

Biennale 2019: Art and Science

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Abstract: Numerous projects of the 58th Venice Biennale are dedicated to science-related themes. The Austrian Pavilion addresses questions at the interface between art and philosophy, the Icelandic Pavilion is dedicated to the psychological effects of colours. Videos and installations in the Canadian and Greek Pavilions deal with traditions in historiography. The Research Pavilion focuses on the relationship between art and ecology. Installations and large-scale sculptures in the Central Pavilion and the Arsenale reflect the close collaboration between artists, scientists and engineers.

May You Live in Interesting Times

The 58th Venice Art Biennale which takes place from 11 May to 24 November 2019 has been curated by Ralph Rugoff, Director of the Hayward Gallery London. The event titled *May You Live in Interesting Times* comprises 87 national pavilions and numerous other exhibitions throughout town (eventi collaterali). The title does not refer to the well-known Chinese curse of the same wording which implies that you will suffer from misfortune in later life if you are born at an inopportune time. Rather, the motto is intended to encourage us to live in the present, to recognize the signs of the times and to act accordingly. Several contributions of Biennale artists are dedicated to science-related themes or reflect cooperations between artists and scientists.

The Central Pavilion and the National Pavilions

At the entrance of the Central Pavilion in the historic Giardini area of the Biennale, visitors are engulfed by thick wafts of mist. The project by Lara Favoretto is meant to present art as a physical experience which stimulates all senses and makes its presence felt. According to curator Ralph Rugoff, the pavilion serves as a kind of brain which captures the visitors' thoughts through the fog. The visitors are meant to look at everyday realities from new angles and thereby change their view of the world.

One of the most impressive works in the Central Pavilion is the installation *Can't Help Myself* by Chinese artists Sun Yuan and Pen Yu. The robot, several meters high, was built by the German mechanical engineering company KUKA in a close cooperation between artists, scientists and technicians. Its programs entail 32 different motion sequences which lead to continuous wiping of a viscous blood-like liquid in a glass cabin. The installation evokes a variety of associations. According to the artists, the work symbolizes the control of a person over a machine while there is no control over the person himself/herself and his/her thoughts.



Sun Yuan/Pen Yu: *Can't Help Myself* (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

The German Pavilion

Natascha Sadr Haghighian who is Professor of Sculpture teaching in Bremen uses the pseudonym Natascha Süder Happelmann for her Biennale work. She designed the German Pavilion which was opened by German Foreign Secretary Heiko Maas. Her aim is to dissociate her work as an artist from its representative function and political instrumentalization. Playing with issues of identity, Natascha Sadr Haghighian covers her head with a paper shell resembling a stone during public appearances and she communicates exclusively through her spokeswoman Helene Duldung. Her installation *Ankersentrum* consists of an arrangement of stones and an increasingly fragile dam wall which is accompanied by a

concert for whistles. The work serves as visualization of the fear of flooding felt by many Germans. The aims of the project are the integration of different channels of perception and a critical reflection of socio-political issues such as migration and crisis of identity.



German Foreign Secretary Heiko Maas opens the German Pavilion (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.



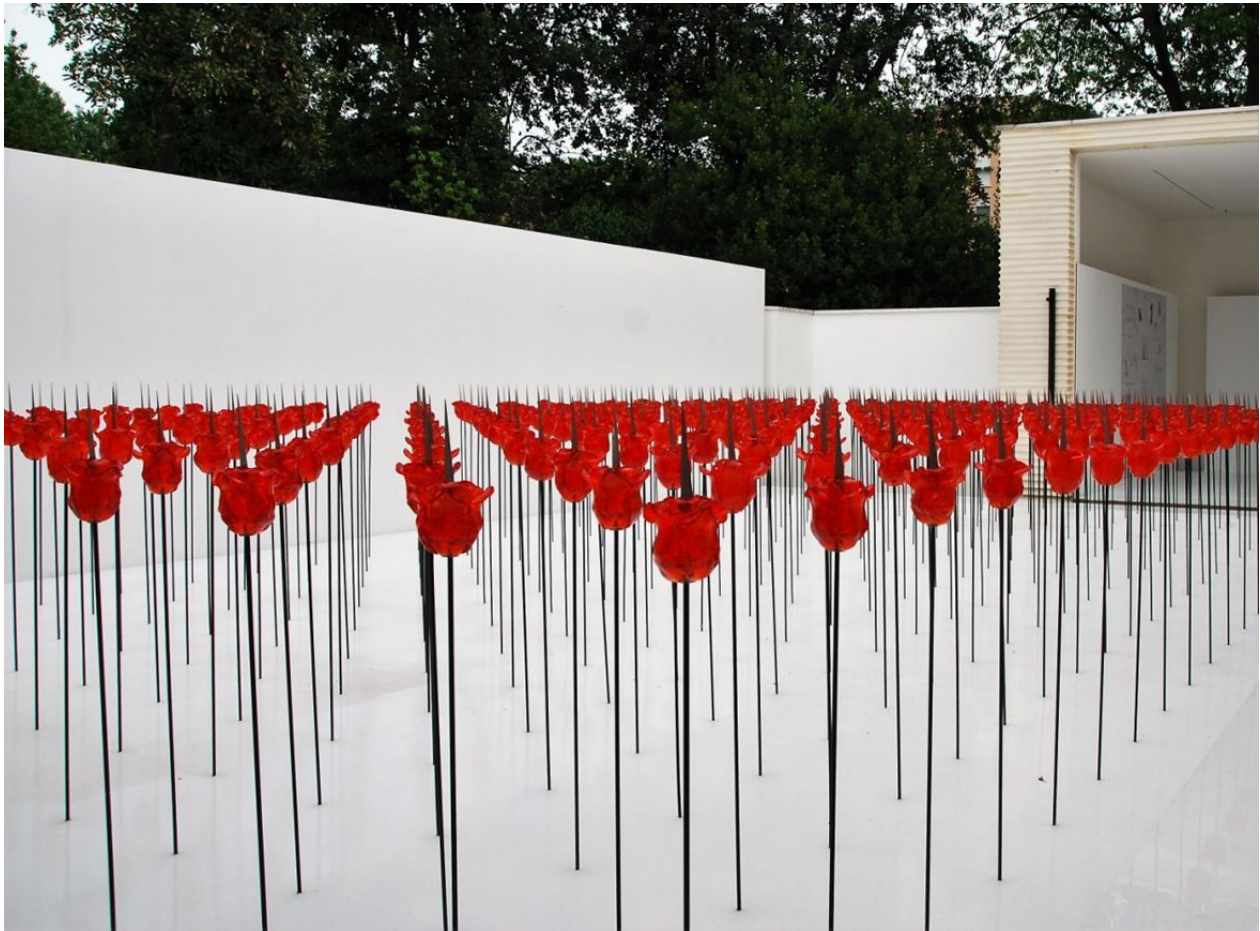
Natascha Süder Happelmann: *Ankersentrum* (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.



Natascha Süder Happelmann (right) und Helene Duldung (left) at the Opening Ceremony (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

The Austrian Pavilion

In its first solo exhibition in the history of the Biennale, the Austrian Pavilion is presenting the installation *Discordo ergo sum* (I contradict, therefore I am) by Renate Bertlmann, a pioneer of performance art. The artist addresses questions at the interface between art and philosophy. Her installation and her motto *amo, ergo sum* are reformulations of Descartes' tenet *cogito, ergo sum*. They represent her protest against logocentrism and the influence of society on the individual. Renate Bertlmann's spirit of contradiction manifests itself in written works, photographs and drawings inside the pavilion. The impressive installation *Messer-Rosen* in the outdoor area is meant to visualize the ambivalence of human experience.



Renate Bertlmann: *Messer-Rosen* (2019). Photo: Irene Daum.

The Islandic Pavilion

A range of pavilions address socio-political topics such as migration or climate change. The artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster who is a specialist in virtual reality presents a Mars landscape based on photographs of the Earth. The diorama shows images of landscapes devastated by climate change as a scenario of the Earth's possible future. The Lithuanian Pavilion which was awarded the Golden Lion also deals with ecological issues. Visitors can watch beach scenes from a balustrade in which beachgoers sing opera arias about the consequences of global warming (as e.g. Christmas parties held in hot temperatures).

The Islandic Pavilion located on the Giudecca Island acts as counterbalance to the socio-political themes described above. It was designed by the Reykjavik-born artist Shoplifter (Hrafnhildur Amardottir) who lives and works in New York. The title of her colourful large-format installation is *Chromo Sapiens*, a kind of cave made up by real and synthetic hair. Dark colours are the dominant features at the entrance of the pavilion which are followed by bright rainbow colours during the course of a walk in the pavilion towards the exit. Based on the scientific findings of perceptual psychology, the artist is playing with the effects of colours on mood and well-being. Her pavilion is meant to induce relaxation and positive feelings as well as stimulating the viewers' imagination.



Shoplifter: *Chromo Sapiens* (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

The Greek Pavilion

The Greek Pavilion was designed by the artists Panos Charalambous, Eva Stefani and Zafos Xagoraris. The installation questions the validity of official reports and historiography and draws attention to historical facts which have been ignored and lost over time. The work *An Eagle was Standing* by artist Panos Charalambous is devoted to voices which have been silenced. It consists of 20000 drinking glasses which are turned upside down. By walking on the glasses visitors produce sounds and noises. The installation represents the body's ability to tell stories and to leave a trace in the present and it is accompanied by sound installations.



Panos Charalambous: *An Eagle was Standing* (2019). Photo: Irene Daum.

The Canadian Pavilion

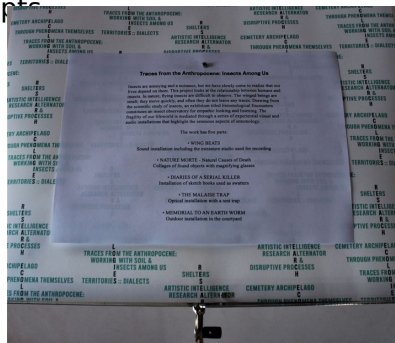
The Canadian Pavilion also addresses the transfer of historical events and personal experiences. For the first time, the pavilion was designed by Inuit artists. The art work is based on the Inuit tradition of passing on historical facts visually and by verbal report; written documentation is not used. A contemporary variant of this tradition are the video works of the artist collective ISUMA. The films capture images from the everyday life of the Inuit. The pavilion also presents a feature film based on the legend of an Inuit warrior.

The Research Pavillon

Following the 2015 and 2017 Biennale Pavilions, the current Biennale also includes a Research Pavilion organized by the University of the Arts Helsinki which is concerned with research questions and collaborations in the field of *artistic research*. It focuses on *Research Ecologies*, issues in the field of art and ecology. Cooperation partners include the Ehrnrooth Foundation, the Aalto University, Finland and university institutions from Gothenburg, Vienna and Seoul. Visitors are informed about the results of cooperative projects in workshops, discussions with artists, performances and exhibitions.

The relationship between art and biology is an important focus of the Research Pavilion. The *Insect Karaoke* project presents sounds produced by insects and the visitors are asked to imitate and interpret the sounds using contact microphones. An exhibition by artist Tuula Närhinen entitled *Entomological Encounters* complements the sound project.

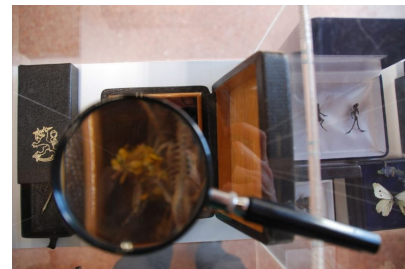
A further project entitled *Climate Change, Globalization and the Art World* addresses the effects of a major international event such as the Biennale on the fragile ecological system of the City of Venice. Key questions relate to the very high number of visitors and the related high levels of traffic. The workshop aims to develop solutions with respect to more sustainable art production and exhibition concepts.



Research Pavillon:
Entomological Encounters
(2019). Photo: Moritz
Niehues.



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Collateral Biennale Exhibitions and Other Events

Two exhibitions which form part of the official Biennale shows (Eventi Collaterali) are of particular interest to German visitors. The exhibition *Baselitz-Academy* is the first retrospective of a contemporary artist in the Gallerie dell'Accademia Museum. The exhibition comprises works from more than 60 years of Georg Baselitz's career as an artist and includes paintings, sculptures and prints reflecting his typical figurative expressive style.



Georg Baselitz: *Donna Via Venezia* (2004). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

The exhibition *Förg in Venice* organized by the Dallas Museum of Art presents more than 30 works by the artist Günther Förg in the historical interior of a Renaissance palace on the Canal Grande (Palazzo Contarini Polignac). The combination of Förg's abstract paintings and the historical ambience of the Palazzo achieve a unique effect and reflect a successful dialogue of art and architecture.



Exhibition Günther Förg, Salon of the Palazzo Contarini Polignac (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

The sculpture *Support* by Lorenzo Quinn shown on the Canal Grande was one of the most popular art works in 2017. At this year's Biennale, the Italian-American sculptor presents a monumental work entitled *Building Bridges* at the entrance of the old shipyard Arsenale. It consists of six pairs of intertwined hands made of white resin. Each pair is 15 m high and 20 m wide. The six couples of hands stand for the universal values of hope, love, friendship, trust, wisdom and helpfulness. According to the artist, they express complex emotions reflected in the language of gestures. Lorenzo Quinn refers to *Building Bridges* as the most challenging work of his career in terms of symbolic power and technology, with important input by engineers.



Lorenzo Quinn: *Building Bridges* (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.



Lorenzo Quinn: *Building Bridges* (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

The installation *The Death of James Lee Byars* organized by the Belgian Vanharents Art Collection in the church Chiesa di Santa Maria della Visitazione is an impressive artistic reflection on issues of death and transience. A burial chamber covered in gold designed by the artist for himself in the face of his own approaching death stands for *golden emptiness*, an image of transience. The rhythmic sound installation *Vocal Shadows* by Lebanese artist and composer Zad Moultaqa forms the second part of the exhibition. The installation includes 16 symmetrically arranged loudspeakers and is meant to serve as a requiem, a mourning choir and reflection on transience.



Installation *The Death of James Lee Byars* in the church Santa Maria della Visitazione (2019).
Photo: Moritz Niehues.



Installation *The Death of James Lee Byars* in the church Santa Maria della Visitazione (2019).
Photo: Moritz Niehues.

An exhibition at the Museum Fondazione Querini Stampalia which is shown in parallel to the Biennale events is dedicated to the career of the Swiss artist Luigi Pericle, an important art informel artist. His contributions as a homo universalis and a border crosser between art and science are widely acknowledged in Switzerland and Italy. His first retrospective in the Carlo Scarpa area of the museum does not only present his drawings and paintings but also written documents on issues ranging from philosophy, psychoanalysis and anthropology to theosophy. Many of his works were discovered by chance in 2016. They form the basis of the *Archivio Luigi Pericle* which was founded in Ascona in 2018.

▷ Art Biennale Venice. 9.5.–25.11.2019, Giardini and Arsenale, Venice and numerous exhibition venues in the city center and on the islands; www.labiennale.it

▷ Research Pavillon. Address: Sala del Camino, Campo S. Cosmo 621, Giudecca, Venice. Opening hours 9.5.–28.8.2019, 10–18 h (closed Tuesdays), free admission. Information and program www.researchpavilion.fi

Photo above the text: Interior view of the Russian Pavilion (2019). Photo: Moritz Niehues.

Tags

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