

frieze

57th Venice Biennale: the Central Pavilion

First impressions of Christine Macel's 'Viva Arte Viva' in the Central Pavilion

by Evan Moffitt
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It's the Summer of Love in the city of Venice. At least it feels that way in 'Viva Arte Viva', the 57th Venice Biennale exhibition curated by Christine Macel, a bright and breezy affair bursting with unbridled optimism. Echoing its title, 'art for art's sake' might be the show's primary theme, borne out from rural tribes to hippie communes. The typically dark, endless corridor of the Arsenale gleams with lurid colours from dozens of woven textiles, sculptures and installations. Appropriations of indigeneity abound; there is more than one film that highlights an aspect of ritual dance. Contemporary politics, meanwhile, are mostly absent. If the news has got you down lately, this show might be a welcome distraction.



Dawn Kasper, *The Sun, The Moon, and The Stars*, 2017, mixed media installation, Central Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale. Courtesy: La Biennale di Venezia; photograph: Francesco Galli

Macel has divided her exhibition up into nine symbolic 'pavilions', or thematic groupings that together reveal a thesis in a show whose title suggests none. The Giardini includes two of these: the Pavilion of Artists and Books, and the Pavilion of Joys and Fears. If the latter sounds opaque, most of the others are as well (try to make sense of the Pavilion of Time and Infinity). Instead, what unfolds in the stately octagonal gallery is what I might rename the Pavilion of the Studio (or, the Pavilion as a Studio?): an evocation – and in one case a literal reconstitution – of artists' studios, as spaces for dialogue, experimentation and play. At the centre of this is Dawn Kasper, the affable New York based installation and performance artist who will be using the Giardini pavilion's palatial rotunda as her studio for the biennale's entire, three-month run. Kasper, a talkative musical autodidact, has filled the space with furniture, instruments and art supplies from her own studio in the Bronx, and is inviting neighbouring artists and strangers she meets to collaborate, perform at open mic sessions or simply sit and chat. It's a marathon restaging of Nomadic Studio Practice Experiment, a performance and residency Kasper completed in 2012 at the Whitney Museum in New York. When I spoke to her, she wasn't sure what would happen over the course of the summer; the uncertainty is tantalizing, if it also puts the creative process under unusual anthropological scrutiny.