

La Biennale

Tobias Verlende
is in Venice



Arriving on a sunny summer afternoon in the wonderful city of Venice—in which each building, each church or small water channel reminds one of all the culture and history of the last 2000 years—is an experience of art already. I have the impression that an artist could probably put a small stone on top of another and I'd easily find it beautiful in this atmosphere.

This year, Venice sees its 51st International Arts Exhibition, organized by the Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia. The first international art exhibition here opened 110 years ago in 1895. This year marks the largest number of national participants in the history of the Biennale: 70 countries present 30 exhibitions in the pavilions in the Giardini and 40 in other venues in the historic centre, involving the entire city. Many countries are participating for the first time in the Biennale like Afghanistan, Albania, Morocco, the Republic of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. For the first time in its longstanding history, the Biennale is this year directed by two directors, Maria de Corral and Rosa Martinez—art historians, critics and curators from Spain.

The Biennale event is divided into two exhibitions in two different locations. One is the exhibition at the Giardini della Biennale, curated by Maria de Corral, titled “The Experience of Art,” which shows art trends and contemporary art. It is hosted in 34 rooms and presents 42 international artists and shows numerous paintings, videos and installations, most of them created especially for the Biennale. They represent the trends in the development of various languages.

Among all these wonderful works in the numerous pavilions, there are three artists that deserve a special mention. One of these is the absolutely impressive installation of the artist Manfredi Beninati in the Italian pavilion—titled *Prendere appunti per un sogno da iniziare di pomeriggio e continuare la notte (e che non si cancella al risveglio)*—from 2005. One could easily miss this work, since it's hidden behind a dirty, old mirror in the corner of a small room. I saw many visitors who just looked at the “mirror” or “old painting” and then went on to the next piece of art. I admit that this could have also happened to me but the visitor before me put his face so close to the “mirror” that I assumed there must be something behind it. If you move very close, you

will get a glance of the fantastic installation which is in a hidden room only seen through the painting. The room is an old living room from a different time, a forgotten world. The viewer gets the feeling of peeking into a secret room that has not been entered in a long time and the mystery lies in all of the objects around.

Another remarkable work is the installation by José Damasceno. It bears the title *Durante o caminho vertical*. It is an installation that occupies a whole room and leaves a special impression on the viewer. Damasceno builds trees that reach the ceiling out of the paper sides of books. Lastly, the artist Matthias Weischer should be mentioned for his oil on canvas paintings in the Italian pavilion. What is the most interesting is the theme Weischer chooses for his works. For example, the very large painting *Automat* which shows in a wonderful colourful way a pinball machine. The special effect comes clearly from very wild and active way in which the artist uses his paintbrush.

The second exhibition is in the 9,000 square meters of the Corderie and the Artiglierie of the Arsenale. Curated by Rosa Martinez, “Always a little further,” looks into the future of art. Forty-nine international artists offer an overview of the latest trends through videos, sculptures and installations made for these specific venues. Rosa Martinez explains: “The exhibition constitutes a test to present artists and aesthetic trends at the beginning of the new millennium and the visit to the Arsenale becomes a fragmentary and exciting voyage to discover the zones of light and shadow in our convulsive world.”

In addition to the two main exhibitions there are several installations in relation to “The experience of Art” and “Always a little further” in the outdoor exhibition areas and across the city centre. In addition to that, a special project, sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Biennale, has been installed on the bank in front of the entrance to the Giardini, which hosts a gigantic work by Fabrizio Plessi entitled *Mare verticale*, which is 44 meters high. It was presented at the International Exhibition in Hanover in 2000, and will subsequently be exhibited in China in 2006. □

Manfredi Beninati, *Prendere appunti per un sogno da iniziare di pomeriggio e continuare la notte (e che non si cancella al risveglio) ovvero svegliarsi su una spiaggia sotto il sole cocente*, 2005. Photo:Giorgio Zucchiatti.