of art comes to be.

The decision to become an artist, in and of itself, requires taking a stance in society, one that is today broadly popular and widely acknowledged, but is perceived nevertheless as an act of calling into question work -and its by-product: money- as the absolute value in the modern world. Being an artist means differentiating between the private individual and the public individual, not as a person of media but as someone who is confronted with the res publica. Indeed, while the artist produces artworks that are meant to be commercialized, the modes of production of his or her disposal include an alternative within which the need for inactivity or rather non-productive action, for mind wandering and research, remain paramount. This position inevitably has consequences on the way in which free time is perceived by society: it is no longer a time to be spent or even consumed, but a time for oneself."

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The Pavilion of Traditions

Traditions that were once rejected in the 18th century by the Enlightenment and later by secular modernity, have re-emerged in the worst sense, namely fundamentalism and conservatism, sparking rejection and nostalgia for the past believed to be better. However and in spite of the many hesitations experienced as part of modernity and its faith in the project of a new man, the past thirty years have provided the opportunity, in the field of art, to question tradition no longer from the point of view of customs and behaviours, often associated with religion or morality, but through the lens of dialogue between the old and the recent. The last few years have seen a plethora of artists explore not only contemporary or recent history, but also a more distant past, as if fired by the fever of archaeology, excavation, re-interpretation and reinvention. A sign of unstable times, tainted by a feeling of a by-gone era that must open up to new values, art delves into long past historical references in an urge for legitimacy, rebirth and reinvention.”

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“Several special, site-specific and performance projects have been commissioned especially for the Giardini, the Giardino delle Vergini and other venues around the city of Venice. The opening week features a dense programme of approximately twenty performances, which are live-streamed and made available in La Biennale’s website.”

- Curator Christine Macel