

Venice 2019: Altering Perspective

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Published by ephemereye. Monday, May 27, 2019.



Manifesto of Presentismo, art action by Veronica Shimanovskaya.
Piazza di San Marco. 9 May, 2019.

One of the events of the 2019 Venice Biennale went largely unnoticed. Apart from a few hundred city visitors that happened to find themselves at the Piazza di San Marco on the late morning of May 9, and one random tourist who actively objected to the action, few others were aware of the happening.

In the midst of pre-biannual festivities and two days before the official opening of all the major exhibitions, on the 74th Anniversary of V-Day (as it's celebrated in Russia), and 110 years after a

similar event happened at the same place, a few handfuls of leaflets containing a message of love and awareness were launched from the top of San Marco Campanile¹. Marinetti style.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a well-known poet and an ideologue of the Futurist Movement, hurled his Futurist Manifesto from San Marco Campanile a year after it was published in the Figaro in 1909. It embodied the attitude and pathos of the future 20th century that had recently begun.

Eleven points of the Manifesto sung “the love of danger,” “the punch and the slap,” “the beauty of speed,” “the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth,” while “...glorify[ing] war — the world’s only hygiene — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.” It promised to “...destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, [...] fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice,” and pledged “defiance to the stars”. Sounds familiar?

The militant hubris of the thirty-three-year-old man was indeed a manifestation of that time in human history that knew little of the horrors of revolutions, world wars, and mass murders on an industrial scale. The 20th century of two world wars, the atomic bomb, and consumerist societies followed. That pathos and attitude picked up from the poetics of the early industrial era landed us where we are now: in a dehumanized environment of insatiable corporate greed, senseless economic expansion, soil and air pollution, refugee crisis, the rise of right-wing politics, and emerging realization of our responsibility for what has happened to us.

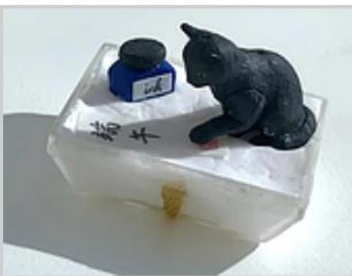
That realization as much as any inspired a counter manifesto, or better yet a proclamation of art as a manifestation of love, and the future as a posit of the present, being as it is dependent

¹ Video recording of the event can be seen here <https://vimeo.com/337381316>. Image and video are courtesy of India Roper-Evans.

on our action at any present given moment. Thus my tongue-in-cheek Manifesto of Presentism flew down off of San Marco Campanile in hopes of spreading the message of art being 'the food of love' and love being 'the food of the present.' The action organically became a part of the Void, a clandestine operation of the group of artists participating in the EMPIRE II series of art shows curated by Vanya Balogh, and yet another perspective-changing exhibition — Miniscule Venice.¹

The ability to change attitudes and perspectives is one of the features of art, and there was a show that did just that. Widely covered in the media (La Nuova di Venezia e Mestre, The Quietus, Forbes, artlyst.com), it is unique in the whole of the Biennale, as it is a behaviour-altering piece on its own. Wandering down via Garibaldi between the main exhibitions of Giardini and Arsenale, a Miniscule Venice spectator can't just brush through, glance around and leave, but is compelled to slow down and pay close attention. The difference is scale. The point of view.

Over 100 artists from all over the world brought together by an artist and a virtuoso curator, Vanya Balogh, created miniature sculptures the size of the matchbox. Some utilized the features of the matchbox form itself, some just adhered to the size limitation. Whether discovering the 'scaling down', or just unearthing miniature works created before, the joy of making the pieces was palpable in the small gallery at the Fondamenta Sant'Anna. Quite a few were mentioned in the various media articles, so here I will mention a few more: Graham Tunnadine's inventive 'Locked out Syndrome' a miniscule peep show, Vanja Karas' elegant and meaningful 'Time Machine', Barbara Stanzi's 'My Miniature Life in Pieces', Bob Lowson's 'Ear for inner voice', Jil Gibson's 'Head – with built in obsolescence' Keith Ball's 'Deck' of diminutive cards with 'Sorry, try again' printed on each of them, and my own 'Mon petit miniscule' attesting to the loss of value of the human and personal in the course of the global conquest declared and sung by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909. All the pieces are unique in the use of material, some a combination of the ready-mades, some newly created from scratch.



Left to right: Graham Tunnadine, Vanja Karas, Bob Lowson, Barbara Stanzi, Jill Gibson, Veronica Shimanovskaya, Keith Ball, Keyko Bromley, Paul Hazelton.

Graham Tunnadine's Void action Black Hole is also a perspective altering piece. An imaginary telescope, his piece calls habitual perceptions into question: "It has always been important to question what we see. It is essential to distinguish between what is and isn't real. But since Hiroshima there is a dwindling trust in progress, The Enlightenment and Modernism which no longer have the same authority. New thinking is not a bad thing by any means, but the crisis of doubt has created an inertia and an inability to tackle the important and urgent issues such as climate change and extinction. By staring into the void, "Black Hole" attempts to act as a

catalyst for discussion around ideas of truth, doubt, reality, perception and action, in these times of uncertainty.²”



Black Hole, 2019 © Graham Tunnadine

As for the other numerous exhibitions of the Biennale, the most noticeable fact is that video prevailed. In the multi-screen installations of techno and urban humans of the Taiwan pavilion, in the spectacular gender-defying dance film of the Swiss pavilion, Laura Provost’s sensual video syncopation and installation in the French pavilion, not to mention the Turner prize–winning iPhone-produced work by Scottish artist Charlotte Prodger, although UK was represented by Cathy Wilkes with her ‘production’ object work. Iran’s Biennale debut seemed the most masterful immersive installation where not a single object or screen was out of place and digital

² From Graham Tunnadine’s artist statement.

and traditional media echoed each other elegantly and most convincingly. USA Martin Puryear's work stood almost humbly among others that exuded despair and animosity toward the status quo. Stating customs-related issues, a few shows couldn't open on time including the Venezuela pavilion that was tellingly empty with a pile of rubbish and overturned canoe in the pavilion yard corner.

The nagging feeling that a message of love and awareness of the present moment felt entirely appropriate. Certainly, Douglas Adams' Hitchhikers Guide... comes to mind: "We apologize for any inconvenience", but perhaps a little bit of hope may still exist.



¹ Artists participating @ Miniscule Venice:

Rebecca Scott GB, Danny Pockets GB, Cedric Christie Jamaica, Vanya Balogh Croatia, Piyali Ghosh India, Emma Croft GB, Gavin Turk GB, Plinio Villagran Galindo Guatemala, Teo Robinson Canada, Tomaz Kramberger Slovenia, Emanuel Fanslau Germany, Jeanne Susplugas France, Marisa Polin Mexico, Mario Sanchez Varas Spain, Tiziana Mandolesi Italy, Katya Kan Kazhakstan, Noriko Uno Japan, Birgit Jensen Germany, Paul Hazelton GB, Sarah Pager GB, Ann Grim France, Christopher Clack GB, Natalia Ryabova Russia, Graham Tunnadine GB, Christina Lorimer GB,

Noel Grassy Macken GB, MIA C GB, Andrew Stys Poland, La Lianna Italy, Nerys Mathias GB, Venetia Nevill GB, Keith Ball GB, Gzillion Artist GB, Ray Gange GB, Ibby Doherty GB, Mahaut Harley Leca France, Olga Jurgenson Estonia, Liz Sheridan GB, Jessica Bailey GB, Daleya Marohn Ethiopia, India Roper-Evans Hungary, Guy Haddon Grant GB, Sarah Sparkes GB, Ian Thompson GB, Roger Clarke GB, Meriilis Riinne Estonia, Meg Shirayama Japan, Mandee Gage GB, Georgina McNamara GB, Deborah Bee Artist GB, Anita Bryan GB, Paul Tucker GB, Jon Baker GB, Dannielle Hodson GB, Tommy Seaward GB, Vanja Karas Serbia, Toni Gallagher GB, Maria Jose Arceo GB, KeelerTornera GB, Jochen Saureacker Germany, Lucinda Burgess GB, Carole Pearson GB, Russell Terry GB, Cathy Gale GB, Lauren Baker GB, Beverley Isaacs GB, Athena Constantinou Cyprus, Alex Ruffini Italy, Michal Cole GB, Petra Lea GB, Spizz Energi GB, Dimtrios Oikonomou Greece, Caroline Gregory GB, Paul Tecklenberg GB, Pascal Rousson France, Veronica Shimanovskaya Russia/USA, Alex Ruffini Italy, Steven Pettengell GB, Melissa Alley GB, Joanna McCormick GB, Tisna Westerhof Holland, Kety Balogh Croatia, Maria Teresa Gavazzi Italy, Alice Herrick GB, Thomas J Ridley GB, Sarah Kogan GB, Susan Haire GB, Almuth Tebbenhoff Germany, Alex Hinks GB, Jason Gibilaro Brasil, Gabriel Mulvey Switzerland, Vera Jefferson GB, Jane Grisewood USA, Toby Bricheno GB, Edward Croft-Balagh GB, Glenn Fitzpatrick GB, Ian Wolter GB, Sarah Goldbart GB, Kate Gilman Brundrett GB, John Stephens GB, Anna Fairchild GB, John Plowman GB, Fiona McAuliffe Artist Forte GB, Penelope Payne GB, Keiko Owada Japan, Susana Sanroman Spain, Farah Ishaq GB, Anne Leigniel GB, Gina Southgate GB, Angela Wright GB, Katya Kan Kazakhstan, Susan Schulman USA, Neda Dana-Haeri Iran, Toby Morgan GB, Hermione Allsopp GB, Jim Roseveare GB, Maslen & Mehra GB, Riitta Hakkarainen Finland, Fiona Haines GB, Steve Smith GB, Mary T Spence GB, Nicole Barclay GB, Natalija Jezova Russia, Carol Wyss Germany, Nicola Hicks GB, Geraldine Swayne Ireland, Elli Lestas Cyprus, Doug Haywood GB.