

# What to See at the Venice Biennale

From a room of mirrors to kinetic sculpture, the trends and pavilions not to miss across the city.

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By Kat Herriman

May 16, 2019



Since its establishment in 1895, [the Venice Biennale](#) has served as a bellwether for the international art community. Spread across the Arsenale, a former shipyard, and the Giardini, a meandering garden anchored by a central pavilion — the biannual event centers on a main showcase helmed by a single curator and features a set of national commissions, which occupy the pavilions that can be found within the two venues and sometimes in palazzos farther afield. For this year’s edition, Ralph Rugoff, the director of London’s [Hayward Gallery](#), was invited to curate the main space with an exhibition titled “May You Live in Interesting Times,” which hints at the forward-thinking artists included within.

Across the city, artists took on a wide array of subjects, such as climate change, identity politics and technology’s changing role in our lives. We combed through the offerings to round up several themes — and things worth seeing — throughout the biennale.

*[Coming later this spring: the T List newsletter, a weekly roundup of what T Magazine editors are noticing and coveting. [Sign up here.](#)]*



The architect Adam Charlap Hyman sits in a former mirror shop he and his creative partner, Andre Herrero, reimagined as a bedroom as part of their show "Ouvrez-Moi" at Alma Zevi. Federico Torra

### **A Home for Art**

Outside the gates of the Arsenale and Giardini is a constellation of satellite exhibitions that enrich the experience of attending the Biennale. Two shows of note look at the way interiors can function as a kind of theater. At Carpenters Workshop Gallery's Venetian outpost, the designer Virgil Abloh addressed climate change through his latest furniture project, titled the Acqua Alta collection, a series of chairs and benches that seem to sink into the floor. Juxtaposed with views of the canal, whose water levels are on the rise, these dysfunctional metal sculptures mimic the sense of unease that can be felt throughout the city, especially in the metal bridges stacked in its roads in response to the frequent flooding.

Not far from the Giardini and Arsenale, at the local gallery Alma Zevi, the curator Clara Zevi tapped the American architecture and design firm [Charlap Hyman & Herrero](#) to create an installation of furniture that highlights the dexterity of Venice's craftsmen. The resulting installation, "Ouvrez-Moi," takes its inspiration from a scene in Jean Cocteau's 1930s fantasy "The Blood of a Poet," in which a man enters a mirror as if it were a pool. This dream plays out in a series of etched mirrors, vases and tables that trick the eye by layering moments of transparency and reflection. "This is a scene Andre and I have returned to again and again," Adam Charlap Hyman says, referring to his creative partner, Andre Herrero. "How often does one get to create work that stays between the dream and reality of perception?"



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## The Modern Side of Ancient Venice: A Traveler's Guide

For those who think they've 'done' Venice, think again. As the Venice Biennale—the world's biggest art fair—kicks off this weekend, we highlight the city's newer, must-see attractions



Le Stanze del Vetro, a modern glass museum. PHOTO: ENRICO FIORESE

*By Gisela Williams*

Updated May 10, 2019 4:10 p.m. ET

**STARTING THIS WEEKEND**, Italy's most magnetic tourist town plays host to the Venice Biennale, the vast international art show that runs through November. Unsuspecting vacationers expecting to binge primarily on Renaissance painters and gothic palaces are in for a surprise.

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*What are some of your favorite places in Venice—old or new? Join the conversation below.*

They may, for example, find themselves at an artificial beach, serenaded by opera singers crooning about sunburns (an art installation/performance piece from this year's Lithuanian representatives). Or, they may stumble across faux pine trees with speakers transmitting the names of extinct birds and defunct countries, compliments of New Zealand artist Dane Mitchell. As it has in years past, the art festival galvanizes this ancient city, sparking several recent projects with a distinctly modern edge. A few new attractions with staying power:



The 'Ouvrez-Moi' exhibit by Adam Charlap Hyman and Andre Herrero recently installed in a former Venetian mirror workshop and organized by Alma Zevi Projects. PHOTO: ENRICO FIORESE

## What to See

After a two-year renovation, the 9th-century Church of San Lorenzo has been reborn as **Ocean Space**, a cultural center focused on marine preservation. Initiated by art world powerhouse Francesca Thyssen- Bornemisza, Ocean Space debuted in March with a multimedia show by artist Joan Jonas ([ocean-space.org](http://ocean-space.org)). In 2016, the young gallerist **Alma Zevi** opened a tiny but impressive art gallery close to the Palazzo Grassi, one of the city's major contemporary art spaces. Ms. Zevi's gallery is kicking off the Biennale season with works by British painter Frank Auerbach ([almazevi.com](http://almazevi.com)). Meanwhile, Ms. Zevi's mother Marie-Rose Kahane and her husband David Landau helped to establish the modern glass museum **Le Stanze del Vetro** set within a historic school complex on San Giorgio Maggiore island ([lestanzedelvetro.org](http://lestanzedelvetro.org)).

Exhibition

# Charlap Hyman & Herrero Open a Reflective Exhibition in Venice

"Ouvrez-moi," timed to coincide with the Venice Biennale, looks to Murano mirrors and watery grottoes for inspiration

By Madeleine Luckel

May 6, 2019



A look inside the installation. Found objects, such as shells, create additional vignettes.

Photo: Enrico Fiorese

When [Alma Zevi Projects](#) approached [Adam Charlap Hyman](#) and [Andre Herrero](#) about an immersive installation to coincide with the [Venice Biennale](#), it immediately struck a chord with the duo. Serendipitously, down the street (or *calle*, as they are known on the Northern Italian *isola*) from Alma Zevi's Venetian gallery was a well-known mirror shop, which had recently been closed. The proprietor "had passed away," Charlap Hyman explains to AD PRO. "But it was still full of stuff." After getting in touch with the owner of the building, the question quickly became: "What can we do with mirrors?" From there, with the 17th-century history of Murano mirror-making and Novecento architecture as the wind beneath their sails, the pair began to percolate. "We had this idea to make a room of cracked mirrors," Charlap Hyman says. At the time, he continues, it was "a very loose idea, but it was the room we kept coming back to."

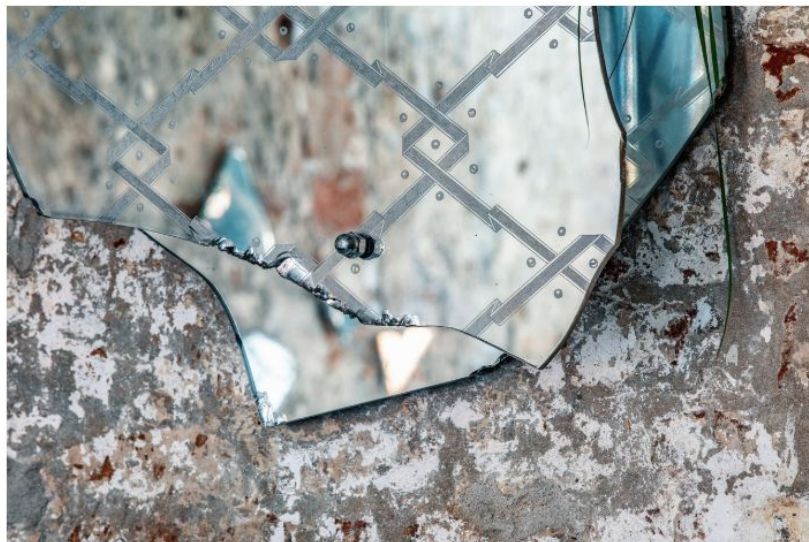
The resulting "Ouvrez-moi" installation, which marks [Charlap Hyman & Herrero's](#) first solo exhibition, is comprised of a series of components—including but also not limited to its broken mirror fragments. Gray-blue linen fabric, which, like all of [Charlap Hyman and Herrero's](#) works on display, is debuting for the first time in [Venice](#), is printed with an interlocking zigzag web in which snails and pearls can be spotted. The pattern of this design has been etched onto the surfaces of the space's mirrors as well, meaning that, as Charlap Hyman puts it, the pattern is further refracted throughout the installation.



Mirrors help create a highly layered look. Charlap Hyman & Herrero is debuting new fabric and furniture works at the Venice exhibition.  
Photo: Enrico Florese

That idea plays off the jagged edges of the mirrors nicely—which is fitting, considering that Charlap Hyman has been fascinated by the history of mirror-making, as well as grottoes, for quite some time. There is actually a connection between these two seemingly disparate topics, as both were associated with Western society's early understanding of the subconscious, when the notion first began to be discussed.

A dawning understanding of psychology is not Charlap Hyman & Herrero's only design inspiration on display. Charlap Hyman cites one particular scene in Jean Cocteau's 1932 film *The Blood of a Poet* as an integral part of his mental mood board. In the scene in question, "The character stands in front of a mirror, and is told he should enter it," Charlap Hyman says. However, since the production was filmed during the 1930s, a pool of water enclosed in a frame made up the entirety of the scene's special effects. This set provides fruitful fodder for the installation, and is all the more fitting considering its lagoon-ensconced location.



A close-up of one fragmented mirror.  
Photo: Enrico Florese



ART | By ANDREA WHITTLE | May 9 2019, 5:44pm

# Charlap Hyman & Herrero Transformed a Venetian Mirror Workshop into a Mythical Bedroom

Our first dispatch from the Venice Biennale brings you into an immersive artwork that draws inspiration from Cocteau.

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There's a scene in Jean Cocteau's 1932 film *The Blood of a Poet* in which the protagonist, an artist in crisis, commands a mirror to "open up" for him. Then, using some pre-CGI movie magic—flipping the set wall horizontally and replacing the full-length mirror with a pool of water—he dives into it with a dramatic splash and enters another dimension.

It's an image that Adam Charlap Hyman and Andre Herrero, of the architecture and design firm Charlap Hyman & Herrero, refer to often. "It requires so much suspension of disbelief, it's such a beautiful cinematic moment and trick of the eye," said Charlap Hyman. "There's a lot in that film that culminates in this moment that's really important to our practice and the way that we think about dreams and emotion in spaces."

When the gallerist Alma Zevi approached them with the idea of doing an installation to coincide with this year's Venice Biennale, she offered them the use of an abandoned mirror workshop, a grotto-like room layered with years of grit and a few built-in surrealist touches, like an ancient wood column with bits of bark still clinging to it and a plaster cast of Beethoven's death mask mounted on the wall above the sink. As they started work on the project, the image of Cocteau's mirror-slash-plunge-pool became a guiding light, and they borrowed the title of the show, "Ouvrez-moi," from his script.



Photo by Enrico Florese.

Charlap Hyman & Herrero transformed the workshop, a ground-level space on a tiny side street in San Marco, into what Charlap Hyman calls "a mythical bedroom," with everything from the headboard to the table made out of massive cracked shards of one- and two-way mirror, etched with an interlocking ribbon pattern by master craftsmen in Murano. Each piece contains spaces for a candle to flicker, ghost-like, through the translucent glass, and vessels filled with lagoon flora, shells, and live snails.



Photo by Enrico Fiorese.

The snails and ribbon pattern (inspired by a Piero Portalupi motif on a palazzo in Milan) are echoed in a custom linen fabric draped over the bed, swagged over the door and windows, and upholstered onto a pair of vintage wicker chairs. “I’ve always been fascinated by snails because they’re this amazing fusion of something so ugly and so beautiful,” said Charlap Hyman. “They’re grotesque, but also really elegant.”

The overall effect of the show, which stays open through July 6th, is intimate, elegant and a little melancholic. It’s studied and referential, but like all of Charlap Hyman & Herrero’s work, it’s ultimately very playful. (During the opening, multiple people jokingly asked if they could spend the night) It’s also the pair’s first solo exhibition. They have collaborated with artists and curators on immersive exhibition designs before—decking out the 56 Henry gallery in New York in sombre green silks for Cynthia Talmadge’s exhibition of paintings of the Frank E. Campbell Funeral Chapel and created a life-sized dollhouse out of cardboard and watercolors for a furniture show at Friedman Benda—but never designed a stand-alone installation of their own.



Photo by Enrico Florese.

Zevi's sister Clara, who is working with her sister in Venice for the first time after four years at Ordovas in New York and London, said that working in the less-than-frenzied environment of an Italian residential neighborhood was a bit of an adjustment, but it yielded a few moments of magic. An elderly neighbor, who kept seeing her standing outside of the space during the install, insisted on offering her his stool. And when they lost power and needed a 50-meter extension cord, another neighbor buzzed doorbells up and down the street until they found one. "The space was such an important part of the neighborhood for such a long time. It was a workshop where a lot of the great Venetian glass artists produced their work," said Clara. "I think it's been really interesting for the people who live here to see it come alive with mirrors again, but in this completely different way."

*Ouvrez-moi is on view in Venice until July 6th at Alma Zevi Projects, San Marco 3208, Salizzada Malipiero.*



## DA VECCHIO LABORATORIO DI SPECCHI VENEZIANI A CAMERA DA LETTO SURREALISTA

*Charlap Hyman & Herrero si ispirano a un vecchio film di Jean Cocteau per esplorare la poetica dello specchio. E costruiscono un'illusione ottica a due passi da San Marco*

DI REDAZIONE DIGITAL 16/05/2019



Una camera da letto in un vecchio laboratorio di specchi veneziano, in una stradina laterale di San Marco: è l'installazione **site specific** degli architetti **Adam Charlap Hyman e Andre Herrero (CHH) Ouvrez Moi**, organizzata dalla galleria **Alma Zevi** in concomitanza con la **Biennale Arte 2019**.



Enrico Fiorese

I mille frammenti di un gigantesco specchio rotto diventano le sagome degli oggetti che siamo soliti vedere in una stanza da letto, dialogando con pezzi d'arredo, tessuti e piante per costruire una natura morta tra le fratture di uno spazio post-industriale con elementi quasi surreali, come l'antica colonna di legno con frammenti di corteccia ancora attaccati e un calco in gesso della maschera mortuaria di Beethoven montato sopra il lavandino.



Enrico Fiorese

L'idea della mostra arriva da un film di Jean Cocteau, *The Blood of a Poet*, in cui una statua vivente trasforma la porta dello studio di un artista in uno specchio.

“Ouvrez-moi”, aprite, comanda l'artista, ma la statua gli dice che l'unico modo per uscire dalla stanza è attraverso lo specchio. Dopo un primo momento di esitazione, si tuffa dentro allo specchio, la cui superficie assume improvvisamente proprietà liquide grazie a un capovolgimento orizzontale del set e alla sostituzione dello specchio a figura intera con una pozza d'acqua.

Affascinati da questo trucco cinematografico i due architetti americani – già impegnati in una ricerca sulla produzione di specchi del diciassettesimo secolo, sulle caverne e sull'architettura del Novecento italiano – hanno provato a esplorare la **poetica dello specchio** come materiale progettuale, lavorando con DH Office di Venezia e gli artigiani locali di Murano.



Enrico Florese

Ogni **specchio bidirezionale** è installato di fronte a uno specchio a senso unico, separati da candele, elementi vegetali tipici della laguna, conchiglie e chiocciole vive: quando si accende una candela, la fiamma attiva la traslucenza dello specchio bidirezionale e crea una sequenza infinita di riflessi, costruendo un'illusione pronta a svanire allo spegnersi della fiamma.



Enrico Florese

Le chiocciole, insieme al motivo a nastro degli specchi (ispirato a un pattern disegnato da Piero Portaluppi per il Palazzo della Società Buonarroti-Carpaccio-Giotto a Milano) si ripetono sul lino usato come copriletto, per le tende e per la tappezzeria delle sedie e delle poltrone vintage.



Enrico Florese

fino al 6 luglio 2019

Ouvrez moi

Alma Zevi Projects

San Marco 3208, Salizzata Malipiero

22 May 2019 by Irene Machetti

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## Charlap Hyman & Herrero first solo exhibition opens in Venice

ALMA ZEVI Projects presents Charlap Hyman & Herrero's debut solo show *Ouvrez-moi*. Organized by Clara Zevi, it takes the spectators into a parallel mindset.



Charlap Hyman & Herrero at 'Ouvrez-moi'. Photograph by Enrico Fiorese

The site-specific installation dialogues directly with the Venetian past and heritage. It comprises of a series of new works produced in Murano, the island's glass-heaven. For the exhibition, Clara Zevi called architects Adam Charlap Hyman and Andre Herrero (CHH) to turn a bygone mirror workshop into a quasi-surreal bedroom. The architectural duo, both 29 years old, live and work between New York and Los Angeles. They certainly found a huge inspiration in these rustic walls, surmounted by a cast in plaster of Beethoven's Death Mask, which belonged to the previous owners on the mirror factory.



The title, *Ouvrez-moi*, is borrowed from Jean Cocteau's script from his 1932 movie *The Blood of a Poet*, another surrealist bell. The film resonates particularly with CHH's practice, and its influence is everywhere felt in their Venice exhibition. In one of the film's scenes, an archetypal artist-in-crisis exhorted by a speaking statue to walk through the mirror. 'Ouvrez-moi!', open up, he commands. And nothing happens—the only way out is physically (and maybe even mentally) through the looking glass. Scared, the artist throws himself against the reflective surface, which magically transforms into a watery, permeable entryway. The reflecting surface shatters completely.



In Venice, a similarly giant etched mirror welcomes visitors into the room. This has been cracked into shards, and then reassembled into a series of intricate pieces of reflective furniture. A remnant becomes the head of the bed; another one a double-layered structure holding some lagoon plants; yet another one turns into an irregular mirror on the irregular wall. Looking closely, you can see sea-shells nestled inside, and snails wandering around, reenacting a typical Venetian habitat.





In this liminal space, fractured and cavernous, intimate but open to the public, CHH invites visitors to explore perceptual illusions constructed with duplications and translucencies. The furniture, textiles and natural artifacts in this exhibition come together to form a still life: part dead, part alive, part natural, part manmade.



CHH collaborated with local craftsmen in Murano to produce this body of new work that draws on Venice's rich history of mirror making, and brings the art form into a contemporary context. Each piece of furniture in CHH's installation incorporates a sheet of two-way mirror in front of a sheet of one-way mirror. Candles and flora and fauna from nearby lagoons live between the two panes. When the candle is lit, the flame activates the translucency of the two-way mirror and creates infinite reflections of the contained ecosystem. When the candle goes out, the viewer is faced with their reflection. Glass becomes mirror and the illusion vanishes.



CHH's research into 17th century mirror production, grottos and Italian Novecento architecture is at the core of *Ouvrez-moi*. On the reflective panes, a geometric design is interlaced. The same can be noticed in the embroideries on the long, semi-transparent curtain that cover the entry-wall. The pattern interprets the soft but geometric design found on the underbelly of Milan's Palazzo della Società Buonarroti- Carpaccio-Giotto with sliding snails in a lattice of interlocking ribbon. This reverberates throughout the exhibition, confusing the distinction between a fleeting reflection and a permanent imprint.

While the artist in *The Blood of a Poet* slips through the looking glass into another world, *Ouvrez-moi* engulfs visitors into a microcosmic grotto. This installation, made using Venetian materials is a space for private play or contemplation, the erotic or the sacred, and is a place that temporarily permeates the threshold of reality. Ephemeral and at the same time grounded in an extensive research into the past and heritage of the city, it acts as a catalyst for discovery and reflection.

*Ouvrez-moi* ALMA ZEVI Projects – San Marco 3208, Salizzada Malipiero, Venice  
3 May – 6 July 2019