

ALMA ZEVI

Luisa Lambri
Bijoy Jain / Studio Mumbai

14 May - 31 August 2021
ALMA ZEVI Venice
Salizzada San Samuele

DIARY

LAGOON SQUAD

May 28, 2021 • Venice • Pia Capelli at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale



Artist Giuseppe Penone, Vuslat Doğan Sabancı, and Biennale President Roberto Cicutto. All photos by author unless noted.

STEPPING OUT OF A GLOBAL RAINY LOCKDOWN and straight into a sunny Architecture Biennale in Venice is no small feat: not for the locals, who are by now used to having the city to themselves; and not for the pro travelers who discover a land of 11 p.m. curfews, zero buffet lunches, and carefully slotted museum previews, where spritz is flowing but Italians have stopped hugging and kissing. The first few minutes inside any exhibition (or *aperitivo*) today feel like a miracle and a relief: *The Biennale is actually happening! We are here again!* Three air hugs (or drinks) later, a sense of bewilderment sneaks in: *Is this. . . okay?*

One now approaches any art event of this scale with a number of conflicting reactions: overenthusiasm shot through with anxiety, empathy and disconnection, fearlessness, and concern. Hashim Sarkis, this biennial's curator, puts it best with his title: "How will we live together?" In answer to this question, the show—which opened to the public on May 22 and is the first major European post-Covid art event—has brought 63 nations to the historic pavilions across the Giardini, the Arsenale, and the city center, plus 17 official collateral events.

The exclusive Wednesday preview day of the Architecture Biennale is an emotional affair in and of itself, with the very lucky few promenading and looking out for familiar faces in the near-deserted Giardini. Some pavilions are still installing, and visitors mistake the builders at the Russian Pavilion for performers. Some others are poetic and empty, so I linger in Denmark and sip vervain calming tea, then later get a little lump in my throat navigating Brazil's rivers and urban history. I don't have to queue for what is now called "the restrooms pavilion." There is a moment of high-pitched cheering when Presidente Roberto Cicutto declares the Biennale open, followed by remarks by Sarkis: "We are all crazy for being here. If I have one emotion to share with you, one that comes out of this biennale, it is love."

Fine art is grafted into the very body of Sarkis's show, with projects by Olafur Eliasson, Michael Rovner, and Arcangelo Sassolino—plus an installation by Giuseppe Penone in the Arsenale waters commissioned by Vuslat Foundation in collaboration with Chus Martinez—but it also unravels like a *fil rouge* of stubbornness and resilience around town: Many projects that were scheduled to coincide with Biennale Arte decided to stick to their original dates. Two shows tower above all: Peter Fischli's über brainy "Stop Painting" at Fondazione Prada, where the relevance of painting is argued through ruptures, repudiations, and paradigm shifts; and Bruce Nauman's striking "Contrapposto Studies" at Punta della Dogana, curated by Carlos Basualdo and Caroline Bourgeois. On Thursday morning, Basualdo welcomes visitors at the entrance of Punta della Dogana: "The idea was to be here with Nauman, but flying out of the US has been tricky. Everything has been difficult. In a way, I think the show conveys this very sense of disorientation, making you question your own presence," he says from beneath a Borsalino hat, his face hidden behind a very elegant navy-blue mask.

Art galleries are open and reflect the Biennale mood. Alma Zevi has a show focusing on Luisa Lambri (who won the Golden Lion in 1999); Michela Rizzo hosts Andrea Mastrovito's works about loss and detachment during the peak corona days; Victoria Miro is presenting Conrad Shawcross's "Fractures" and "Perimeter Studies" sculptures, and is also inviting visitors into an art-filled apartment right across the *calle* where the gallery expects to entertain collectors soon "and sell, *naturalmente*." Thaddaeus Ropac is in town, supporting Georg Baselitz's show at Fondazione Vedova as well as Not Vital's Scarch (Sculpture + Architecture) sky-reaching installation inside Abbazia di San Giorgio.

Post-vernissage cocktails prove discreet receptions in small gardens and backyards, and if there's some "secret" party happening after-hours in hotel rooms or private apartments, it's not publicly discussed. At Il Palazzo Experimental, groups of *canottieri*, Venetian rowers in white-and-blue striped T-shirts (on break from the Vogalonga regatta), share the garden with Rick Owens, Michele Lamy, and a reborn crowd of Instagrammers and TikTokers.

The most convivial moments happen at Ocean Space, inside the church of San Lorenzo dei Greci, the breathtaking Venetian venue of hyper-multidisciplinary TBA21 Academy, which now hosts Taloi Havini's "The Soul-Expanding Ocean" (curated by Chus Martinez) and "Oceans in Transformation – Territorial Agency" (curated by Daniela Zyman). On Friday afternoons, I always try to attend their itinerant conversations, curated by Barbara Casavecchia and Pietro Consolandi. The 2021 series is about "Lagoon Micro-Ecologies" and takes explorers to remote, bird-inhabited islands of the Venetian ecosystem. But after a week of biennale fatigue, this Friday's event takes the shape of a short, joyful pilgrimage to a small food collective (Tocia!) in Castello, where chef Marco Bravetti distributes bowls of raw seafood, algae, herbs, and flowers that will become our dinner. "Preserve and evolve," his keywords, seem to sum up the city's philosophy for the near future.

Another atypical show stands out: "Non-Extractive Architecture - On Designing without Depletion," curated by Joseph Grima and Space Caviar at the VAC Foundation. The posh building on Zattere is transformed into a workshop, with teams of young architects clicking away and walls covered in handwritten notes that chronicle the progress of their research. "We opened with an empty building, says Grima. "The idea is that throughout the course of the year, like a laboratory, we'll produce things in here."

This concept—Venice as laboratory—keeps popping up in conversation. Architect Luca Molinari, in his multiple roles as curator (of the exhibition "EST" at Fondazione Cini), member of the Biennale Jury, and newly appointed director of M9 Museum in Mestre, expresses it well while we sit in the sun: "The future of Venice is supremely challenging. The goal is to avoid going back to the usual tide of indifferent visitors and present future Venice not just as a stage or a postcard, but as a *laboratorio*. With the rumored 2022 arrival of the Kapoor Foundation, the recent acquisition of the iconic Giudecca building Casa dei Tre Oci by the Berggruen Institute, and many new institutions and two universities, this city is getting more and more relevant." The future of life in Venice is a political matter, Molinari continues. "Architecture today is a synonym of responsibility. It is a form of care."

Care is the mission for a number of institutions that have been very busy during the pandemic. "We have never stopped working," says Toto Bergamo Rossi, the advisor and soul of Venetian Heritage, as he guides me through the magnificent restoration of Museo di Palazzo Grimani that has been brought back to its splendor during the lockdown, and which now also hosts a long-term installation by Baselitz (this one supported by Gagosian and curated by Mario Codognato). Venice International Foundation has appointed a new architect president, Luca Bombassei, as well as the first of a new series of Venice Ambassadors, Angela Missoni. In partnership with Venetian museums, VIF will finance the education of younger "potential Venetians" to bring fresh talent to the city.

On the way home one afternoon in the heart of Dorsoduro (a *sestiere* that is now home to the very successfully rebranded “Museum Mile”), I bump into Teresa Mavica, director of VAC. “This is the strangest Biennale,” she notes. “Such few people, and this palpable mix of desire and fear. But have you seen? Everyone here is a professional. In the end, the core of the Biennale community has come to Venice.”

— *Pia Capelli*



Biennale Director Hashim Sarkis. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.

Venice Biennale

Art and design in Venice during the Architecture Biennale

There is much to see and discover in the slowly reopening Venetian Lagoon. Here are *Domus'* suggestions on what to see.

AUTHOR

Simona Bordone

PUBLISHED

29 May 2021

SHARE



One should stay in Venice for a long time and take it slow to follow the city's ancient rhythm. However, this is a luxury only few can afford, and while it is true that this year's exhibition by the curator of the Architecture Biennale Hashim Sarkis goes beyond the strictly disciplinary boundaries, the city that hosts it is in itself "interdisciplinary". Here, everyday life, history, architecture, university research, ancient and contemporary art, and craftsmanship are intertwined - while the number of inhabitants is decreasing. Will we really manage to change it, then? And if the Biennale is the epitome of Italian and international public investment in the contemporary arts, the city is also the headquarters of the many foundations of the tycoons, heirs and collectors of old industrial families, leaders of the luxury sector and great industrial executives devoted to culture. This is how the industry world shows itself to Venice - the real industry, the one outside the borders of the lagoon city, is in Porto Marghera and in the mainland of the industrious region of Veneto. As it used to be since the dawn of the city's richness.

Ocean Space, the interdisciplinary space dedicated to the oceans by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21) in San Lorenzo Church hosts two exhibitions that ask for "sense and sensibility". In the deconsecrated church, split in two by the remains of the wall separating the sector of the church that is open to the public and the one that belonged to the cloistered nuns of the adjacent former convent, we are greeted by "Territorial Agency: Oceans in Transformation", an installation that is the result of three years of research into the relationship between human actions and the changes occurring in the oceans. It's a data visualization experience which, starting with the sea level rise, one of the most visible signs of climate change, analyses all kinds of human exploitation activities. Assessing the latest scientific findings, the project reaffirms the crucial role played by the oceans for the survival of the planet. Beyond the wall, we find ourselves in "The Soul Expanding Ocean #1" by artist Taloi Havini, originally from the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in the Southwest Pacific Ocean. It's a complex work that blends a blue and azure material installation - the colours of the sea and the mantles of the madonnas that probably once inhabited the church - with a bewitching sound installation. Sitting for a while on her blue island and listening to the sounds that fill the space restores an ocean that seems at peace with humanity.

Studio Mumbai and Luisa Lambri

The exhibition by Bijoy Jain - [Studio Mumbai](#) and Luisa Lambri at the Alma Zevi Gallery is very small and elegant, and it takes some effort to get used to it after such magnificence. It is a room with two delicate works relating to each other and to the city. Jain's aerial bamboo sculptures arrived in Venice on their own because covid-19 prevented the Indian architect from travelling, and they were covered in golden leaves by a local craftsman. Lambri also worked on the colour of gold, photographing the details of the inserts of Carlo Scarpa's intervention at Palazzo Querini Stampalia. In this exhibition, gold is not the arrogant demonstration of wealth but rather the light that runs through things.

Elena Cologni

At the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa Palazzetto Tito, "Pratiche di cura, o del cur(v)are", the beautiful exhibition by Elena Cologni, an Italian artist based in Cambridge, is a tale made up of drawings, sculptures, installations, and performative choreographies. Her work is the result of in-depth research into the places in which she operates, and shows her way of acting with and for the communities in which she carries out her projects.

Charlotte Perriand and Frank Gehry

A few steps from San Marco, the Venetian branch of the Fondation Louis Vuitton presents a small but much sought-after exhibition, a side event of the Biennale, which compares the works of [Charlotte Perriand](#) and the first phase of [Frank Gehry's](#) research with two projects exhibited for the first time: *Tritianon* (1937) by Perriand and *Power Pack* (1969) by Gehry. They are works that respond to the all-too-current need for low environmental impact housing, from minimal dwellings to the energy autonomy of buildings.



Table designed by Jimmie Durham for LABINAC, Giardini Reali di Venezia, San Marco. Photo Andrea Avezzù

Maria Thereza Alves and Jimmie Durham

In the Giardini Reali next to San Marco – yes Venice is also green – the work of Labinac, the collective founded in Berlin by artists Maria Thereza Alves and [Jimmie Durham](#), is on display. “Echoes of the Forest”, which is the title of the exhibition, includes, among other things, thirty tables made specifically for the gardens inspired by the endemic Mediterranean pine tree. The metal legs and green resin tops create artificial creatures that gracefully sit in the garden, which is artificial too but made of plants by landscape architect Paolo Pejrone, and in the greenhouse. The gardens, restored by the Venice Gardens Foundation, again thanks to the collaboration of public and private institutions, had reopened in December 2019 – before the pandemic brought everything to a halt.

Le stanze del vetro

The Giorgio Cini Foundation in San Giorgio, as part of [Le stanze del vetro](#), the yearly exhibition dedicated to promoting the culture of glass, presents “L’Arca di vetro. La collezione di animali di Pierre Rosenberg”, composed of hundreds of animals made in Murano that the historic director of the Louvre in Paris collected during his visits to Venice. The quality of the exhibitions proposed by the foundation is confirmed by a beautiful, child-friendly exhibition design, with the [Domus Archive](#) also contributing to the catalogue.

Maarten Baas

At the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, the designer [Maarten Baas](#), in collaboration with Theun Mosk, has created a large installation called “Second Act” where the *Sweeper* clocks, part of the famous Real-Time Clocks series, are also on display.

Bruce Nauman, Peter Fischli

“[Bruce Nauman](#). Contrapposto studies” is hosted at Punta della Dogana. The exhibition shows historical and recent works by the great American artist who has been exploring different languages since the 1960s and investigating the very definition of artistic practice. Finally, artist [Peter Fischli](#) has curated an exhibition for the Fondazione Prada in which he questions the presumed death of painting, searching for the breaking point that would have undermined its fertility as a language. These two major exhibitions are definitely worth visiting.

VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE

Lessons from an Atypical Biennale

Ian Volner on how this year's pandemic-era edition can be a model for the future.

By [IAN VOLNER](#)



Andrea Avezzù/La Biennale di Venezia

In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino's postmodernist masterpiece, the character of Marco Polo confesses the truth behind his outrageous tales of far-off lands: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice." However zany, however improbable his fantasy capitals may be, they are only pallid reflections of the original—the one place the great traveler cannot help but return to.

Over the last quarter century, many in the design world have come to feel the same way, albeit for different reasons. Every other year after every other year, critics and practitioners return to La Serenissima for the Venice Architecture Biennale, a ritual that has come to bear all the hallmarks of a religious pilgrimage: costly, physically taxing, and yielding mixed blessings at best for hosts and visitors alike. It has also, by now, exhausted most of the available critical takes one could plausibly cook up either to praise or bury it (including invocations of Calvino, of which the above can hardly be the first). Only the intervention of COVID-19—which pushed the 2020 Biennale back a full 12 months—has afforded this year’s edition an air of novelty, and with it, the possibility of reassessing the whole screwy endeavor.



Andrea Avezzù/La Biennale di Venezia

"Catalogue for the Posthuman," by Chicago-based Parsons & Charlesworth



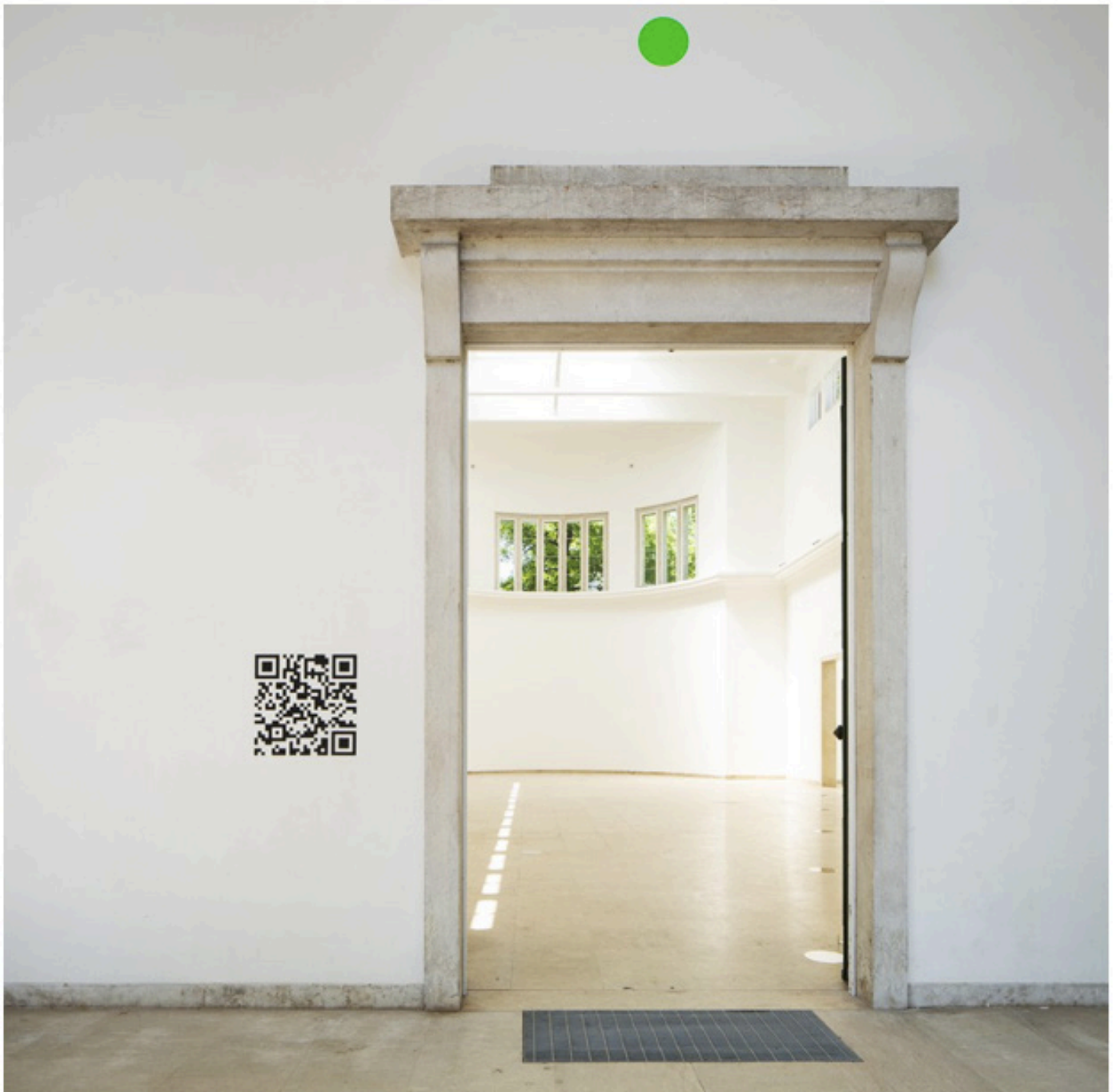
Andrea Avezzù/La Biennale di Venezia

The V&A Museum's installation

The prognosis, at first blush, is not great. All the vices of Biennales past—lack of cogency, excessive scale, a cloying optimism about architecture's social potential—seem to be concentrated in the main exhibition, which was curated by Hashim Sarkis, the dean of the MIT School of Architecture and Planning. Even his chosen theme, “How Will We Live Together?”, sounds like a parody of what an architecture biennial might be called. (One imagines the rejected alternatives: “DesignPlusNow”; “The Fundamentals of Here.”)

The Arsenale, a dark and imposing space at the best of times, has been rendered even more so. It's filled with installations that are not necessarily bad by themselves but that lose their punch by their proximity to everything else: An imagined post-apocalyptic pan-ecological dinner table, from British firm Superflux, sits within shouting distance of an extravagantly high-tech moon base proposal from Skidmore Owings & Merrill, which is within sight of a sort of wood triumphal arch by Peruvian duo Alexia León and Lucho Marcial that is meant, somehow, to symbolize shared space. Austrian-based MAEID's

“Magic Queen,” an unworldly mini-landscape built by an automated arm, bumps up conceptually against a hilarious take down of high-tech culture, “Catalogue for the Posthuman,” from Chicago-based Parsons & Charlesworth. By the time visitors reach the back of the main hall, where Reinier de Graaf and OMA have installed gurneys for watching a film on the history of healthcare spaces, the piece seems like a work of genius simply for allowing viewers the chance to lie down.

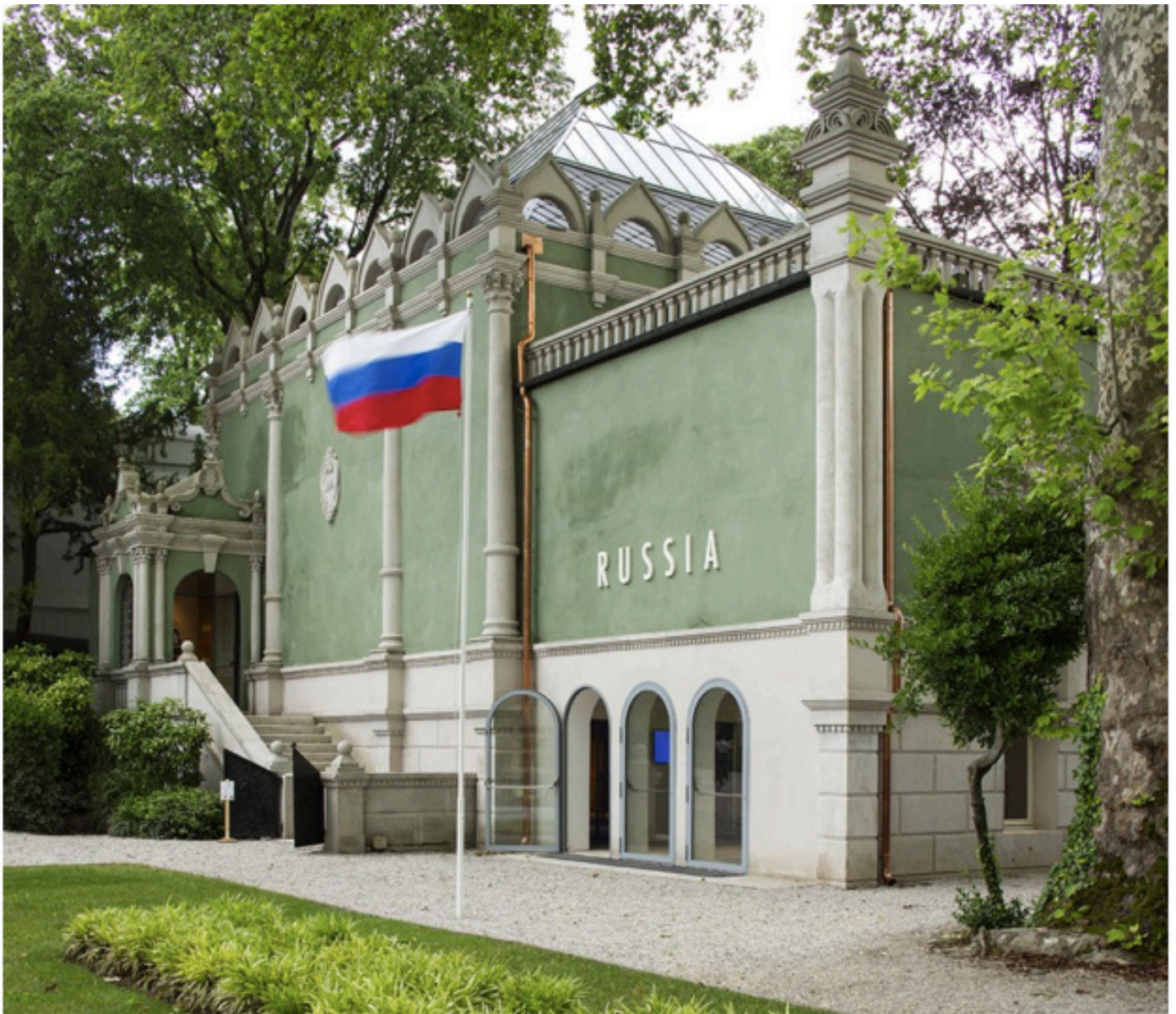


Francesco Galli/La Biennale di Venezia

The German pavilion, empty save for QR codes

“The Biennale Architettura 2021 is motivated by new kinds of problems that the world is putting in front of architecture,” reads Sarkis’s curatorial statement. That’s it. That’s apparently as much philosophical impetus as could be mustered to justify a sprawling show that features 113 contributors from 46 countries and that took two years to mount if you count the lengthy COVID interregnum—which did not seem to affect the content of the exhibitions so much as the logistics of traveling to Venice and installing them. Some folks never did make it, including Czechoslovakia, whose pavilion sat empty, as well as most of the curatorial team behind the United Kingdom’s contributions (a pavilion show on public-private space and an exploration of London mosques from the V&A Museum) who were barred by their government from attending. Also conspicuous in its absence was most of the international press corps, along with the customary battalion of celebrity architects, academic *mak*hers, and most of the fanfare and vernissages that typically mark the occasion. Local coronavirus restrictions were not too onerous, but informal architectural gabfests over *pasta alle vongole* were scarce, and when the nominal citywide curfew arrived at around 10 p.m., only a few stragglers remained in the Piazza St. Marco for the carabinieri to shoo away.

Sound like a bit of a drag? It was, but it could yet turn out to be a constructive one. What this year’s Biennale lacked in verve it made up for, at least in part, with a certain accidental atmosphere. While many exhibitors seemed content with Sarkis’s muffled clarion call, there was an entirely different vibe in parts of the central exhibition and especially in the national pavilions: an intellectually clearer, more engaging, and funnier one. Whether born of the pandemic or not, it was a mood perfectly suited to the moment, and it pointed a way forward for biennials everywhere—but especially for Venice’s, the most vexing yet essential of the bunch.



Francesco Galli/La Biennale di Venezia

The Russian pavilion, which was housed in a newly renovated 1914 building

Standing on the newly-reopened rear balcony of the Russian pavilion during the press preview, the co-curator of the Biennale, Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, explained what had happened to the 1914 building in the forgoing year. "We had to completely renew the space," he said. The project, long in the making, has removed years of misbegotten renovations that had, among other things, shut off the airy south-facing terrace. For the first time in decades, visitors can go to a national show in the Giardini and get a view of the Grand Canal, to which the exhibition zone has always studiously turned its back. The Russians scored a double coup by making the pavilion renovation the primary topic of their exhibition.

But they were hardly the only ones who arrived at the Biennale in order to—of all things—actually do architecture. “It was only fully completed yesterday,” Paul Anderson told me when I visited the American pavilion, which he had co-curated. Anderson had helped pull together one of the least intellectually pretentious, most satisfying U.S. contributions in recent memory, a paean to wood balloon-frame construction featuring a full-size structure in front of the pavilion and a show of photographs and exquisite models inside. The piece works, in part, because the three-story timber outbuilding operates not just as an object to be viewed, but as a viewing device for the gardens that surround it.



Francesco Galli/La Biennale di Venezia

The U.S. pavilion

Even with fewer off-site exhibitions than are customary during the Biennale (notable exceptions include “Non-Extractive Architecture,” a Joseph Grima-directed show at the V-A-C Foundation; the interactive “Mutualities” installation at Spazio Ravà; and a tiny, stunning jewel box of a show about Carlo Scarpa at Alma Zevi), the American and Russian contingents helped the Biennale feel more situated, more *Venetian*, than it has in a while. It also felt— notwithstanding the high seriousness of Sarkis’s overall direction—surprisingly lighthearted. The Korean Pavilion is a snug domestic interior where a stray Venetian cat had taken up residence. The Nordic Pavilion, offering even more coziness and wall-to-wall wood, is a special hit with the toddler set. And the German pavilion was entirely empty save for QR codes on the walls that redirected visitors to an online exhibition, leaving the bare beauty of the structure exposed. The linked videos were a sober-minded affair, but they were introduced by a pseudo-futuristic tour guide doing a sort of flight-attendant bit, complete with overdrawn hand gestures. When the Germans are being funny, you know something’s up.

Levity snuck into the central show as well, mostly in the form of a remarkable number of installations that went beyond mere architectural model-making to become honest-to-goodness dollhouses. Sarkis’s Lebanese compatriot Lina Ghotmeh showed off her new Stone Garden tower in Beirut with a stunningly executed mock up of the tactile, earthy structure that stands nearly six feet tall. Meng Fanhao’s “Rural Nostalgia/Urban Dream,” a detailed scale miniature of a Chinese village, was alive with figures and action, affording the viewer a rush of voyeuristic pleasure. And Danish firm EFFEKT created an entire model forest community with trees composed of real growing seedlings—a Playmobil city for the ecologically conscious. After a rough year, maybe some architects just wanted to smile again: The childlike simplicity of Michael Maltzan, FAIA’s Sixth Street Viaduct model, as well as a beautifully abstracted townscape on view in the Belgian pavilion, had an oddball charm reminiscent of the work of outsider artist Peter Fritzl, whose meticulous train set-like houses were a highlight of the 2013 Venice Art Biennale organized by the brilliant curator Massimiliano Gioni.



Marco Zorzanello/La Biennale di Venezia

The installation by Danish firm EFFEKT



Marco Zorzanello/La Biennale di Venezia

EFFEKT's exhibit

Speaking of which: curators. If there is one chronic problem plaguing the Biennale that the current iteration seems to crystalize, it has been the reliance of the show's Italian administrators on architects—practicing designers—to take on the chief curatorial position. It has not always been thus: Historian Francesco dal Co was responsible for the 1991 show; a critic, ARCHITECT's own Aaron Betsky, assumed the role in 2008. For the most part, however, professional curators have been locked out of the job, for reasons that likely have more to do with marketing than anything else, given the higher media profile enjoyed by most architects. In choosing Sarkis, as well as his predecessors Grafton Architects, the Biennale leadership can be credited with turning to less overly familiar names, but their strategic error is the same. The current architecture exhibit marks the first outing under newly installed Biennale president Roberto Cicutti, who took over the role from longtime incumbent Paolo Baratta early last year. In seeking to put his own mark on the institution, one thing Cicutti might consider would be to hire an actual curator to do some actual curating.

While they're at it, the Biennale's Powers That Be might also consider whether the event must invariably be such a *fottuta casino totale*. The relative emptiness and petite size of the COVID-curtailed show had definite advantages: It was easier to navigate, more digestible, and best of all, it allowed visitors to move through Venice with more ease, to take it all in at leisure. Surely a happy medium can be found between the relative quietude of 2021 and the oppressive bustle of previous years: Namely, attendance should be controlled so it's high enough to create a little more excitement, but not so high as to burden an already over-touristed city with serious ecological, infrastructural, and quality-of-life issues. If future, slightly smaller crowds were to arrive to find a show with a tighter thematic focus, in better dialogue with its historic setting, they might remember again why they started going in the first place, and how good it is to be back.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Ian Volner](#)

Ian Volner is a Manhattan-based writer and frequent ARCHITECT contributor whose work has also been published in Harper's, The Wall Street Journal, and The New Republic.

STUDIO

The Venice Architecture Biennale
22 May to 21 November, 2021

"CAN WE FILL THE VOID left by the disappearance of the public toilet in unique and surprising ways?" is one of several urgent challenges posed by the British Pavilion at this year's Venice Architecture Biennale [1]. The show is entitled *The Garden of Privatised Delights*, purportedly in homage to Hieronymus Bosch, an artist who knew a thing or two about voids. The "dystopia of total privatisation" certainly looms large in the UK, but the solution proposed by **MANIJEH VERGHESE** and **MADELEINE KESSLER** [2] involves a pink gazebo and a bit of old carpet from Wetherspoons; the idea of maybe not voting for a party under whose governance 215 school playing fields have been sold off since 2010 doesn't get a mention.

Collectively titled *How Will We Live Together?*, the 2021 Biennale offers international architects an opportunity to confront real-world issues surrounding built environments in tragically timely fashion, an engagement to which the majority of shows at Arsenale and Giardini spectacularly fail to rise.

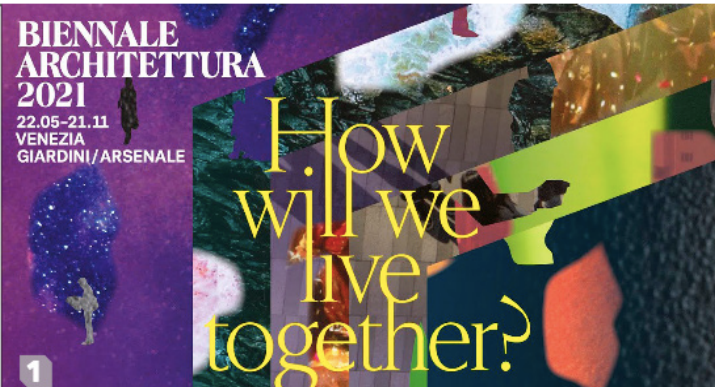
To pluck just one example from the cornucopia of vapid, pompous, self-indulgent, meretricious inanities assembled in the pavilions is a tough call, but a strong favourite might be the "workout" posters in *How to Begin Again*: "Shake your left leg and say: 'I am free from (Oppression)'. Shake your right leg and say 'I am free from (Oppression) ...' Best rush that solution to Tigray.

The **SIGN ON THE WALL** [3] between the Russian and Japanese pavilions that reads "This is not a wall" could also be a contender, or perhaps the visionary home furnishing at Arsenale



which promises a "climatized form" of "accentuated materiality", the object in question being a sub-Ikea pitch pine bench.

WHICH ARCHITECTURAL INNOVATOR thought that the Covid-safe takeaway lunch experience would be enhanced by



forcing visitors to exit the cafe through the lavatories? Moreover, why did the Danes get the idea that a really cool way to explore dynamic community spaces would be to build a plastic artificial canal in Venice?

So far so Biennale, but there are many diamonds amongst the dross. The unmissable show this year is **CARAVANE EARTH's Majlis** [4/5] on the monastery island of San Giorgio. Majlis derive from pre-Islamic Arabic and signifies a community meeting place triumphantly reimagined here by Columbian bamboo architects Simon Velez and Stefania Simic.

The structure is wrapped in tapestries woven by a women's



PHOTOGRAPHS © ANNA SODERBLOM EXCEPT WHERE NOTED; CARAVANE EARTH (LEFT)



CARAVANE EARTH

STUDIO

The Venice Architecture Biennale
22 May to 21 November, 2021

collective in the Atlas Mountains and sited in a medieval style garden designed by **TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN** on a former asphalt football pitch, which will remain as a permanent gift to the monastic community which has been present on the island since the eighth century.

Curated by Thierry Morel of the Hermitage Foundation, the show includes carpets, porcelains and metalware brought from Doha, Armenia, Turkey and Morocco, recalling a dialogue between Venice and the East that was operating long before art directors began to insist on the term.

For beauty and sheer intelligence, *Majlis* is unmatched, but perhaps the most extraordinary piece is a ten-metre long carpet which journeyed from Cairo to the Scuola San Rocco in the sixteenth century, a luminous narrative in thread all the more remarkable for the sparse discipline with which it is displayed.

ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE is very fond of posing questions, less so of answering them, but two exhibits stand out for their impressive practicality. Bremer-Punkt by **LIN ARCHITECTS [6]** is a moveable four storey timber structure — effectively a glamorous



prefab — which can be inserted into available urban space to provide swift, inexpensive housing.

Co-operative Conditions: A Primer on Architecture, Finance and Regulation in Zurich usefully does exactly what it claims by summarizing clearly and accessibly the processes of setting up a housing co-operative.

The need for such projects is emphasised by the Romanian pavilion at Giardini, which features *Away*, a project by photographers **TELELEU [7/8]**, who have spent eight years documenting the Romanian diaspora. From the four adults who made a home in a Fiat Punto to the plastic shacks of strawberry

Caption to this photo (child at the Danish Pavilion) here



pickers in Spain, the show is a chastening reminder of the extent to which Europe's economy depends on this vast and largely marginalized group of workers, yet its stories of struggle and endurance manage to remain heartening and deeply humane.

BEYOND THE TWO MAIN LOCATIONS, one of the joys of Biennale is the huge number of shows spread over the city, many in spaces which are usually closed to the public.

Heavy hitters are in evidence at the major foundations — the 12-piece **BASELITZ** show at Palazzo Grimani is worth it for the spectacular building if not the canvases, whilst Prada Foundation at Ca'Corner della Regina, always reliable for the architecture if not its contents, is showing **PETER FISCHLI's** *Stop Painting*, an interrogation of the radical fractures in the timeline of the canvas tradition brought about by technological and social revolutions in the past 150 years. Pinault Collection is also focusing on the deep origins of Western art in **BRUCE NAUMAN's** *Contrapposto Studies* at Punta della Dogana, worth a stroll past the Guggenheim to the tip of Dorsoduro.

The tiny Alma Zevi gallery near Palazzo Grassi has been punching well above its weight for several years, and the delicate, subtle collaboration between photographer **LUISA LAMBRI** and sculptor **BIJOY JAIN** is no exception.

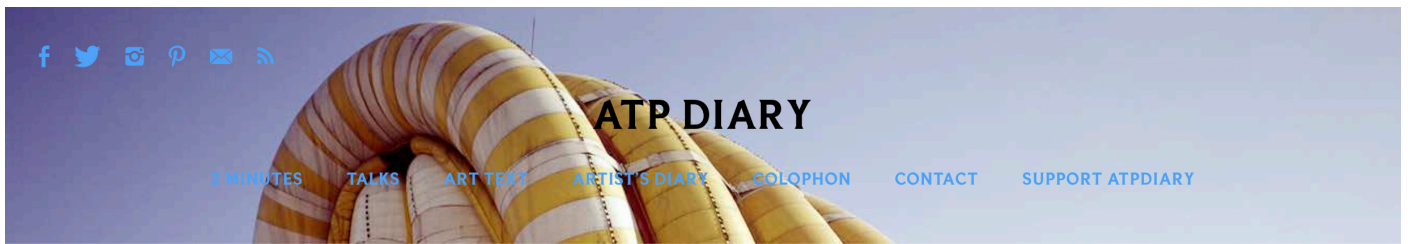
But maybe the most impressive feature of Biennale this year is the sense of exuberance which has finally returned to the beleaguered lagoon city; as ever, the most ravishing exhibit is Venice itself. — *Lisa Hilton*

Lisa Hilton is



**Caption to
photo of Lisa at
? here**

TELELU (TOP); ANNA SODERBLOM



[Art Text](#)

L'oro e la luce di Luisa Lambri e Bijoy Jain / Studio Mumbai | Alma Zevi

Fotografia e scultura protagoniste della prima bipersonale di Luisa Lambri e Bijoy Jain / Studio Mumbai in occasione di Biennale Architettura 2021.

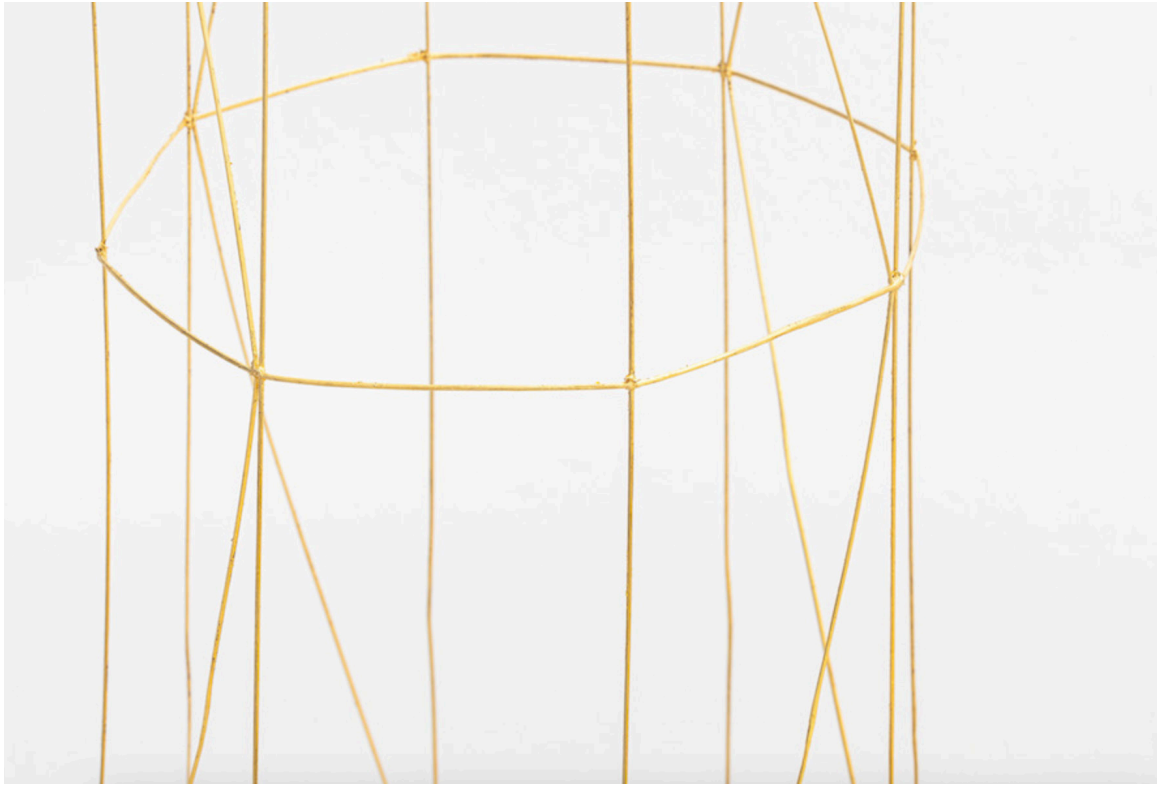
Giugno 27, 2021

Veronica Pillon

SHARE: [FACEBOOK](#) - [TWITTER](#) - [PINTEREST](#) - [GOOGLE+](#)



Luisa Lambri_Bijoy Jain/Studio Mumbai – ALMA ZEVI Venice- Installation view



Luisa Lambri_Bijoy Jain/Studio Mumbai – Installation view – Bijoy Jain Tazia I, 2021 Bamboo and silk thread, gilded with gold leaf Courtesy the Artist and ALMA Zevi, Venice

Spazio e luce al centro della mostra allestita negli spazi veneziani della galleria [Alma Zevi](#): la fotografa **Luisa Lambri** e l'architetto **Bijoy Jain** (Studio Mumbai) interpretano, attraverso lavori inediti – tre fotografie e due sculture in foglia d'oro -, la loro relazione con la storia e la tradizione architettonica. Fino al 31 luglio 2021, il dialogo tra i due artisti e le loro opere sarà presente e vivo: i lavori, pur essendo realizzati autonomamente e individualmente, riflettono un comune interesse nella resa dello spazio, in costante mutamento grazie all'azione della luce, della linea e nell'utilizzo dell'oro.

"Fotografare gli interni per me è una pratica esistenziale, non solo la precisa riproduzione di un'edificio". Le parole di Luisa Lambri risuonano come una dichiarazione di poetica: i suoi scatti presentano dettagli di un edificio in una composizione geometrica e sovraesposta, realizzati in analogico. La fotografia decontestualizza il dettaglio catturato: le immagini, scattate nel 2019 durante un sopralluogo nel Palazzo Querini Stampalia di Carlo Scarpa, non permettono di capire quale sia l'edificio o lo spazio rappresentato. Le composizioni, caratterizzate da linee ortogonali su cui si inseriscono inserti dorati, immergono l'osservatore in un'atmosfera intima e soggettiva: se, da un lato, l'immagine riflette l'interpretazione e la visione dello spazio di Lambri, dall'altro questa stessa visione cambia nel momento in cui l'osservatore posa lo sguardo sulla fotografia. Un processo creativo che traduce impressioni e sensazioni personali in riflessioni generali, legate al modo in cui lo spazio muta a partire dalla presenza umana – la percezione di un ambiente, infatti, risente delle esperienze e della sensibilità di ciascuno – e all'impatto che l'architetto ha nella progettazione di un edificio e, conseguentemente, del tessuto urbano.



Luisa Lambri Untitled (Fondazione Querini Stampalia, #02), 2019 Fine Art pigment print 60 x 52 cm (23 5/8 x 20 1/2 in) (framed) Ed. 3 + 1 AP Courtesy the Artist and Thomas Dane Gallery

Le fotografie di Luisa Lambri si realizzano, spesso, all'interno di edifici progettati da architetti di grande fama – da Le Corbusier a Carlo Scarpa – di sesso maschile: attraverso una visione dell'ambiente soggettiva, Lambri rivendica la presenza del femminile e il cambiamento di prospettiva che lo sguardo e la progettualità delle donne può portare all'architettura.

La reazione agli spazi è un aspetto fondamentale anche nella pratica di Jain che, per la mostra, realizza delle sculture totemiche in bambù e foglia d'oro. Liberamente ispirata a delle sculture utilizzate nelle processioni religiose in India, la struttura – verticale, preziosa e leggera – è visibile da tutti i lati e la sua percezione cambia a seconda dei raggi di luce che la colpiscono nei diversi momenti della giornata. Il totem, contraddistinto da una tessitura e intreccio dei fili di bambù a motivo geometrico, è frutto di un lavoro collettivo, momento di scambio di saperi e relazioni: il totem viene intrecciato e costruito da maestranze indiane e, successivamente, rivestito in foglia d'oro da artigiani veneziani. L'Oriente indiano e l'Occidente veneziano – frutto di una storia secolare di commerci e relazioni interculturali – convivono e si incontrano, rendendo l'esperienza artistica e dello spazio un momento di superamento dei limiti linguistici, geografici e culturali.

"Bisogna essere attenti all'ambiente, ai materiali e ai suoi abitanti. L'uomo nella natura, la natura nell'uomo".

Luisa Lambri e Bijoy Jain / Studio Mumbai

[ALMA ZEVI](#) Venezia

Salizzada San Samuele, San Marco 3357, 30124 Venezia

Fino al 31 luglio 2021

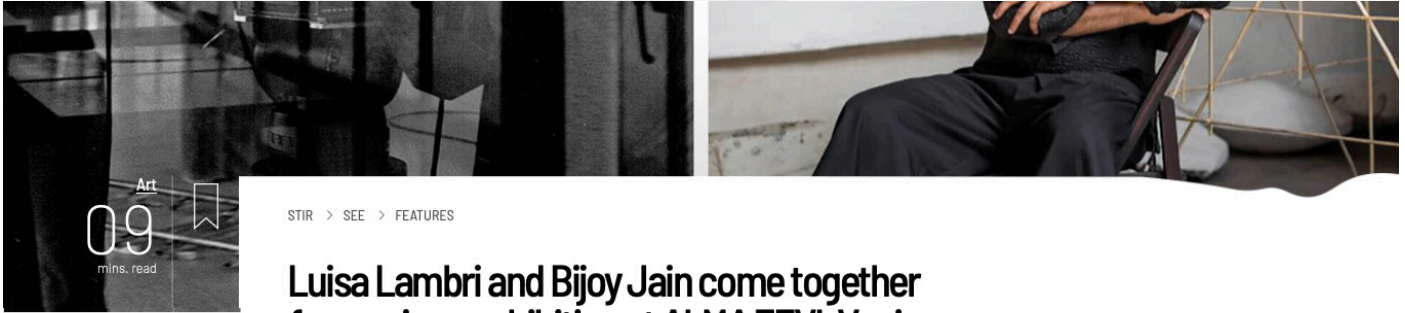
Oltre alla bipersonale, fino al 31 luglio 2021 è allestita, in Salizzada Malipiero (San Marco 3208), la personale di Sofia Stevi, *The Somnambulist*.



Luisa Lambri_Bijoy Jain/Studio Mumbai – ALMA ZEVI Venice- Installation view



Luisa Lambri_Bijoy Jain/Studio Mumbai – ALMA ZEVI Venice- Installation view



STIR > SEE > FEATURES

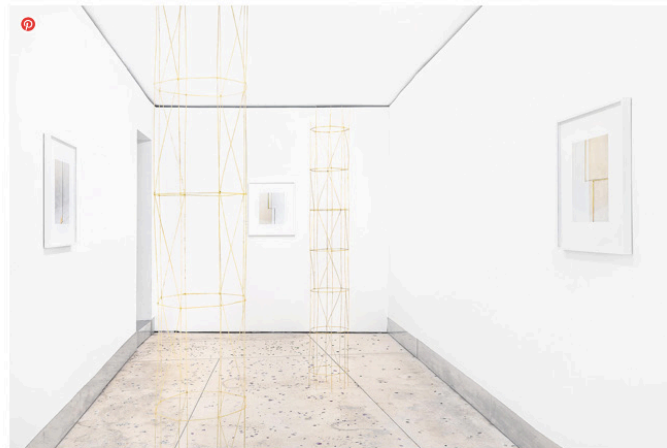
Luisa Lambri and Bijoy Jain come together for a unique exhibition at ALMA ZEVI, Venice

Photographer Luisa Lambri and architect and artist Bijoy Jain explore the ideas of space and line through the lens of history and material in their distinct practices.

by Rahul Kumar | Published on : Jul 17, 2021



How would the ideas of space and volume, of transparency and lightness, come together in two distinct bodies of works? **Italian artist** and photographer, Luisa Lambri, and **Indian architect** and artist, **Bijoy Jain**, did exactly this at their recent collaborative presentation at gallery ALMA ZEVI in **Venice**. Lambri explores architectural spaces in a unique way through her images. She investigates the idea of space through minimal photographic work, capturing subtleties and the play of light and lines. Most often she prefers to work with empty spaces of modernist buildings. Bijoy Jain and **Studio Mumbai**, through the artworks created for this exhibit explore materiality and transforming forms in space. Straddling across 'function' through his architecture and **product design** practice, Jain seamlessly navigates to the 'function-less' through these works.



Installation view

Image: Courtesy of ALMA ZEVI and the artists

Luisa and Bijoy embarked on a prolonged discussion about how their work could interact with each other. Over three years or so, they created two unique bodies of work, which exist within the realm of both their own languages and discrete practices, but also sit together in a dialogue. The dialogue exists not only between the two practitioners, but also between their show and the greater context of Venice.

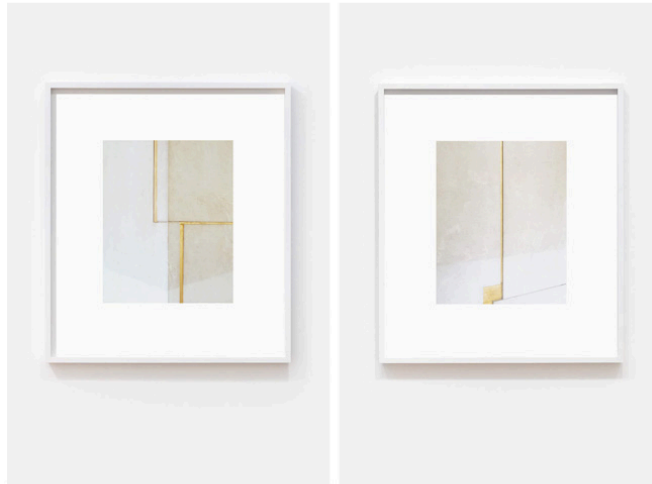


Tazia II (detail) by Bijoy Jain

Image: Courtesy of ALMA ZEVI and the artist

Luisa Lambri does not see herself as a photographer per se but as a **contemporary artist**. Bijoy is not solely an architect but has a far-reaching practice that encompasses art and **design** as well. This fluidity and interdisciplinary approach is what I am very interested in - and this has shaped much of the gallery programme until now. The relationships between

and this has shaped much of the gallery programme until now. The relationships between art and architecture have always fascinated me. There is a direct precedent for this in the exhibition we hosted in 2019 with Charlap Hyman & Herrero; an architecture and design firm based in **New York** and **Los Angeles**. This incredibly talented team made a site-specific installation, which encompassed furniture, art objects and a custom-designed fabric which were all shown in the context of the **Venice Art Biennale**. In short, the gallery tries to be open: a place of discourse, playfulness and experimentation.



Luisa Lambri, *Untitled (Fondazione Querini Stampalia, #02 & 03), 2019*
Image: Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery

RK: What is the significance of 15th century Palazzo Querini Stampalia, details of which have been photographed by Lambri for this show?

AZ: A recurring subject in Luisa's work is the presence of 20th century architecture. It seems natural to me that she would be drawn to Carlo Scarpa. One of the finest examples of the great Venetian architect and designer's work is his intervention in the Palazzo Querini Stampalia. It is not the first time that Luisa photographed Scarpa, she has also made beautiful works relating to his Cimitero Brion, outside Venice.

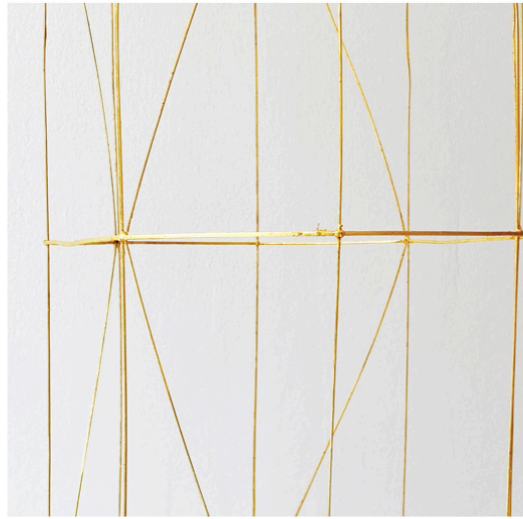
For this exhibition, Luisa wanted to make new work that connected specifically with the city of Venice. The importance of an exploration and reinterpretation of the city was at the heart of this. The fact that Scarpa's work from the 1960s exists within a 15th century Palazzo adds another layer of meaning and contextualises it within an anachronistic setting. It is a beautiful story of old and new existing side by side; old making space for new, and new communicating with old. Venice as an experience is so layered - it is important that there will always be space for the new. Everything takes on such a different feeling with the backdrop of this magical city, its unique architecture and its multi-faceted history.



Works at ALMA ZEVI gallery
Image: Courtesy of ALMA ZEVI and the artists

RK: In continuation, why does Lambri call her work "an existential practice rather than accurate representation of the buildings"?

AZ: Luisa's practice is not about 'documenting' architecture or reproducing spaces that already exist. Her practice is rather more about experiencing light, volumes and spaces. In doing so, she creates new and unique artworks. She has found that using architecture as the building blocks of her visual language allows her to best articulate her interest in the sensations of experiencing certain times and being in certain spaces. She wants to convey the feeling of experiencing these spaces, therefore the works take on very evocative and personal identities.



Tazia II by Bijoy Jain
Image: Courtesy of ALMA ZEVI and the artist

RK: Bijoy Jain on the other hand uses a minimal approach to his art work. How does this resonate across his architecture and art? For instance, the idea of "allowing atmosphere to seamlessly pass" through his forms, the idea of structure alongside lightness and transparency?

AZ: I would not necessarily describe his approach as minimal. It is richly suggestive. He creates atmospheres in his buildings and objects. He plays with textures, natural elements and is always interweaving indoor and outdoor spaces together seamlessly.

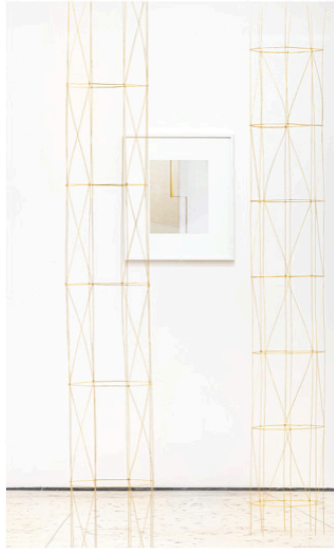


Luisa Lambri, *Untitled (Fondazione Querini Stampalia, #01)*, 2019
Image: Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery

RK: Why does Jain use material like bamboo and yet makes it precious by gilding it with gold leaf? How in your opinion do these forms "simultaneously reveal and conceal" Lambri's images?

AZ: Bamboo is a material that is very present in many areas of Jain's practice. By way of context, it is commonly used in constructions in India, as well as for scaffolding and for *Tazia*, which also are the titles of his sculptures. *Tazia* are traditional structures carried in Islamic processions in India, and are part of the inspiration for the works he is showing in the Venice gallery. The bamboo structures were created at Bijoy's studio in Mumbai and shipped to Italy. In Venice, these works were gilded in the traditional gold leafing that Venice has been renowned for over the centuries. Bijoy therefore combines artisanal techniques and crafts from different countries; creating hybrid forms that are a product of the interconnectedness he sees in the world around him. By gilding the sculptures, they take on a different appearance and different meaning, appearing perhaps more precious or heavier than they really are. Many visitors have assumed they are made of

metal - it is only when they come close that they see the delicate traces of the gold leafing process on the fine surface of bamboo. The resulting structures are open and allow the viewer to see through them. This was an important part of the discussion between Luisa and Bijoy - they both very much wanted the viewer to be able to see parts of the photographic works through the *Tazia*. As one walks around the *Tazia*, areas of the photographic work on the wall are both revealed and concealed. It is only once a visitor has walked around each structure that they see a photograph in its entirety.



Display at ALMA ZEVI gallery

Image: Courtesy of ALMA ZEVI and the artists

RK: Finally, how do the two bodies of work create a unique experience of space, its emptiness and fullness?

AZ: Both Luisa and Bijoy's works are concerned with space, volumes, transparency and lightness. Yet they also revolve around structures that are, in essence, solid. Luisa's photographs in are taken in 'empty' spaces, yet the artworks are full of feeling. Bijoy's sculptures are open-form structures yet fill their surroundings with their golden glow. Both the photographs and the sculptures on view in the gallery convey an elastic presence: from different angles or different conceptual readings they can move swiftly from ephemeral works defined by a light touch, to pieces that are imbued with histories and localised narratives.



Alma Zevi

Image: Enrico Fiorese, Courtesy of ALMA ZEVI

About Author



Rahul Kumar

Editor, Arts

Rahul is responsible for curating the Art section. He has been a Consulting Editor with Arts Illustrated and has written for various publications like Mint-Lounge and Vogue. Before retiring from mainstream corporate roles, he led an art venture for NDTV and was also involved in its television programming. He is a Fulbright scholar, a Charles Wallace fellow, and a practising artist.