Dawn Kasper

*The Sun, The Moon, The Stars*

Viva Arte Viva

The 57th Venice Biennale

Curated by Christine Macel

Central Pavilion, Giardini, Venice, Italy

Press
"I grew up in northern Virginia and would go to the [Smithsonian]. That's what made me realize that this is what I want to do – it was this linchpin. There was the George Segal sculpture, Blue Girl on Black Bed. It was so touching to me. The whole collection – I'd only ever seen the works in history books. I was pretty antisocial in high school. I loved writing lyrics and playing in hardcore bands. I liked that transmission of energy, the utilizing of sounds and movement." –Kasper is a performance and multimedia artist based in New York City. She is part of the Venice Biennale’s curated group show Viva Arte Viva.
**Why Performance Has Become the Essential Art Medium of the 21st Century**

In the aftermath of Anne Imhof’s triumph with ‘Faust,’ we explore the explosive rise of the medium.

by Caroline Elbaor  
June 5, 2017

Across institutions and biennials, project spaces, and even the commercial sector, a turn towards performance is emerging within the contemporary art landscape. Following a slow but steady boil over the past year, Anne Imhof’s immensely popular, Golden Lion-winning Faust at this year’s Venice Biennale arguably crowned performance as the art world’s reigning medium right now.

Though Imhof’s success in Venice certainly solidified the art form as au courant, its rise can be traced to a string of performance-based exhibitions that made a splash across Europe in the past year, most notably Tino Sehgal at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris; Donna Huanca at the Zabludowicz Collection in London; “Ten Days Six Nights” at London’s Tate Modern; and (again) Anne Imhof’s Angst cycle at the Kunsthalle Basel and Berlin’s Hamburger Bahnhof.

Meanwhile, London’s fairly young performance-only art festival, the annual Block Universe—which has just closed its third edition—enjoyed its most popular iteration yet, with commissions by the likes of performances artists Liz Magic Laser and Eglė Budvytė.

The rise in events like Block Universe arguably stems from the original, mother-of-all performance festivals: Performa. Founded in 2004 by Roselee Goldberg, Performa is a biennial event centered around commissioned works that temporarily inhabit venues across New York City for a month-long celebration of the medium. Under Goldberg’s direction, artists working in various mediums are encouraged to strengthen their performance muscle—either by building upon an existing practice or experimenting with it for the first time.

Past participants include veritable luminaries, both in and outside of the field: Ragnar Kjartansson, Mika Rottenberg, Simon Fujiwara, Alexandre Singh, Yvonne Rainer, Isaac Julien, and Francis Alÿs are among the long list of artists who have contributed to Performa’s former editions.

In the past, time-based, intangible work requiring an actively-engaged audience was typically left in the shadow of the more easily-accessed, traditional art object. So, what is it about performance that has suddenly become so alluring now?

It is, perhaps, the much-discussed question of audience engagement that is making performance thrive. With our cultural dependence upon screens moving us ever-further away from one another, the medium brings one back into the moment—the here and now—by drawing attention to what is going on in one’s immediate surroundings, creating a communal atmosphere that includes both the audience and the artist in a move that perhaps echoes Nicolas Bourriaud’s theory of relational aesthetics.

“I think many artists are moving away from an emphasis on solitary studio practice and gallery display towards an interest in staging communal situations, in sharing an experience of art,” Catherine Wood, senior curator of Performance at the Tate, told artnet News.
Along with Tate’s film curator Andrea Lissoni, Wood spearheaded a series of performances, “Ten Days Six Nights,” this past March and April at the Tate Modern. (The event, it is worth noting, was sold out.) The series was self-described as intended to “mark a new departure in the concept of the art exhibition: from a static presentation to an experience of art that unfolds through time.”

Artists on the roster included rising stars, such as Paul Maheke and Isabel Lewis, as well as seasoned veterans like CAMP, a collective founded in 2004 that is known for its engagement with technology, or Phill Niblock, whose experimental career spans 50 years.

Maitreyi Maheshwari, program director at the Zabludowicz Collection in London, aligned with Wood’s points when speaking with artnet News: “Since so much of how art is seen is now through the circulation of images online or through Instagram, I think there is a real sense of trying to re-examine the experience of an artwork,” she said. “Many artists are also keen to reject the forms of market-led commodification of artworks, which is still very much focused on material objects.”

Maheshwari organized an exhibition of Donna Huanca’s work at the Zabludowicz Collection last year, and again, the emphasis was on the interaction with the audience, with daily, six-hour-long performances. (Huanca’s performances can be viewed in the Unlimited section at Art Basel in Basel next week.)

“Donna and I had a number of conversations about how performances would feature in the work. From these it became clear that the tension created between the visitor and the models was a really important aspect of the work,” she said.

Dmitry Komis, director of the David Lewis Gallery in New York, works closely with multimedia artist Dawn Kasper, who is currently included in “Viva Arte Viva,” the Christine Macel-curated International Exhibition at the 57th Venice Biennale.
Yet, when speaking about the origins of the artist’s relationship with the gallery to artnet News, Komis too highlighted the importance of the communal—as opposed to monetary—aspect: “There was never an expectation of the work she would make at the gallery and how ‘commercial’ it would be,” he said. “It was more about a community of artists, and Dawn was part of that community.” However, Komis also recognizes that Kasper’s work is indeed profitable. “The gallery has sold Kasper’s performative installations and individual works to both public and private collections,” he said, citing Frieze New York, Art Basel Miami, LISTE Art Basel, and Artissima all as examples of fairs in which Kasper’s work has been a success among collectors.

“The work does very well at art fairs. It stands out and people are immediately drawn to the work and the story,” Komis explained, adding that institutions are also eager to scoop up Kasper’s work. “Her first show with the gallery ‘& sun & or THE SHAPE OF TIME’ was sold to a European foundation as one work. Her Venice installation is sold as one work, and we are currently in talks with a few institutions.”

“These works challenge the museum’s value system and its way of doing things in exciting ways, shifting the emphasis from valuing material objects towards thinking about how a work can be encountered through time, or how a document of a past action can simply fire the imagination,” Wood explained in regards to Tate’s acquisitions of performance works.

“The [Zabludowicz] Collection is still relatively new to collecting performance art and so far this has tended to take the form of documentation or objects left over or produced from performances,” Maheshwari said.

Another example of an artist who has successfully navigated the medium’s monetary element is the performance titan Tino Sehgal, who famously refuses to permit the documentation of any of his performances (or “situations,” as his pieces are known in art world lexicon).

Sehgal’s specifications subvert how the art market typically functions: He leaves no tangible trail, but still renders the works purchasable by allowing for their endless repetition. In the end, Sehgal’s clever manipulation of the rules means he can maintain artistic credibility while still making financial gains.

Helena Reckitt, author of the reader on performance pioneer Sanja Iveković, further elaborated on the medium’s marketability: “Probably the best-known example of the re-performance trend is Marina Abramović’s Seven Easy Pieces of 2005, for which she turned time-based performance works into tableaux vivants,” she said, referring to these profitable reenactments.

But, beyond its proven profitability, the appeal of performance might lie in our current craving for connection, which is what makes this medium so relevant and compelling.

“Performance is an acknowledgement that our ways of doing things and our hierarchies of value are up for grabs,” Wood explained. “Performed gestures and actions are part of it, but it’s a state of liveness, of potential for change, of positions and relations that artists are concerned with.”

“I also think Robert Rauschenberg’s statement—that he wanted to make an art that ‘refuses to settle’—is key to our time,” Wood added.
MAIDEN VOYAGE
Christine Macel talks with Michelle Kuo about the 57th Venice Biennale

OPENING ON MAY 13, the Fifty-Seventh Venice Biennale will take place amid rolling geopolitical waters—and massive shifts regarding the production of objects, ideas, and selves. Curator Christine Macel talked with Artnet editor Michelle Kuo about artistic process and the trajectory of the world’s biggest exhibition.


CHRISTINE MACEL: The exhibition puts art and the artist first. Everything in the show has been deduced from this starting point.

By contrast, most Biennales begin with a theme, and the selection of the artists follows. Often, I think, the concept is too wide, and so the show becomes impossibly broad. In Venice, where the venues cover fifty thousand square feet, it’s even more difficult to create something coherent. But on the other hand, if you choose a very specific theme, the artists lose the freedom they need to make their work and to have a genuine dialogue with the curators; the process becomes too curatorial.

So instead of choosing a single theme, I worked closely with the artists to develop thinking about their practices. The way they make their art. The position they have chosen. Their surroundings—from the material, like their studios, to the intellectual: their inspiration, knowledge, research, influences.

Then I asked each artist to send me documentation: images, book covers, even personal statements. This was the beginning of my research for the exhibition and catalogue, and it has culminated in a series of videos I’ve asked each artist to make about his or her practice. One has been posted every day on the Biennale website since February; they will also be on view in the exhibition itself.

And so the show intimately explores the position of the artist, their studio, history, milieu, and so on. It’s like being at the level of the subject itself, being with the artist in their own space.

MK: But this isn’t about re-creating the studio in the exhibition.

CM: Right—the first part of the show, in fact, is about inviting the artist to make works that deal with the idea of the studio, or that make it understandable.

MK: It’s a reflection on these conditions, not a recreation of them.

CM: Take, for example, Dawn Kasper: Much of her work has explicitly been about her studio practice.

MK: Her performances often stage her own process.

CM: In fact, she proposed to stay in Venice for six months, which is rare, as you might imagine. She moved in, and she will really make this lived experience visible. Or take Olafur Eliasson, who is showing a huge piece about his own equally huge workshop and laboratory. It’s about different approaches to production.

MK: And nonproductivity.

CM: I’m very interested in the tension in the artist’s life between production and self-reflection, moments of ozam, to use the Latin term. Ozam is often improperly translated as “leisure,” but it really designates a kind of free time, a moment of idleness, a nonactivity that is also somehow generative, in which you are basically nourishing yourself.

In the classical tradition, ozam was seen as a necessity in everyday life, in balance with negotioam, which is...
La prima volta che ho visto un'opera di Dawn Kasper ho visto proprio Dawn Kasper. Sì, perché l'opera era un'installazione del suo "Nomadic studio practice experiment", un progetto in cui l'artista americana trasferisce il proprio studio nello spazio espositivo nel quale è invitata a intervenire e a sferzare quotidianamente per tutta la durata della mostra, "fissando arte" davanti agli spettatori.

Il "Nomadic studio practice experiment" è nato per necessità. Avevo perso il mio lavoro di assistente per un artista più anziano, e fui costruito a rinunciare al mio atelier. Da allora sono nomade e produco le mie opere dove posso, spesso rivelando il processo creativo al pubblico. L'idea è un luogo di creazione permeabile, che permette di condividere con lo spettatore la nascita dell'opera, dove anche il curatore Christine Macel, che con la sua maestria intende spostare l'attenzione sugli aspetti più nascosti della produzione artistica. Attraverso una serie di video pubblicati sul sito della Biennale, Macel ha aperto la porta di molti suoi artisti.

Nel caso di Dawn, sarà lo studio stesso a distaccarsi in Laguna, da maggio a novembre. "Quella di Venezia sarà la più lunga performance che ho mai realizzato. È intitolata "The sun, the moon, and the stars". Tramite la pratica quotidiana invocherò i corpi celesti e il suo comportamento filosofico della "musica universale" o "musica delle stelle". Secondo il quale i movimenti dei corpi celesti producono un insieme di suoni costituiti impercettibili all'occhio umano, ma conosciuti armonici tra di loro."

Il "Nomadic studio practice experiment" è stato spesso interpretato nell'ottica dell'avanguardia della fusione tra arte e vita. Io ho sempre pensato invece che la "mesa in scena" di Dawn della propria pratica di studio serve a raccogliere le dispersioni dell'atto creativo nei paradigmi del lavoro.
Dawn Kasper Will Be Staying in the Giardini’s Central Pavilion for Six Months

by Nate Freeman
May 9, 2017

The first press preview day of the 57th Venice Biennale has just started to get cooking, as a first spin through the Central Pavilion in the Giardini shows. Right up front you have Sam Gilliam’s Yves Klein Blue (2015), an explosively colorful work draped along the thick white columns—bursting with its titled hue, along with orange and magenta, it’s almost a direct counterpoint to the black drapes by Oscar Murillo that hung in the same spot two years ago.

Go inside the Central Pavilion and there’s a wealth of great work, and while not too many people have access yet to take it in, oh look, there’s François Pinault, the Christie’s owner who also owns two spaces in Venice, the Punta della Dogana and the Palazzo Grassi. When I went up to ask what he thought of the show, he said, “It’s a very good show, very interesting!” And then he moved right along.

One of the cooler things here in the Central Pavilion is that front and center you step into Dawn Kasper’s The Sun, The Moon, and The Stars (2017), a continuation of a body of work that involves her setting up a roving studio space as a work, and right now she’s spinning Marianne Faithfull vinyl and chilling with people, all in the stately fresco-topped Sala Chini. Occasionally, she picks up an ax.

“I’m just noodling,” she said as I walked up, putting down the guitar.

She told me that she’s staying here for six months using the space as a studio—the longest residency she’s done yet.

“I’m really stoked,” she said, surrounded by keyboards, a drum set, maracas, tom-toms, amps, mixing boards, recorders, all that good stuff. “It’s a gift to be able to be here, an honor, really. And, like, how do I plan for six months of studio time? I brought all these different clothes. I might learn Italian.”

She put Neil Young’s Harvest on the turntable and noted that some friends were coming over later to jam.

“It’ll be kind of like, a little loose and fluid and drone-y and fun,” she said.

There are apparently going to be beatbox tournaments in the coming weeks, and an open mic night for standup comedians. Watch this space.

Original article: http://www.artnews.com/2017/05/09/dawn-kasper-will-be-staying-in-the-giardinis-central-pavilion-for-six-months/
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.
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.

Original article: https://frieze.com/article/57th-venice-biennale-central-pavilion
Bored of yet another long list of white male artists? There are many women on show at the Venice Biennale this year making thoughtful, complex and deeply considered work. These are ten of most exciting names at Venice Biennale 2017.

**Dawn Kasper**
Dawn Kasper is one of the women the central (female) curators the biennale has included in the main exhibition. A performance artist based in NYC, she studied under Chris Burden and Catherine Opie in LA, and made installation based projects about fear and panic – timely for our current emotional fall out then...

Dawn Kasper, ‘On Desire or the Method’, 2016

Original article: http://www.twinfactory.co.uk/index.php/tag/venice-biennale-2017/
May 16, 2017

To view, click here.

Original video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AP6Z7aktjqA
The Unmissable Highlights of Christine Macel’s 2017 Venice Biennale

“Viva Arte Viva” eschews epic overtures for intimate detail, but its most powerful moments linger in the memory.

by Andrew Goldstein
May 10, 2017

The curator Christine Macel titled her 2017 Venice Biennale “Viva Arte Viva” as a way of illustrating her intention to place art in the middle of life—see what she did there?—and walking through the show you can start to see what, exactly, she means by that. This is not so much the capital-L Life of childbirth, sex, death, and what comes next; Macel’s show is geared more to the lowercase-l life of going to work in the morning, noting ephemeral glimpses of beauty in the world around us, collaborating on worthwhile things, getting a little crazy after work perhaps, and then doing some light housework before going to bed.

While not a sustained cri de coeur in the same overt way as Okwui Enwezor’s previous biennale, its power lies in its closely observed details and passages of splendor—it’s like a collection of short stories, in other words, not an epic novel. There are, of course, some riveting, impactful moments in this show that visitors will take home in their memory. Here are six of those highlights from the show.

DAWN KASPER
The Sun, The Moon, and The Stars, 2017

Immediately upon entering the Giardini portion of “Arte Viva Arte,” you find several artworks dedicated to artists sleeping or in other stages of active rest, ready to receive inspiration—the state of otium Macel describes as “a space of productive idleness and mind work.” Smack in the middle of these is the American artist Dawn Kasper, who Macel invited to reprise her performance This Could Be Something If I Let It from the 2012 Whitney Biennial, in which she set up her studio in that museum’s galleries for three months, making art and talking to the inquisitive visitors...
who stopped to chat. Since this is Venice, however, the piece (retitled *The Sun, The Moon, and The Stars*), and part of her ongoing project “The Nomadic Studio Practice”) has grown grander in the intervening five years: now, Kasper, whose once short hair has grown long and rangy, will be working inside the exhibition for six months. It’s also more complicated, considering that the artist needed to obtain a visa to work in Italy, which she describes as a “frustrating experience” that included so much paperwork she decided to incorporate it into her performance as a kind of research piece on the tribulations immigrants go through when researching visas.

On the Biennale’s opening day, Kasper was playing Bessie Smith’s “Empty Bed Blues” on her record player—“that starts out the day for me,” she says—and was full of nervous excitement about the project ahead. She had learned a few tricks from her Whitney stay, so this time she brought a whole box of extra chairs, a comfy couch, and a recliner that turns into a bed. Recording equipment is arrayed on tables around the large gallery she was given, and she hopes to record an album of new music with her bandmates Kelly Coates and Kathleen Kim, two Whitney collaborators who followed her to Venice (along with one of their boyfriends, who helpfully is a music producer), and also a solo album of her own compositions. A live performance in the space took place for VIPs the day before the opening, and “it’s sounding pretty well,” she says.

She’s also brought a slew of art supplies and photo-developing equipment, and is planning to hang the art she makes on the walls. “Some days I’m am going to stare at the wall and freak out about what I’m making,” she says, adding that the music helps her relax and “let go enough to let the work be what it wants to be.” In the meantime, Kasper—who is sleeping in an apartment a short walk away from the Biennale—is getting settled into her new environs. “It’s like a new lover—we’re trying to get to know each [other], me and this room,” she says. “I’m just trying to appreciate the experience.”
In a moment in history when the role of art and the responsibility of artists to take action has returned with urgency, the 57th Biennale di Venezia seems entirely escapist. The exhibition, “Viva Arte Viva,” directed by long-time chief curator of the Pompidou Center in Paris Christine Macel, puts art and its makers first—everything else starts from that point. With all the many parallel events and museums, a giant, golden public sculpture, and more than 85 national pavilions, Document joined designer Patrik Ervell to explore special moments from this, one of the world’s most significant contemporary art events.

To enter the first of nine so called transpavilions, “artists and books,” we must pass under a suspended drape painting, “Yves Klein Blue” by 83-year-old African-American pioneer artist Sam Gilliam. The authority of the all-white columned building is undermined by the richly saturated blue, yellow, and red soaked raw canvas that hangs like a protest banner. Gilliam is a painter’s painter, a window into Christine Macel’s “for artists by artists” curatorial approach. Coming from color field painting as a signifier of personal freedom, he maintains visual and material decisions, and his work complicates the philosophical (transcendental) aspirations of American abstract expressionist painting. This liminal space of the portico transitions us from outside to inside, shining with vibrant primary colors.

The first piece we encountered was a series of black and white photos by the mostly unknown Mladen Stilinović of himself sleeping, titled “Artist at Work.” Perhaps, to give weight to her concepts, Macel calls upon the Roman terms “Otium,” which roughly means “taking time away” or “meditation.” It is also the title of a work by giant of postwar art Franz West, known for working while “chatting to friends or napping on the divan.” Other artists on view are hard at work lounging, like a self-portrait of Frances Stark on the couch (a psychoanalytic pun, as she is surrounded by inspirations and images of her boyfriend.
Past the wall of slumber, we immediately hear Neil Young’s “Heart of Gold” on the record player in the next room. We arrive in a rotunda under a stunning vaulted frescoed ceiling to Dawn Kasper’s “Nomadic Studio Practice Experiment.” She has moved her materials and equipment—including a full set of drums, a record player, guitars, paint, and a flatscreen TV to play Buster Keaton films—to Venice for six months where she will work inside the exhibition. “Music is a way to get to people emotionally,” she says, explaining that her being present is a performance. “I’m freaking out for you or in front of you, but I don’t want to freak out on you. I don’t want it to be shock art.” Perhaps the two most beautiful bodies of work in the exhibit are both centered around books, which, while not nostalgic, proves that publications matter more than ever. First are the ink-soaked volumes by Geng Jianyi laid out in a vitrine, and the careful but incredibly suite of small oil paintings titled “books on books” by Beijing-based Liu Ye. As much as they call on a history of realism, the paintings are inspired simultaneously by cartoons (Muffy, for example) and the neoplasticism of Piet Mondrian.

“The Pavilion of Joys and Fears,” is suddenly much more existential. A centerpiece inside is work by the late Syrian artist Marwan; he spent his lifetime obsessed with portraiture. Early paintings in the 1960’s were fairly straightforward naturalistic representation but over time he zoomed in closer to the sitter’s face making them more grotesque and abject until the last paintings are nearly abstract—turning the visage inside out. Beside Marwan is art world stalwart Kiki Smith, who nearly owns abjection as a mode of working, and brings this to a new body of work inspired by dark fairy tales.

Nearby is Chicago-based McArthur Binion, another African-American abstract painter, who by not making the political immediately visible, reveals what can not be seen. Taking the documents of social contracts—his own birth certificate, licenses, and other legal papers big and small—he subjects them to shredding and places them inside cross-hatching along a post-modern grid, his signature style. One of the fair’s youngest artists, Rachel Rose presents a new stop motion cartoon, “Lake Valley,” that illustrates a 19th-century children’s book. The main characters are a girl that levitates out of her bed while sleeping (or is a dream?) and a hybrid rabbit/dog/fox—a border-crossing species of what Donna Haraway would call a “messmate.” The only female African-American artist in the exhibition, post-minimalist Senga Nengudi presents her “RSVP” sculptures (begun in 1975), working with nylon stockings that not only recall the body but require movement and performance to activate them.

Over at the Arsenale, we run smack into the great Lee Mingwei, a relational aesthetics artist from Taiwan, who expanded the discourse outside of Europe—and often in a far more poetic and queer way. He remounted his “Mending Project,” in which viewers are invited to bring their torn or battered clothes to him. After giving their names and occupations, he sews up the clothes (healing the wounds) with colored thread. Charles Atlas, a Document contributor presented one of his large-screen video works “The Tyranny of Consciousness,” which displays a collage of sunsets. The voice over the image is New York night-life luminary Lady Bunny, who talks about the downfall of American politics to an electronic dance beat.

Elsewhere around the biennial there are artists asking the question “How can we reinvent a new humanism after its failure?” Another New York artist Sam Lewitt, who here deals conceptually with the historic electric company of Venice in a work titled “Stranded Assets,” addresses notions of institutional critique. Taking historical lamps that were shaped uncannily like open books, Lewitt smartly produces their ghosts out of coal ash.

In the “Pavilion of the Dionysian”—dedicated to the ecstatic states of the feminine—Ervell finds his favorite work here, ironically, the only male artist in this section. In a combination of new and old works by Berlin-based Canadian artist Jeremy Shaw. He is literally a rock star and artist—his solo music production is aptly titled “Circlesquare.” It is an image of two opposing shapes that fit perfectly together as art and music. His last album, “Songs About Dancing and Drugs,” is kind of a leitmotif of recent work. We stop to see his “Towards Universal Pattern Recognition” series, mostly black and white found photos covered by transparent prismatic formations that transform the photos into a sculptural wall reliefs. One photo is a person screaming that recalls Edvard Munch in subject and even more so Francis Bacon in its formal elements. His new video, “Liminals,” is a science fiction piece that follows a group of people engaged in trance-like states to save humanity. A very David Attenborough authoritative voiceover tells us that “in extreme periods of political change we enter a period of great uncertainty and disorientation that
brings about a potential of important new perspectives." The voice continues: “Although there is no exact date, our extinction is a quantifiable certainty.”

Out of all 85 pavilions, everyone was talking about the German space the most. We waited along with museum directors, curators, and billionaire heiresses more than one hour to get in. Some people said they waited much longer. Once inside, we were immersed into a gesamtkunstwerk of the world of artist Anne Imhof. Bringing together painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, architecture, and dogs in cages for a five hour-long performance, it won the Venice Biennale’s Golden Lion. Imhof disrupts established orders, boundaries, and barriers by subverting idealized representations—especially from fashion—into bodily desublimation of the abject and spiritual. She works with a core of performers who are all friends, including her lover Eliza Douglas, whose Ars Nova-style Gregorian chanting almost moved us to tears in the premiere of “Faust,” produced just for the Biennale. One association comes quickly to mind, the aesthetics of HealthGoth: bodies that are augmented by biotechnology, neoprene and sweat-resistant sportswear nearly all black, like Nike, Adidas, Hood by Air, Rick Owens, mixed with band T-shirts, and embracing the reality of current dystopia. Not without irony, Imhof herself wore Balenciaga during the performance. The bodies of the performers became hybrid (zombified) cyborgs, collapsing the self and other in the dissecting gaze behind glass walls. In the end it is the music that redeems us, composed in part by collaborator Billy Bultheel, in a moment his smears ignitable petroleum jelly on the floor in the shape of a serpent and lights it on fire. His hand in the jar of lubricant evokes “fisting” and in fact faust means “fist” in German, a symbol of solidarity knowing when to raise your fist to fight for what is right.

The last thing we see with Ervell before the tour ends is as magical and mythical as the floating city itself—“the golden tower” by the late, legendary shamanist artist James Lee Byars. It is a colossal, 20-meter tall that, in his words “bridge heaven and earth, and unify humanity,” a deeply spiritual work of the sublime. In every sense of the idea, this phallic symbol has been erected at the edge of the grand canal. He intended it to be a monument to humanity in one of his hometowns of Venice, which is of one of the earliest cities of globalization where west meets east—nothing could be more fitting than this shiny golden beacon of optimism.

Original article: http://www.documentjournal.com/article/escaping-reality-57th-venice-biennale
In the Venice Biennale’s ‘Viva Arte Viva,’ Shamanism Sneaks Back Into the Picture

Primitivism makes an unexpected return in Christine Macel’s therapeutic vision.

by Ben Davis
May 12, 2017

The “return to order” is a well-worn theme, both in art history and on the contemporary art circuit. Every so often, the political energies within art get unruly or uncomfortable or exhausted enough that the “return” is announced once again. Beauty/feeling/whimsy/fantasy/tradition... it’s back, baby!

When announcing that French curator Christine Macel would organize the 2017 show, the Venice Biennale organizers were more or less explicit that they were looking for a change following Okwui Enwezor’s aggressively outspoken 2015 edition, which went so far as to include a reading of Marx’s Capital in its entirety as a centerpiece.

“In the wake of the Biennale Arte directed by Okwui Enwezor, centered on the theme of the rifts and divisions that pervade the world, and aware that we are currently living in an age of anxiety, La Biennale has selected Christine Macel as a curator committed to emphasizing the important role artists play in inventing their own universes and injecting generous vitality into the world we live in,” Biennale president Paolo Baratta said at the time.

It was a notably muddy statement of intent, seeming to charge Macel with getting away from all the controversial stuff while also addressing it, either by offering solutions or just making people forget about it. It wasn’t clear.

That muddiness follows us into the resulting big show in interesting ways. Overall, the 2017 Venice Biennale gives off a highly accomplished, though slightly underthought, vibe. That includes the title, “Viva Arte Viva,” which is almost charmingly hokey: At a time when art might feel overrun by events, it literally sticks “art” at the center of “life.”

At the Central Pavilion, the first section of “Viva Arte Viva” greets you with the “Artist at Work” series of Belgrade-born Mladen Stilinović (1947-2016). This is probably the most willfully low-key shot possible to fire at the start of a show, photographs showing the artist... just sleeping.

As an opener, it seems more or less a direct reply to Enwezor’s theatrically “woke” Biennial. But it’s a canny choice for this purpose: Stilinović’s Eastern European conceptualism was, in its original form, a sort of a riposte to the socialist rhetoric of its day (the 1970s), and so can be thought of as political in its own non-conformist, unconventional way.

Take a further turn into “Viva Arte Viva,” and there’s a photograph of Stilinović’s more famous Austrian contemporary, Franz West (1947-2012), also sleeping. Good art doesn’t try too hard, it seems to say. Good art is refreshing, like a nap. And then there’s artist duo Yelena Vorobyeva and Viktor Vorobyev (both b. 1957), just around the corner, with their life-sized tableau The Artist Is Asleep (1996), just to make it clear.

Macel doesn’t just want you to consider art’s soporific powers, of course; she is making a claim for its power to dream.

And, at its many high points, “Viva Arte Viva” shows art dreaming with a lonely and articulate beauty. For instance, see the witty little hand-drawn Arabic scrolls, nested into household tins, of the Emirati conceptual art pioneer Abdullah Al Saadi (b. 1967).

Or the wall-filling video mosaic of multiple, coordinated sunsets by American video artist Charles Atlas (b. 1949)—nature at its most stock sublime paired with audio of a raw sermon about the corrupt state of politics from drag star Lady Bunny.
Or the scrappy three-channel video by Turkish-born, Germany-based artist Nevin Aladağ (b. 1972), collaging footage of different musical instruments ingeniously set up on the streets of Stuttgart so that they seem to play themselves: a tambourine shaking because it is attached to the head of a playground rocking horse, a flute capturing the wind as it is hung out the window of a moving car, a violin attached to a merry-go-round so that its strings are struck with each rotation.

Yet any show of the Venice Biennale’s size and resources can marshal excellent works. The test is whether its vision holds it all together.

You might be able to tell what is on the mind of “Viva Arte Viva” by what is not in it. Contemporary politics are muted, of course; hardly a whisper of current events sneaks in. And yet, despite its not-so-implicit brief to restore the comforting side of art, “Viva Arte Viva” is notably not a “back-to-painting” biennale. There is painting, some of it interesting, but it’s a dispersed substance within the larger brew.

“Viva Arte Viva” is also light on technology. Racking my brains for the most in-your-face, high-tech-seeming thing here, what comes to mind is an interactive DVD, Mon Encyclopedia Clartes, that the late French artist Raymond Hains (1926-2005) put together with Macel for his 2001 retrospective at the Pompidou. It is presented for your perusal in the gallery devoted to his raucous body of work, via a deliberately funky old iMac—a sign of antique cool.

The show’s sensibility is very much trying to place you outside of the cycle of the present.

What Macel’s show is heavy on is craftiness. For instance, there’s Chinese artist Lee Mingwei’s The Mending Project (2009-2007), which invites visitors to contribute clothing they want mended to the installation.

Nearby is Filipino artist David Medalla’s A Stitch in Time, originally from 1968, recreated as an embroidery project inviting people to stitch whatever scraps that represent their experience onto a shared draped swatch of fabric, forming a collective portrait of the moment. That’s two setpieces involving participatory needlework!

A relative lack of paint-on-canvas work is made up for by a surplus of textile works, draped painting-like on the walls, and intimately crafted things, presented on shelves or on tables. Even some of the more impressive beats of the show—say, Leonor Antunes’s delicate, shimmering hangings and dangling lamps made in the Murano glass workshops, and Sheila Hicks’s climactic wall of multicolored pompoms—are examples of craft exaggerated to the level of spectacle.

Craft, with its associations with comforting tradition, connects to what I take to be the larger presiding theme of the show: the power of personal ritual.

This Biennale is full of artists who stage self-invented rites of psychic nourishment (Lee Mingwei’s dream-like ceremony in the Grand Pavilion; Anna Halprin’s choreography meant to aid in community healing), or make their art available as a prop for low-fi self-expression (Rasheed Araeen’s colorful towers of cubes, which you are meant to handle; Dawn Kasper’s transformation of one gallery into a cluttered workshop in which to improvise work), or just present an art of rough DIY edges as if to say, “Hey, take pleasure in the small things.” (Maria Lai’s books bound in bread; Michel Blazy’s display of sports shoes made into planters.)

In that sense—coming full circle to the political “age of anxiety”—Macel’s “Viva Arte Viva” reads as an essay on contemporary art as coping mechanism, turning towards small-scale epiphany as the world outside becomes more menacing.

This compensatory narrative brings us to an issue worth addressing: Compared to the 2015 Enwezor show’s unusual, and exciting, emphasis on artists from Africa, Macel’s roster definitely reorients its conversation around artists living or working in the traditional European center (though it has a nice emphasis on Eastern Europe). At the same time, the show puts a curious accent on works that speak with an almost anthropological voice about non-Western cultures.
Just as Stilinović’s “Artist At Work” series introduces the themes of the Central Pavilion, in the Arsenale section of the show Chile-born artist Juan Downey (1940-1993) sets the tone with his video sculpture, The Circle of Fires Vive (1979): stellae of paired video monitors organized in a low-slung circle, playing identical footage he took while living among an indigenous tribe in Latin America during a sojourn in the '70s.

There’s more work with anthropological themes throughout—but let’s just skip to where the theme reaches its spectacular peak: Brazilian star Ernesto Neto’s Um Sagrado Lugar (A Sacred Place) (2017), a gallery-filling pavilion made of soft, colorful mesh. The work introduces the section Macel has actually dubbed the “Pavilion of Shamans,” proposing that we live in a time where “the need for care and spirituality is greater than ever,” and looking to artists who connect us to the wisdom of Sufism, Buddhism, and, here, indigenous peoples.

Just as Downey’s circle of video monitors was meant to evoke a “shabono,” or gathering place for the Yanomami people, the text beside Neto’s work explains that it was inspired by a “Cupixawa, a place of sociality, political meetings, and spiritual ceremonies for the Huni Kuin Indians.” It is meant to evoke the site of a sacred ayahuasca ceremony—though it mainly ends up as a funky chill-out zone for art tourists.

Downey, for one, was very aware of the dangers of anthropological-style imagery in enforcing stereotypes, and tried to cut against them (though critics have argued that, in the end, he failed to escape a “primitivist” frame). Neto’s Um Sagrado Lugar is accompanied by a sincere written plea to pay attention to the plight of indigenous Brazilians, and a group of tribal members have willingly accompanied him to the Biennale to perform. Someone, however, might have edited the hand-written texts studding the walls around his pavilion to make them sound a little bit less like ‘noble savage’ boilerplate.

Whatever the case for individual artists, taken with the overall percolating ‘healing ritual’ aspects of Macel’s exhibition, this shamanistic sub-theme returns us to what seems a half-thought-through primitivism: offering redemption for a corrupt Western world in the wise Other.

A final, funny thing about this show: My favorite discovery, a 20-minute film by the Canadian artist Jeremy Shaw (b. 1977), could almost serve as an internal critique of “Viva Arte Viva” and its disposition.

Called Liminals (2017), and made specifically for the Biennale, it is a science-fiction pseudo-documentary. A narrator explains the grainy footage: In future times, as the certainty of human extinction comes to weigh more and more on the species, a group called the “Liminals” form a sort of cult, trying to restimulate the parts of their brain that activate the lost sense of religious belief.

They speak their own nonsense language (subtitled in the film). You watch them thrash around in rituals of ecstatic awkwardness—attempting, we are told, to return to a time before the nightmares of the modern world via the ecstatic rituals of an earlier time.

“Our extinction is a quantifiable certainty,” the narrator of Liminals intones at one point. “Thus, the quest of the Liminals, and of periphery Altraist cultures in general, to incite evolutionary advancement in an effort to save humanity is more consistent with the types of reactionary developmental syndromes found in societies during End Times than a plausible attempt for redemption. Nonetheless, their diligence and commitment to such fantastical ideas is rather fascinating.”

The neat thing about Macel’s Biennale in relation to Enwezor’s is that it seems to suggest that certain emphases in contemporary art—on magical thinking, on personal myth, on local epiphany—represent exactly a “reactionary developmental syndrome.” In the face of an unspoken and intractably apocalyptic sense of the world, they look to rekindle forms of imaginary redemption, taking on a slightly unworldly feeling as a result. And it’s true: The commitment to such fantastical ideas is rather fascinating.

What are you waiting for at the Venice Biennial 2017?

Christine Macel, director of the 57th International Art Exhibition of the Biennale, anticipates what we will see at the Arsenal and the Gardens

by Laura Maggi
February 8, 2017

It is like a mantra, but with the advantage of being able to recite it too, the title of the 2017 “Viva Arte Viva” Art Biennial: it wants to emphasize how art is “a yes to life, a garden to grow beyond of the modes and of the specific interests and also represents an alternative to individualism and indifference.” This is stated by Christine Macel, director of the Venice Biennale edition, which will open to the public the traditional spaces of the Arsenal and the Gardens of Venice from 13 May to 26 November. A Biennial who has the art and the artists in the center, presenting “the forms they propose, the questions they ask, the practices they develop, the ways of life they choose,” as it reiterates. French, with an art history trait that is reflected in his choices of rediscovering some of the artists of the past, Macel since 2000 is the Curator of the Museum of Modern Art - Center Pompidou in Paris and has structured the exhibition path in a journey, articulated as an epic poem, developed in a prologue and nine episodes, leading to a direct encounter between authors and visitors.

Starting from the Central Pavilion to reach the Giardino delle Vergini, through the immense Arsenal, in a succession of halls, there are as many rooms and environments “that propose to the spectator an experience, as in a journey.” As a prologue, the Pavilion of artists and books where the practices and the way of working artists, through idleness and action, are investigated, the positive and negative reasons for doing art today in the face of the daily conflagrations and controversies of international reality. Right here, the American Dawn Kasper transfers his studio, living and working on site for the duration of the Biennale, while Danish Olafur Eliasson activates his art workshops.
Emotions and feelings are the theme of the Pavilion of Joy and Fears, while the concept of the collective, the way of building a community is the object of the Common Space Pavilion, which also includes an Open Table where to meet (table, lunch) artists. Utopias and dreams related to the environment, the planet and the natural world are the protagonists of the Pavilion of the Earth where the Japanese group The Play sets up a floating House of the Japanese group, while the Brazilian Erika Verzutti presents a cemetery of animals. Other stages include the Pavilion of Traditions, that of the Shaman where Ernesto Neto reproduces the experiences he lived in the Amazon rainforest, the Dionysius, who celebrates the female body and his sexuality, the Colors, a true and enchanting fire of fire, that of Time and Infinity. Time is, in fact, “one of my obsessions,” says Christine Macel, who in 2008 published a book on the topic Le Temps pris/Time Taken.

Among the parallel projects and the many planned performances, the one called My Library, inspired by Walter Benjamin’s essay in 1931, set up in the Central Pavilion and allowing artists to draw up a list of their favorite readings, tickling the curiosity of the audience.

Confirming the vocation to pluralism of the voices, the exhibition is flanked by 85 national exhibitions in the Historical Padiglions of the Gardens, while the Italian Pavilion at the Tense of the Virgin in the Arsenal is at the head of another art lady, Cecilia Alemani who chose three artists Giorgio Andreotta Calò, Roberto Cuoghi and Adelita Husni-Bey belonging to new generations and international breath.
“For me art is a yes to life,” declared Christine Macel during a press conference held in Berlin in February and recorded by Universes in Universe. “Art is a response to shock, conflict and uncertainty and it has always been a place for freedom, resistance and generosity,” she continued. The two curated exhibitions of ‘Viva Arte Viva’ are nevertheless surprisingly apolitical and only sporadically connected to the struggles of the present.

The exhibitions proposed a focus on the artist and his internal processes. The viewer experiences a sort of time-travel when following the course of the two curated exhibitions. Catapulted in temporal rhythms that are distant from the urgency of the present and plunged into foreign cultural settings, the viewer finds herself in a space without many references. There are a lot of new artists to discover—belonging to younger and older generations—and their approaches are presented through a lens that foregrounds their internal, sensorial, associative, visceral processes of ‘making art’. An emphasis on materiality, colour, and handcrafted products is dominant, as well as a mixed web of references to multiculturalism and spirituality.

The main concept—that of the performance and manufacturing of the ‘self’—is explored in different tones. The atelier appears as an intimate space of return to the self for Mladen Stilinović, Yelena Vorobyeva & Viktor Vorobyev and Dawn Kasper, who set up her own workshop in the main exhibition in Giardini for six months. The object of art is seen as a visual and tangible form of the ‘self’: the production space appears as a collective fabrication site, as in Studio Olafur Eliasson’s contribution, which is meant to facilitate refugee integration in Italy. Art also appears simply as a result of ‘hand-mending’ in Lee Mingwei’s ‘The Mending Project’ or Sheila Hicks’ mass of coloured wool spheres, and in the installation of Irina Korina or that of Cynthia Gutiérrez in the Arsenale. We also encounter psychological incursions into the image and consistency of the self in two referential artists’ profiles: Marwan and Kiki Smith in the Giardini exhibition.

The ‘self’ is staged not only on a personal but also on a cultural level, where the artistic objects become carriers of cultural references and qualities: in the work of Hassan Sharif, the detritus of culture is institutionalized and classified. Multiculturalism meets anthropological approaches in the performance of Lee Mingwei, ‘When beauty visits’, which quotes from a pan-oriental, western-perceived aesthetics and spirituality.

Paradigmatic for this approach is Ernesto Neto’s ‘Sacred Place’ in the Arsenale. Part of a section of Macel’s exhibition called ‘Pavilion of Shamans’, Neto’s net-tent hosts a group of Huni Kuin Indians from Brazil. At the preview of the Biennale, the art viewers, the Indians, and the artist were all squeezed inside the tent, drinking tea and chanting. Visitors were invited to take off their shoes and enter the sacred tent, and to adopt the role of the participant-observer ethnologist. Watching the exotic tribe chief performing a ‘ceremony’ we ask ourselves what is the meaning of an ayahuasca ritual, without the ayahuasca? The installation is functional in another way, as a small station to rest in the midst of the busy exhibition.

The appeal to spirituality seems almost anachronistic, when seen through an organically textured, low-tech, bricollaged mediation that dominates throughout both exhibitions. We are confronted with an ambience that seems to want to lull us into a deep sleep, far from our digital wars. As it seems, many of the installations could function as therapeutic, back-to-the-roots pills of content, but the viewer is urged to ask himself which roots are being referenced, and whether they are still potent in our multi-technological universe?

In an interview by Marco Petricca in February at Ca’ Giustinian, Venezia, Christine Macel affirms that she is not particularly interested in presenting newness, but rather a deepness, which can bring new meanings to contemporaneity, independently of the generation of artists exhibited. With a gracious nod toward the role of Italian culture in Western civilisation, she refers to ‘humanism’ as a direction of thinking and positioning in the world that the contemporary individual should work on. Macel expresses her belief in the Renaissance-based universal function of the artist in constructing contemporary culture and our necessity to exteriorize their universe.

Macel indeed creates a temporality in her curatorial platform, which corresponds rather to an interior pace than to what she calls the ‘hyper-momentarity’ of the present. She pleads in the same interview for the power of this augmented temporality to influence our cognitive capacity positively, bringing forth a new type of information.

The shows are marked by a universalism that, besides recalling the manifold capacities of the artist as uomo universale, also runs the risk of falling into stereotypes. As viewers, we find ourselves cast into the Euro-centric perspective of the intellectual-discoverer, who plunges into foreign ‘traditions’ as sources of wisdom. Warnings of the dangers of exoticization are surprisingly left out. The mix of Dionysian joys and shamanistic traditions and temporalities (to which the pavilion titles inside the Arsenale exhibition refer) is actually far from politically innocent. A longing makes itself felt: not for a missed inner dimension, but rather for a critical vision to shake up an intoxicated society, nourished with what is pictured as an apolitical self.

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Venice Art Biennale 2017 “Viva Arte Viva” | Core Exhibition at Giardini

by Federica Lusiardi
September 16, 2017

Viva Arte Viva, the title of the 57th Venice Art Biennale is an exclamation and a mission statement; it expresses the vision of contemporary art as the “last defense” against indifference, violence, and conflicts of the present world; a “garden to cultivate above and beyond trends and personal interests” as Christine Macel, Artistic Director of the Biennale, says.

Artists’ responsibility - which descends from their capability to guess the trajectories of a future whose outlines are increasingly blurring - is put again at the heart of the Biennale and so are the artists themselves, their work, the questions they pose through their creations, as well as their way of life and the practices they propose. The Core exhibition of the Biennale’s Artistic Director, Christine Macel, does not have a single key theme, it presents instead nine chapters based on the works by the artists invited. Nine groups of artists presented into nine transnational “trans-pavilions”, whose concept once again questions the presence of “national pavilions” at the Biennale.

The first two of the nine trans-pavilions, or chapters, which form the core exhibition of the 57th Venice Art Biennale – the Pavilion of Artists and Books and the Pavilion of Joys and Fears – are located in the Central Pavilion at the Giardini.

The Pavilion of Artists and Books opens with a section centered on the artists’ practice and how they “make art”. The focus is on the concept of Otium, on those inactivity and “mind-wandering” – in contrast to the idea of action – which are necessary and fundamental elements of the process of creating art. Thus, at the beginning of the exhibition, the works of Mladen Stilinović, who advocated laziness as a necessary condition for being an artist and in 1987 made a self portrait of him resting in a bed, are truly paradigmatic.

Therefore, the artist’s workshop and his very life become artworks in themselves yet, unlike in the past, the workshop is today more than a private atelier to exhibit, it’s a space for making art open to contributions from others. This is the case of Dawn Kasper, who moved her workshop in the Chini room of the Central Pavilion – in which she will write and play music interacting with the public throughout the whole Biennale 2017 – and of Olafur Eliasson who, long since involved in projects and initiatives in Africa, has installed a collaborative atelier, named “Green Light – An Artistic Workshop” for creating modular light fixtures, a project at the same time artistic, political, and aesthetic.

The Pavilion of Joys and Fears provides a journey into the relationship between the artist and his own existence. Pieces of view include works by Tibor Hajas and Marwan who both – though in different moments of their artistic career and through different means – chose self-portraits to represent their own impulse to disruption and self-annulment.

Aggressiveness, xenophobia, alienation, discomfort with the world are instead depicted under a different interpretation key – namely through cartoon-like fictional characters and through monsters that both exorcise our fears and make them explicit – by German artist Andy Hope 1930 who, at the Biennale, presents a complex installation made of videos, sculptures, and graphic works.
There are many colors, fabrics and textiles, books and beds, and playfully interactive components among the works by 120 artists at the 2017 Venice Biennale, which opened this week. Just as the title, “Viva Arte Viva,” suggests, the 57th Venice Biennale, curated by Christine Macel, has a celebratory spirit, foregrounding art over discourse. If Okwui Enwezor’s edition of the Biennale two years ago was like an anthology of postcolonial discourse, then Macel’s is like a re-issued collection of world poetry. The 2017 Venice Biennale opens at a time, Macel acknowledges, when the world is “full of conflicts and shocks,” but the French curator presents art as the “last bastion” and, in an explicitly humanist worldview, as “the ultimate ground for reflection, individual expression, freedom, and for fundamental questions.” Macel proposes that “at a time of global disorder, art embraces life, even if doubt ensues inevitably.” You come away from this Biennale not burdened (but also not unburdened) by history, yet uplifted by art’s own discoveries of worlds slightly apart from the ones that bring us so much trouble in our regular lives.

In its primary objective to put art—and artists—first, “Viva Arte Viva” excels, with Macel bringing a commodious, museum-like presentation to the Central Pavilion at the Giardini and the Arsenale. On first impression, the art itself looks good, and it especially looks good when presented all together. The exterior of the Central Pavilion is draped in a colorful fabric—a “drape painting”—titled Yves Klein Blue (2016), by Sam Gillian, an African-American Color Field painter who exhibited in the United States pavilion in 1972, and whom history (and art history) had largely forgotten.

The exterior of the Central Pavillion in the Giardini draped with a colorful fabric work, Yves Klein Blue (2016) by SAM GILLIAN, an American Color Field painter who previously exhibited work in the United States Pavilion. All photos by HG Masters for ArtAsiaPacific
Right inside the door is a tribute to the late Mladen Stilinović (1947–2016), a member of Zagreb’s 1970s experimental art scene, rendered in photographs of the artist lying in bed for a performance series of his cheekily called Artist at Work (1978). Behind the partition in the Sala Chini are the contents of Dawn Kasper’s “nomadic studio,” where a band was jamming. There are also many references to books in the coming rooms: in the lovely paintings of Liu Ye—whose obsession with Mondrian shines in his compositions—which Macel paired with the diaristic scrolls written by Abdullah al-Saadi that the artist keeps in self-customized metal tins, and the ink-soaked volumes by Geng Jianyi, which inhabit the same room as book-embedded wall sculptures by Jonathan Latham. Another ebullient spirit, the late Hassan Sharif (1951–2016) has a room of his own where his eclectic assemblages of plastic and metal objects, tied together with jute or copper wire, sit on metal shelves as if they were in a supermarket. There’s much to be said for artists finding new ways to fashion things from all the mediocre and unlovely things already in the world.

Over at the Arsenale, there’s plenty more color and fabric, as well as artists that have been overlooked by history. This includes the opening pairing of an anthropological video work depicting members of indigenous tribes by the Chilean artist Juan Downey (1940–1993), with Rasheed Araeen’s “Zero to Infinity” series (1968–2007) of colorful stackable cubes. Lee Mingwei has reprised his Mending Project (2009/14), where damaged clothing, donated by members of the public, is being repaired with a rainbow of colorful fabrics. Lee’s work finds its karmic ancestor in David Medalla’s A Stitch in Time, which dates from 1968, in which the artist invites people to donate swatches of fabric (perhaps from their own clothes) by stitching a bit onto a canvas using colorful thread. At the Arsenale, the exhibition is much more obviously demarcated into what Macel calls “trans-pavilions,” thematic clusters such as the “Dionysian Pavilion,” the “Pavilion of the Earth” and the “Pavilion of Colors.” Macel revisits the utopianism and environmentalism of the post-1968 moment through lesser known characters, such as the Japanese collective, The Play, whose collective actions included building a floating house and navigating down the Uji, Yodo and Dojima Rivers between Kyoto and Osaka, first in 1969 and then again in 2011. She revisits Buenos Aires-born artist Nicolas Garcia Uriburu (1937–2016), who in 1968, amid general controversy over the Biennale that year, poured 30 kg of fluorescein into the water of the Grand Canal, turning it green for eight hours. Thu Van Tran’s visually stunning installation of sculptures and photograms looks at the rubber industry in south Vietnam and all the environmental and political disruption it has caused, while Koki Tanaka’s walking project addresses nuclear power, an industry that now haunts Japan. Sopheap Pich’s abstract drawings and a sculpture share the Arsenale corridor with Yee Sookyung’s massive tower of gold-lacquer repaired ceramics, Nine Dragons in Wonderland (2017)—both works are about ideas of “repair.” A plinth featuring Francis Upritchard’s sculptures makes her miniature humans look particularly engaging and poignant. Huguette Caland’s paintings and painted dresses are featured in a section about feminism and the body, while Hale Tenger’s video installation Ballons on the Sea (2011) features balloons floating on the water being shot at, but which nonetheless return, in a metaphorical act of renewal and resistance.

There’s a lot more to chronicle in this 57th Venice Biennale, but there’s a throwback vibe to the idealism of the 1970s, and the internationalism and solidarity of that time. It’s also notable that Macel seems to be navigating a very narrow channel between the art world’s professionalized intellectualization and its commercial industry-ification. This approach is refreshing as there has been a harsh polarization in the art world between art yoked into service of sociopolitical discourse and art that is so often (but sometimes unfairly) exploited by culturally elitist commercial forces. I’m sure both polarized sides will protest Macel’s third way: with one side decrying the Biennale’s lack of overt polemics, while the other side will complain about the absence of Top 100 auction and art-fair bestsellers. But let’s not forget that this Biennale is opening less than a week after a French election when neither the oligarchic conservatives nor the exhausted, faux-progressive “socialists” of François Hollande’s party could mount viable candidates. I was happy to see a lot of art by artists I was unfamiliar with, and to see it so well cared for and brought together in good company. More about the Venice Biennale tomorrow—specifically about the National Pavilions. HG Masters is editor-at-large of ArtAsiaPacific.
Art and civil conscience. The Biennial of Christine Macel

Innovative approach of the French curator, who builds a choral exhibition, recovering the sense of the artistic community dedicated to the beautiful and civil progress.

by Niccolo Lucarelli
May 13, 2017

Venice. Iterum leo rug. After three very consecutive consecutive editions, with dispersive and vaguely self-referential curators, art returns to the Biennale, and through an intelligent female: Christine Macel (Paris 1969), with the sensitivity that distinguishes women (secret holders ancestral of the life of Giorgionesca memory), he conceived a curatorial approach to investigate the ability of art to preserve over time this vital force, to resurrect from the ashes of natural and human disasters, to become a constant spark of civil progress. A generating force that makes art a living reality. This is what Christine Macel wanted to celebrate in Laguna, as a bridge between the audience and the artists, leaving their voice in the center, recognizing civil responsibility. Too often, in the logic of the art market, one forgets how the sense of being an artist should not be limited to producing something with particular aesthetic characteristics. Just behind, there should also be a reflection on reality, existence, politics, love and beauty, so that artworks in their own way make up an ideal library to read with a look and feel with the soul.

The international exhibition, in addition to the spaces of the Arsenal, continues to the Gardens, and is characterized by a wide-ranging setting that allows to appreciate the works - many of them large - without being suffocated by the adjacent ones. But the true novelty lies in the setting for sections, each of which is dedicated to a cultural and anthropological theme, which in turn refers to the roots of humanity, to the archaic idea of art as a form of representation of reality mediated by the idea.

Macel renounces the idea of a single large show, devoting himself to nine small expositions, but a narrative plot in a mosaic is a great charm. There is no order, no history, as is the case with the Marcel Proust cycle. Looking for lost time; and research is also that of Viva Arte Viva, which pushes on the thread of memory to recover the authentic essence of creativity, creativity that can not be avoided by the surrounding environment, understood as planet Earth, as a natural landscape, as resources available, as an air of fire water in the philosophy of Anassimene of
Mileto. As Rem Kolhaas explored the fundamentals of architecture in 2014, Macel investigates the fundamentals of art, and is also concerned with anthropological considerations, as at the bottom of this intelligent exposition lies the idea of art as a vanguard of knowledge, art as sensitivity to new paths. Joys, fears, colors, nature, shamanic and dionysian rites, traditions, written word, time, common space understood as the “polis” of humanity. The artist is immersed in this universe, observes it and then re-elaborates it in the intimacy of his atelier, place of creation, certainly, but also of study. The exhibition opens with a reflection on the relationship between art, knowledge, and the place where it is elaborated by artists; the atelier becomes a crucial place where everything is born, a kind of primal Pangea of ideas, which the creative process clears and makes concrete. The American Dawn Kasper (1977) has recreated his work environment in Venice, halfway between an office and an atelier: The Sun, the Moon and the Stars is a dynamic installation, in which the artist interacts with the public, shows at work, surrounded by a myriad of objects like costumes, disks, musical instruments; the creative environment at its most “chaos”, as well as the prints of the Behold Man series!, in which the American rock star Frances Stark (1967) strikes the audience with a subtle reflection on mass society and gender identity. Two women, Kasper and Stark, who play with determination their role as artists.

Along with these radical approaches, which literally fall into daily life, the introductory section also offers more “classical” reflections, linked to the elaboration of knowledge through the artist’s book, not just a style exercise but also a critical tool: as emerges from the work of Katherine Nuñez (1992) and Issay Rodriguez, Filipino artists who with the installation In between the lines, re-elaborate scholastic learning guides considered excessively notional and set to a functional education logic only in the labor market; with their fabric books with embroidery applications, artists invite “to manipulate the text”, to read “among the rows” as a title, using their own critical sense, without limiting themselves to the pure notion. An installation demonstrating the artist’s importance in society, and the presence of art as a living instrument of decoding reality.

Reality that presents problems of every kind that the individual faces primarily emotionally, and rarely develop his fragility. Fear and joy, at the opposite poles of sensations, dominate this chaotic and contradictory era; from the troubling ambiguity painted by Florence Lai (1984), with her female figures suspended in distressed landscapes of which she is perceived by the stifling silence, the elegant short film created by Rachel Rose (1986), linked to the natural world reinterpreted in a dreamlike dream, a bit like Lewis Carroll. An exploration adventure of a continually changing landscape, as it is this reality.

Going further, Christine Macel has succeeded in setting up an exhibition that considers the historical and civil reach of art and artists, linking it with environmental issues, the idea of common space to be protected, loved, observed, lived and shared; the idea of community, dialogue, knowledge, is superimposed to that of the necessary sensibility to the planet, whose resources are not unlimited. Earth-Mother who finds in the Dionysian Pavilion her iconographic, celebratory and interpretative feminine body: the metaphorical sense is profound, it is a Pavilion to be observed with respect, where the most true nature of art emerges, which is a female in the “audacity with which you look around, in the thrust of generating new perspectives.

From the quality of the works, but also from the layout (which at times suggests a pulsating organism), one perceives the idea of art that breathes in tune with the Earth as an expression that translates into images the beauty of nature and civilization, which originates from Earth. An existentialist exhibition, which emphasizes the role and responsibilities of the individual artist, the need to extract from his own interior the impulses and reflections needed to create and pass on art and culture, and thus progress. To this is added the humanistic cut, which looks to the artist as the protagonist of a creative path, of course, but which also has social and political reflections. A bit on the verge of the Architecture Biennale of 2016, curated by Alejandro Aravena, who had the merit of proposing that social architecture conceived in the real interest of civilization; Christine Macel has also left behind the logic of the elite and the market, leaving room for an art capable of speaking to the common individual, tackling the issues, sharing enthusiasm and fears.
“VIVA ARTE VIVA is the title of the 57th International Art Exhibition in Venice, curated by Christine Macel. The exhibition will be open to the public from Saturday, May 13, to Sunday, November 26, 2017, at the Giardini and Arsenale venues. Flash Art spoke with Christine Macel.

“VIVA ARTE VIVA is a biennial designed with artists, by artists and for artists.” The 120 participating artists and their practices have helped shape the structure of the exhibition around nine “chapters” that constitute moments of pause, reflection and confrontation, offering a range of viewpoints into the artist’s creative process. These include the “Pavilion of Artists and Books,” in which viewers can immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the artist’s studio; “Open Table (Tavola Aperta),” where artists will meet and converse with the audience; “Artists Practices Project,” a series of video projections made by the artists about their way of working; and “Unpacking My Library” – inspired by the eponymous Walter Benjamin essay – in which the artists talk about books that nurtured their process.

What was the reaction of the artists when you invited them to share with the public a more intimate view of their practice?

The artists have responded very positively to all parallel projects. In February we began to upload videos about each artist’s practice to the Biennale website, and this will last until the day before the opening, with more than one hundred videos available. By watching them, one gets the feeling of meeting the artist on a very special level, either through a sort of documentary that shows the studio, or in the moment of the making of a piece, or even through a sort of statement that can be sometimes cryptic but reveals a lot about the way the artist wants to represent his or her way of working.

For instance, the piece by Charles Atlas, in which he has asked a comedian dressed as an old professor to talk about him, is frankly hilarious, and it is in keeping with the heritage of West Coast performance; while the video proposed by Philippe Parreno remains quite mysterious, with an octopus filmed in its aquarium in the studio of the artist, an animal that has always been central to his imagination. The response to “Open Table (Tavola Aperta)” has also been impressive. You will have the chance to follow the process via streaming video – if not seated with the artist over lunch in Venice. This practice of conversation has always been so important for artists and curators that I wanted to extend it to the public, who is outside this reality. The project “Unpacking My Library,” which will be visible in the show as well as the catalogue, is now a sort of giant library to which the national pavilions will also contribute, creating a space to read, hang out or take notes in the Stirling Pavilion of the Giardini. All these books reveal a lot about the artists’ worlds and thoughts. I was, for example, surprised to discover that Senga Nengudi is inspired by Rumi, and this told me a lot about the more spiritual dimension of her practice.

How will the space devoted to creation evolve? From the painter’s atelier to the portable or immaterial studio, artists are constantly traveling around the world for residencies, projects and exhibitions. By presenting an artist’s studio at the Biennale, does it preserve its authenticity? Could the Biennale be a place for a collective production of knowledge?
There won’t be studios, but artworks dealing with the idea of the studio. It is more about representation, about the studio as a theme in the artist’s world. But here the perspective is a bit different. It is not so much about given images of the studio than positions of artists toward the studio as a place for idleness and quite intimate thoughts (otium) or as a sphere open to the public (negotium), with a tension between the necessity of being with oneself and the desire to open the studio to a dimension of communal life. This is visible in the room devoted to Franz West, in works dealing directly with the notion of otium, which was a real issue for him; and in the work of Dawn Kasper, who will move in with her studio in a six-month performance. Olafur Eliasson has created a space for his Green Light project, which evokes his way of working in the studio in Berlin, that is, like a collective laboratory.

Can you share few examples of how some of the fifty-two works realized specifically for the Biennale reveal aspects of the creative process?

The creative process is a point of departure and is developed in the parallel projects. Then, of course, I hope that it will help the viewer to encounter the works with a different approach. This understanding will be deepened through the catalogue, which has more than six hundred pages dedicated just to the artists, with a lot of material, images and texts that tell a lot about their own worlds. The show itself is a sort of organic narrative that goes from the artist toward different dimensions through nine “Trans-Pavilions,” because they are transnationals. It draws a movement of extraversion toward the other, the environment, the unknown, in a sort of gradation. It will engage the viewer in a journey that addresses different dimensions of life, and it should provoke a lot of perceptions and thoughts about the necessity to rethink relationships — even the more speculative ones. Let’s take one example: Abdullah Al Saadi shows some boxes with texts in Arab, his own diaries, in the “Pavilion of Artists and Books.” When you look at his video, you understand how he works, on a small table at home, and you see his relationship to his beautiful and modest natural environment on the mountain of Khorfakkan (UAE). His solitary practice, introverted and also open to the immediate surroundings, from his family to the arid mountains around his house, becomes clearly understandable.

The number of artists participating in the Biennale for the first time is quite surprising (103 out of 120). Some of them are very young, like Katherine Nuñez and Issay Rodriguez from the Philippines (born in 1992 and 1991), while some artists are still largely unknown despite the importance of their work. Is there a convergence between the works of younger artists and works from the 1960s and 1970s? Does an artwork possess a prophetic character?

There are some works from the ’60s and ’70s in the exhibition, carefully chosen, that address some specific issues that I consider crucial for our time and that are in resonance with a lot of contemporary artworks. The “Pavilion of the Common,” for example, clearly shows a lot of older positions dealing with the issue of the common — how to build something in common in a time of strong individualism. Works by artists such as Maria Lai and David Medalla are still valid and being discussed by younger artists like Martin Cordiano, Yorgos Sapountzis or Marcos Ávila Forero.

The exhibition is articulated into nine Trans-Pavilions, whose names are very evocative, in particular “The Pavilion of the Shamans” or “The Dionysian Pavilion.” Is spirituality still alive in contemporary art today? Is it experienced or seen through an anthropological lens?

The anthropological approach has always been crucial for me, and I can see how artists themselves are deeply concerned by this kind of research. María Lai, for example, who is so interested in the ways of living and thinking in her native Sardinia, has rooted her works in her community of Ulassai and also the earth. Juan Downey, Ernesto Neto, Ayrson Heráclito, Abdoulaye Konaté and so many others in this biennial have all developed their work with a deep anthropological concern and a true sensibility toward some specific communities and their social practices. On the other hand, I see a lot of artists dealing with more spiritual dimensions of life. Take the example of Younès Rahmoun, a Moroccan artist based in Tétouan, who has a very conceptual practice based on the idea of the house/ghorfa. His thinking is deeply rooted in Sufism. To develop this type of work he has lived as a hermit under a
staircase in his parents’ house. Again, it is not something new, if you think of On Kawara, for example — his date paintings address the question of time and infinity in a sort of conceptual/metaphysical way. The difference is that our times make these questions even more urgent, again because some artists envision themselves as “missionaries,” as Marcel Duchamp used to say, without any esoterism or reactionary movement against reason, but through a consciousness of a deeper meaning of art and the necessity to transform our reality. Ernesto Neto, for example, after his experience with the Huni Kuins, with whom he lived in Amazonia, said that it is not a time for revolution but for transformation. This can of course be discussed, but it is a significant statement.

In the press release, we read that the pavilions “flow together like chapters of a book” — they are “nine episodes that tell a story.” Is there one (or more) literary source that inspired “VIVA ARTE VIVA”?

Not directly, but I am an obsessive reader, and my own universe is full of books. The show is a show, but the titles I chose for the different chapters, which are not separated physically in the space but are only mentioned in the leaflet like an indication, are indeed like titles of books, more evocative than didactic. I hope they will activate the imagination of the viewers, which are to me, along with the artists, an essential actor in the exhibition.

Original article: http://www.flashartonline.com/2017/05/christine-macel-on-viva-arte-viva-57th-venice-biennale/
Artists strike a chord as music fills the Venice Biennale

Audio installations and sound sculptures take centre-stage at the 57th International Art Exhibition

by Gareth Harris, Javier PES
May 10, 2017

The Venice Biennale opens to the public this weekend (13 May–26 November), but the 57th edition includes so many sound works and sculptures it feels as though the city’s Biennale of Music later in the year (29 September–8 October) has been given a head start—as invited guests discovered this week. Visitors to the French pavilion encounter professional musicians and sound technicians rather than paintings and sculptures as the artist Xavier Veilhan’s Studio Venezia has turned the space into a working recording studio.

The pavilion is fitted with obscure electronic instruments such as the ondes martenot and other equipment lent by (among others) Nigel Godrich, the Radiohead producer. The plywood grotto design draws inspiration from Kurt Schwitters’s lost Merzbau, which Veilhan calls a “benchmark” in installation art. According to the Biennale catalogue: “The artist, present during the seven months of La Biennale, hopes the pavilion becomes a living, breathing space rather than a passive receptacle for predetermined programmes.”

Samson Young, who is representing Hong Kong, has created Songs for Disaster Relief, complete with an outdoor stage area, gold discs and chill-out zone. He riffs on charity singles of the 1980s and 90s, such as USA for Africa’s 1985 charity anthem in We Are the World, as performed by the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions Choir (2017). Young is a trained musician, and his ongoing research into sound, supported by the BMW Art Journey Award, has focused on bell ringing, including at St Paul’s Cathedral in London, he told us.

The Chinese pavilion offers a group show of artists with a shared interest in shadow-play puppet theatre. It includes traditional musicians, many of them elderly, who can be seen wandering in the garden of the Arsenale between performances.

Carlos Amorales’s installation in the Mexican pavilion, also in the Arsenale, is regularly animated by musicians playing the shard-like pottery pipes, or octarines, like those the artist has created for Life in the Folds.

Cevdet Erek fills the Turkish pavilion with an exhibition titled ÇIN, an onomatopoeic Turkish word for a metallic bell sound and also the effect of tinnitus. It’s one noisy experience.

Also in the Arsenale, this time outside the former naval complex buildings, an audio and highly tactile sculpture by the Polish artist Alicja Kwade is proving irresistible to Biennale visitors. Monumental spheres of polished stones of variable dimensions and different colours resemble a cluster of planets, arranged as if they were billiard balls rather than in any orbit around the sun. Called Pars pro Toto (2017), Kwade’s special project was commissioned by the curator of the main show, Christine Macel. It includes sounds—sometimes gentle, sometimes dramatic—that seem to come from the constellation of stone.

The French-born artist Kader Attia turns to Arab golden age singers from his childhood for his Narrative Vibrations piece in Viva Arte Viva. The work is a comment on a lesser known aspect of postcolonial popular...
culture. It comprises a multichannel installation showing vintage concert recordings of female superstars, such as the Algerian singers Reinette l’Oranaise and Meriem Fekkai. The rise and fall of their voices causes couscous placed on connecting circular trays to jump and vibrate (the electromagnetic waves in the songs make the grains move).

Macel, the chief curator of the Centre Pompidou, has also included the 96-year-old US choreographer Anna Halprin’s Planetary Dance (1961-2017). Videos of annual performances of the group-healing ritual in locations ranging from San Francisco to Marseille will be screened in the Arsenale, and live performances of the happy-clappy event will also take place.

Macel has often worked in the past with artists who use sound and music as a medium. She organised the French pavilion in the 2013 Venice Biennale, when the artist Anri Sala combined two pieces of music by Ravel. For Viva Arte Viva’s Pavilion of Traditions, Sala has created a large-scale wall work, All of a Tremble (Encounter 1), combining two designs for printed wallpaper and the patterns’ roller, which he has converted into a novel musical instrument. The patterns are “played” as the steel combs are plucked, like a giant musical box, creating a surprisingly harmonious piece.

Percussive sound, of a loud, clashing, rock music sort, stops visitors in their tracks at the very start of Viva Arte Viva in the Giardini’s Central pavilion, when the US artist Dawn Kasper feels in the mood. Under an ornate dome, a garage band studio seems to have popped up, where Kasper performs on an array of instruments. Her work The Sun, The Moon, and the Stars (2017) is part of her Nomadic Studio Project, which she has moved to Venice for the duration of Macel’s main show. This means the first Pavilion of Artists and Books is rarely a hushed, library or traditional museum-like space. More of Kasper’s favourite music, live and recorded, is guaranteed.

Original article: http://theartnewspaper.com/reports/artists-strike-a-chord-as-music-fills-the-venice-biennale/
Venice Biennale round-up: A rainbow thread of optimism

This edition is politically light and playful, a riposte to the sombre tone of 2015


A pack of caged Dobermans howl at visitors to the German pavilion, hurling themselves against the wire netting where acrobatic performers in black insouciantly balance to artist Anne Imhof’s instructions. Inside, Imhof has replaced the floor with a slippery glass platform threatened from below by flaming cigarettes, and makes nervous outsiders of us all.

Competing with the dogs, the French have pianists on baby grands, drummers, an opera singer soaring to Puccini, in a pavilion transformed by Xavier Veilhan and Christian Marclay into supremely elegant recording studios open to everyone, interspersed with fantastical cardboard models of Venetian lutes and rock guitars: a metaphor for harmony of voices, and as invitingly chic as a Left Bank bar.

National identity remains a piquant, near illicit charm in today’s Venice. Embodying the geopolitical order in 1895, when the Biennale was launched, the British pavilion stands atop the main Giardini drag, flanked by France and Germany. Between their super-lively performances, Phyllida Barlow’s deliberately clumsy, solid, stolid, mashed-up columns, outsize cardboard loo rolls and randomly nailed boards cannot but look an old-fashioned embarrassment. Her piece is called “Folly”, but no conceptual chat about collapse can save it.

Following Okwui Enwezor’s dark 2015 edition, 2017’s Biennale is politically light and playful, thriving on undercurrent, implication, cross-discipline, frissons of fun. The Korean pavilion is a neon motel advertising “free orgasm”. Tunisia offers couscous and mock visas. Romania lifts the spirits with 91-year-old Geta Bratescu’s recent brilliant-hued cut-outs “Game of Forms”.

The tone is set by this year’s director, Pompidou curator Christine Macel. Young, liberal and global in outlook, optimistic, socially aware, determined to give fresh efforts a hearing yet something of an unknown herself, Macel is the art world’s Emmanuel Macron.

Her title “Viva Arte Viva”, ebullient but banal, reflects her international exhibitions: generous, low on ideas, high on audience participation, sometimes smacking of the smug, art-world insider, overwhelmingly feel-good, open to all media. For the first time in years this Biennale celebrates fine under-the-radar painters: Liu Ye’s jewel-like book paintings with upside-down classic titles and art histories - Lolita, Mondrian - questioning how we read; the sumptuously distorted faces of Syrian-German expressionist Marwan, who died in 2016.

Inaugurating the Giardini with Sam Gilliam’s saturated blue and turquoise fabrics fluttering over the entrance like sails - this is a homage to Yves Klein’s glowing ultramarine monochromes, evoking 1960s optimism - Macel begins with a riposte: Oscar Murillo’s black banners hung here in 2015, announcing Enwezor’s pessimistic (though compelling) vision. This time, minutes in at the Arsenale, too, you are caught up in joyful, billowing threads: sit down with Taiwan-born, Paris-based, impeccably tailored artist Lee Mingwei, and he will stitch your torn clothes
in his delightful “Mending Project”, then attach each item by a single strand to a huge wall of coloured reel. Together the filaments form a vibrant gossamer rainbow, fragile but taut, more radiant with every new hue: unity in diversity, process not product, the potential of change.

The Arsenale drips fabric works. They pour gloriously from high wooden beams: Ernesto Neto’s immersive transparent cotton and jute tent “A Sacred Place”, packed with soil, plants, cushions, scents, songs. They are suspended over rough brickwork: Petrit Halilaj’s exquisite sculptures in Kosovan cloth of giant moths and flickering lights, one furry-footed insect flopped to the ground, its lovely patterning the more poignant and visible. David Medalla’s hammock “A stitch in time” is draped between columns. Cynthia Gutiérrez’s pre-Hispanic woven textiles referencing conquered communities lie on the ground as acts of resistance in “Cántico del descenso”. Maria Lai’s photographs of a performance staged with inhabitants of her native Ulassai, Sardinia, threading ribbons house to house, enact a folk tale about a little girl who thus rescued her village from a falling mountain.

Macel organises her show into sections (“Pavilion of the Earth”, “Pavilion of Colours”, “Pavilion of Time and Infinity”), but these mean little. Crystalline throughout, however, are her overarching themes: only connect, unwind hierarchies. Thread and fabric enshrine concepts of co-operation, and at the Arsenale poetry and sensuous materiality carry the message.

At the Giardini things are more vexed, with too much tedious art about art. Taus Makhacheva’s video describes carting crates of paintings across Dagestan’s mountains. Dawn Kasper trills her recorder occasionally in “The Nomadic Studio Practice Experiment”, explaining to visitors, “We’re just hanging out.” Bands of conceptualists led by Mladen Stilinovic’s sleeping self-portrait photographs, “The Artist at Work”, advocate Duchampian laziness.

This jars when the next gallery is Olafur Eliasson’s “Green Light”, an orchestration of migrant volunteers, the men mostly black, handsome, smiling, the women, some in hijabs, chatty and engrossed; all are working to fabricate lamps to a design by Eliasson, to be sold to benefit Venice’s refugees. “I just want to be doing something,” one man told us. I felt sickened by this human zoo, but it has become a hub: the most popular, peopled place in the Giardini.

How to dovetail art and social activism: the question of the age, paradoxically fuelled by the commercial success of activists such as Eliasson and Sharon Lockhart, who documents working with troubled teenage girls in Rudzienko at the very dull Polish pavilion.

The model must be Mark Bradford, the 6ft 7in black artist representing America who towers aesthetically, imaginatively, morally here. Bradford has a “Process Collettivo” with prisoners in Venice, but he keeps such projects separate from his art, which is very beautiful, fiercely engaged with social reality, and rigorously unites form, media, subject.

Bradford has littered the front of his pavilion’s mini-White House with rubble, and you enter at the side, immediately confronted by a sculpture - boat? Whale? Architectural wreck? - in Bradford’s characteristic bleached, soaked, painted paper, with blotchy encrustations and gestural marks across disjointed surfaces held with roofing tiles. This is “Spoiled Foot”, so large that it forces you into corners before you emerge into galleries of inky black paintings with the depths of water.

The subterranean mood, caught between ruin and discovery, equally referencing Venice and America’s new political reality, continues in the rotunda, with walls ripped and sculpted paper pouring from the roof in serpentine black twists - an accompanying sculpture is called “Medusa”. It is also evident in grand gold-red textural abstractions that are by turns frightening - the hint of a split bloody head “Go Tell It on the Mountain” - and elated, in “105194” and “Tomorrow is Another Day”, suggesting both cells and galaxies. So base materials are transcended by the alchemy of hope, and the experience of this single pavilion is worth a visit to Venice.

Original article: http://wantedonline.co.za/society/the-arts/2017-05-16-venice-biennale-round-up-a-rainbow-thread-of-optimism/
Artsy and IBS Create 360° Films in Celebration of the 57th International Art Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia

May 4, 2017

NEW YORK (BUSINESS WIRE) - May 4, 2017-- Artsy in collaboration with UBS today released the first film in a multi-part 360° documentary series “Inside the Biennale” exploring the 57th Venice Biennale. In the spirit of increased access to the world’s premier art exhibition, these films will build on the success of Artsy and UBS’s first collaboration, an 11-part series on the 2015 Venice Biennale, providing a global audience an insider’s glimpse of the Biennale’s most engaging art, personalities, and performances.

Featuring luminary artists and curators including Cecilia Alemani, Carol Bove, Dawn Kasper, Massimilano Gioni, Christian Marclay, Francis Uprichard, Erwin Wurm, and more, the films will transport viewers from studios, galleries, and institutions around the world to the iconic city, delving deep into the Biennale buzz as Venice prepares for the exhibition’s opening. Filmed “in the round,” the films will provide viewers a unique, immersive view of the city and exhibition.

The first 360° film explores the story of the Venice Biennale through the perspectives of several artists and curators as they create artworks and prepare installations that will be on view at the Biennale’s national pavilions. Following today’s launch, additional films will be released on Artsy through the first months of the Biennale.

This is the fifth iteration of Artsy and UBS’s partnership, following collaborations on a series of films focused on the 2015 Venice Biennale; Year in Art editorial features from 2015 and 2016; and a four-part film series lifting the curtain on the art market, which debuted last year.

“We’re proud to be collaborating again with UBS, a partner that shares our dedication to providing greater access to the world’s most influential artists and exhibitions,” said Sebastian Cwilich, Artsy’s President and CCO. “The Venice Biennale is a uniquely important cultural moment and we’re excited to share it with Artsy’s millions of monthly visitors in this cutting-edge new format.”

Artsy commissioned virtual reality studio Scenic to direct the films, which will be viewable on both desktop and mobile, as well as through an enhanced viewing experience in virtual reality headsets. To accompany the films, Artsy tapped artists Erwin Wurm and Dawn Kasper to design limited-edition cardboard virtual reality viewers, which will be distributed in Venice.

To view the films go to http://www.artsy.net/venice-biennale/toward-venice

The 57th International Art Exhibition, titled Viva Arte Viva, opened to the public on Saturday, May 13. We were lucky to have press credentials so we headed to the Giardini on May 11 to check out the sprawling international group exhibition curated by Christine Macel (France), before checking out the 86 National participation historic Pavilions, which were located at the Giardini, at the nearby Arsenale warehouse space, and also proliferating across the city of Venice in satellite locations.

Here is some of the work that we saw on the first day in the Main Pavilion.

Photos by Cara Ober, Kelly Zimmerman, and Sherri Fisher.

Dawn Kasper, American: Installation and Site Specific Performance, an amazing spot for a recording studio, under the dome.

(above and below)

Original article: http://www.bmoreart.com/2017/05/verniissage-week-in-venice-main-pavilion.html
Review of the Art Biennale 2017: United States

by Katia
June 1, 2017

The United States is very well represented at the ‘Viva Arte Viva exhibition’ of Christine Macel, with 18 artists on a total of 120: Charles Atlas, McArthur Binion, Sam Gilliam, Anna Halprin, Sheila Hicks, Dawn Kasper, Sam Lewitt, Dan Miller, Peter Miller, Senga Nengudi, Eileen Quinlan, Rachel Rose, Judith Scott, Nancy Shaver, Bonnie Ora Sherk, Frances Stark, Michelle Stuart, John Waters.

The pavilion of the United States plays on your perception right from the start. First, you have to use the small side door instead of the main entrance. As soon as you entered, you’re confronted with a huge installation (Spoiled Foot) which blocks the room almost completely. When you have to walk against the wall to pass it, you get the impression that you aren’t supposed to be there. It is certainly a way to attract the attention to the installation of Mark Bradford. The next rooms show a few large and colourful paintings and two additional installations. The last installation (Saturn Returns), a painted decoration on the ceiling of the small connecting room, made me think of the pantheon in Rome.

Mark Bradford is known for his social engagement. In Venice, he supports a project which employs the prisoners of the city. Unfortunately, besides the brochure at the entrance, there is no reference to the project inside the pavilion. They also don’t sell these handmade bags, so you can only buy them in the city center.

The United States pavilion is one of my favourites and is therefore one of the 8 pavilions you cannot miss at the Art Biennale 2017.

Original article: https://www.theveniceinsider.com/art-biennale-2017-united-states/
Artists will be the protagonists of La Biennale di Venezia

by Ilona Catani Scarlett
March 17, 2017

Artists and their creative acts will be the focus of Viva Arte Viva, the 57th edition of La Biennale di Venezia, which will open on May 13 until November 26. To adhere to the central idea of this edition of the art exposition Paolo Baratta, president of the institution, recruited the French curator Christine Macel.

Marcel has a completely different approach from her predecessor, Okwui Enwezor: less ideological and less obsessed by novelties, more alarmed by the dangers facing humanism in a world flattened by technology and conflicts. “After what happened in the last year all over the world – a world full of conflicts and regressive forces (is she thinking about Trump’s presidency? e.d.) – I’m happy to bring back the artist to the center of the scene. – she says – My Biennale questions what an artist is, what he/she does, what he/she feeds on, what he/she thinks…”

The Central pavilion will be dedicated to the phenomenology of creation, but also to the Latin concept of otium, “which is at the basis of the research.” Here you will see Franz West in Falstaff style resting, or thinking, on a couch and Dawn Kasper will transfer her studio here for six months. In the Book pavilion the 25-year-old Philippine Katherine Nunez & Issay Rodriguez will illustrate the rediscovery of volumes and the desertion of e-books. The works of Sardinian Maria Lai will be in the Communities pavilion, together with the ones of the doyen of the exhibition, 96-year-old choreographer Anna Helprin. In the Earth pavilion there will be the houseboat of the Japanese group The Play. Other pavilions will be dedicated to Fears, Traditions, Shamans, Dionysius, Color and Time.
The Venice Biennale, The Serene Art

With no less than 87 national pavilions and an international exhibition that reactivates the utopian aesthetics of the 70s, the 57th edition of the major artistic rendezvous is a maze that favors gestures without noise.

by Judicaël Lavrador
March 14, 2017

What a place for the Venice Biennale, which is still the first to be dreamed of, but caught in the overloaded calendar of the 2017 circuit of contemporary art, between a very political Documenta open in Athens in early April and soon in Cassel (read Libération du 10 avril) the hysteria of Art Basel (in Basel, because precision is now important) and before the very serious and decennial Skulptur Projekt in Münster? Launch pad for emerging artists? Ultimate walk before the pantheonization of confirmed figures? Laboratory of contemporary art, always so fond of this experimental cape? Showcase for private foundations, more and more numerous to open their own pavilion on the edge of the Grand Canal? The oldest of biennials, 87 national pavilions this year, official and parallel collateral events galore, would not be all that at once without there being some heaviness somewhere - if only in the legs of the visitor, but also in the bombastic and megalomaniac exhibition of the masto and kitsch sculptures of a Damien Hirst to the Pinault Foundation. And, more seriously, the gravity of the international context in which this edition opens.

It is in considering this situation, “a world full of conflicts and traumas”, that Christine Macel, curator of the international exhibition that unfolds in the Giardini and Arsenale, inscribes art, as “the last bastion, a garden to cultivate beyond or below personal fashions and interests. It represents one of the unequivocal alternatives against individualism and indifference, she writes in the first lines of her statement of intent. His exhibition, “Viva arte viva”, a title in the form of a cry of the heart, or enthusiastic clamor, carries this faith convincingly, without sometimes avoiding a form of sneer and good feelings, but always relying on artists, their way of expressing themselves, their method, their timing. In other words, the commissioner does not place great theories on the doorstep of the Biennale, no great visions that would overhang and accessorize the works. She’s waiting for the artists.

Sew the link
They are not always on time. At the beginning of the exhibition of the international pavilion, Mladen Stilinovic appears sleeping in the studio (Artist at Work) an act conceived at the time (1978) by the Serbian as a “passive resistance to the absorption by politics”. And also, paradoxically, a way of working. This eulogy of idleness as a source of inspiration, slow and not dazzling, returns in a loop in the following rooms. There, art does not stand at all at all costs. The opening sequence of scenes of drowsiness, far from an entry in matter with fanfare, also brings into the exhibition the intimacy of the artist and his place of creation. In the international pavilion, the young Dawn Kasper has also moved her studio, her computers and her couch, performing her mini-sketches of living sculpture when he sings. The artists are here at home. Which does not imply that they are alone. Hospitaller, Olafur Eliasson activates a workshop, where are produced in an alternative workshop atmosphere of Green Lights from recovery materials. Some national pavilions also cultivate the form of the studio. Starting with the French pavilion, reassigned in recording studio by Xavier Veilhan. Caulked in a wooded architecture with architectural angles, singular musical instruments, are made available to a beautiful list of musicians who will succeed there until the end of November.
Out of bed, the artist is the one who, in a lively process, initiates collaborative and participative works whose artistic virtue is no more and no less than its humanistic aim, retaining links between people, sustainably. The Biennial brings to the fore these acts, often tenuous and long remained discreet, artists in search of harmony, involved in living together. Sewing the link: Christine Macel takes the expression at the foot of the thread because the beginning of the Arsenale is a sewing workshop. If the Taiwanese Lee Mingwei is wearing torn garments before you, the American David Medalla, reactivating his itinerant device started in 1968, lets you sew your thoughts and small pieces of paper on a long sheet. Weaving, embroidery, knits are the modest stars of a whole section of this Biennale. From Maria Lai to Michele Ciacciofera and to the wall where Sheila Hicks pours a multicolored cascade of big pompoms, the Arsenale is adorned with a soft, cozy and cozy side.

So many soft-textured pieces that do not want to stay straight or stiff. On the contrary, they prefer to hang from the ceiling, dragging carelessly, but not without grace or sweetness. Suddenly, in space, the works wind, unfold, unfold or fold. By force, however there is a catch: it does not stretch. It sags a hair. The hanging draws a landscape a little too peaceful and peaceful - not without relief, certainly, but without asperity or head beyond. We do not feel a desire to vary excessively the formats of the pieces. The great majority of them all respect the same scale, average. And indeed, no one pulls the sheet to her.

Hippie fiber
Anti-star (system), the Biennale plays this democratic credo even in its casting. The protagonists are for the most part that the history of art will have gone under the carpet, and especially women. “Viva arte viva” thus proclaims this compelling desire to revive in the open the works of Huguette Caland (born in 1931) or, on the other side, vis-à-vis, that of the Swiss Heidi Bucher, dead in 1993. His species of latex dresses painted in bright hues, as if stuck on the wall, take on a texture that is both fleshy and fossilized. The naked silhouettes revealed as much as they were concealed by Caland in the intertwining of a checkerboard motif, echoed nearby, in the central span, the lattice nets hanging from the ceiling of the youngest Leonor Antunes.

This exhibition is (in part) a biennial of discoveries in reverse, which in the 70s draws their community utopias and their hippie fiber - enough to make the art enjoy a makeover. If there are no stars (market), early young hatched, especially new technologies and staging a post-Internet aesthetic where the world can see itself only through the images filtered by the Internet, it is certainly a choice, that of an alternative. Christine Macel deliberately leans for an art that sticks to life, supports it, changes it, and not for art forms that turn away from it, surpass it or even ignore it in favor of the virtual and individualism. “After all,” she writes in her text of intentionart may not have changed the world, but there remains the ground where this one can be reinvented “. How? The recipes are to be drawn from the optimism of an era that was thought to be dated, out of date, that of the 70s, represented here by a series of works in the form of generous and gratuitous contributions of the artist to the people, to the nature, to the joy of living, to harmony, to inner peace, to the quest for spirituality, to well-being. It is the processions and meals to be shared in color that Dorothee Selz and her acolytes staged in the 70’s, the rounds that were formed naked in a militant spirit and ecologist under the direction of Anna Halprin (97 years), or the breeding of chickens and agricultural crops, which was devoted from 1974, a few kilometers from San Francisco, on a plot of 3 hectares purchased by Bonnie Ora Sherk, an artist who documents in Venice this trip neo-rural.

Fantasy accents
At the Biennale, among the few young artists who reanimate this spirit and convincingly reinvent this role, we can mention the Frenchman living in Colombia Marcos Ayila Forero, who is filming a ritual he himself has, with the help of researchers, exhumed from the intangible heritage forgotten, and that is to beat the water of the river by emitting a bass sound that sounds like a signal. Or that of Marie Voignier, filming, while contained rage, a former safari guide, leafing through his book of memories in which his clients pose alongside their corpses, the remains of big cats and horns of elephants. Still, the most convincing succession unfolds under more phantasmatic accents, like Pauline Curnier Jardin and her video, a bewitching approach to the grotesque erotico-demonic.
Finally, the lack of tension in the hanging as in the consistency of the pieces, the Arsenale, also said the state of mind of this Biennal very foreign to any form of struggle, criticism or frontal challenge. In contemporary art, this attitude, docile and benevolent, courageous rather than vindictive, proceeding little by little, rather than making a clean sweep, murmuring rather than eructing, is probably not the most popular, nor the most shown. The proof: the golden lion of the best national flag has returned to the most clingy and at least accommodating of all. For the German Anne Imhof, in her black and anxiety choreography, embraces a cruel and vicious tone to dull violence, when on the contrary, the international proposal of Christine Macel flees.

Without the same strike force, but few pavilions had this year - apart from the Swiss with the docu-fiction Flora, recounting the fate of Giacometti’s lover, or the incredible sculptures of the Englishman Phyllida Barlow, or even the translucent panels of the Portuguese José Pedro Croft, redesigning the landscape -, Cinthia Marcelle receives a special mention for the Brazilian pavilion which she inclines the ground and the pebble, with in the background an urban video, a bit predictable. In contrast to the very discreet sound that resonates in the gardens of the Arsenale, and that is worth to its author, the Egyptian Hassan Khan, the silver lion of the best young artist. Golden Lion for his contribution to the international pavilion “Viva arte viva”, the German Franz Erhard Walther (born in 1939) presented textile sculptures encompassing the body of the spectator. Finally, Charles Atlas (born in 1949), author of a video starring a New York drag queen and abusing special effects, inherits a special prize, as well as Kosovar Petrit Halilaj, 31, for his enchanting and graceful works weaving history of his country and his childhood memories. A work whose lightness moved best reflect the spirit of the international exhibition.

Translated from French.
Venice Art Biennale 2017 – Giardini

by Heinrich Schmidt
May 10, 2017

The 57th International Art Exhibition in Venice (Italy), organized by La Biennale di Venezia, is titled “Viva Arte Viva”. Curated by Christine Macel, the exhibition runs until November 26th 2017, at the Giardini and the Arsenale venues. The show features 120 artists from 51 countries; 103 of these are participating for the first time. This video provides you with a virtual tour of the Central Pavilion in the Biennale’s Giardini, which presents works by Dawn Kasper, Franz West, Olafur Eliasson, John Latham, Philippe Parreno, Cerith Wyn Evans, among others.

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If you begin at the beginning of the 2017 Venice Biennale exhibition, “Viva Arte Viva,” you might think this is a show primarily about artists’ sleeping habits.

The vast exhibition, assembled by the Centre Pompidou’s chief curator Christine Macel, brings together 120 artists and collectives—70 percent of whom are making their Biennale debut—and opens in the Giardini’s Central Pavilion with a series of self-portraits of an artist idly passing time in bed.

This interest in the spaces where artists do nothing but gestate and ideate extends to American artist Dawn Kasper’s piece, for which she’s transplanted her whole studio into the pavilion, complete with a drum kit, work tables piled with art and scraps, and the artist herself, milling around, chatting to people, and fiddling with her work from time to time.

In these opening rooms, the rather vague claims of Macel’s Venice Biennale to being about artists, for artists, begin to take (very literal) form. This loose premise is a jumping-off point to reflect on the nature of creativity and to make an argument for the value of the artist, even the value of inefficiency, as one wall text alludes to, as a vital origin point for new ideas.
What’s the best way to understand art? One tactic is to see a lot of it. Another is to spend time with artists. And yet another is to curate an entire show around the idea that artist practices are God’s gift to the world and include as many studios, meditations on studios, and virtual studio renderings as humanly possible. Guess which approach Biennale curator Christine Macel takes in the Giardini section. A look at the show below.