

TRANSCENDENTAL REALISM

THE ART OF ADI DA SAMRAJ



la Biennale di Venezia

52. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte
Eventi collaterali

PALAZZO BOLLANI

Castello 3647- 30122 Venice

10 June - 21 November 2007

Hours: 10.00 am – 6.00 pm (closed on Mondays)

IL MANIFESTO - **JUNE 2007**

by **IDA GEROSA**

THINK WITH THE SENSES FEEL WITH THE MIND ART IN THE PRESENT TENSE

(5 + 1)

When one approaches a visit to a great art exhibition like the Venice Biennale, the expectation is to see something new. Something that will surprise you or grab your attention.

Having visited the past Biennale exhibitions over the years, I saw innovative and carefully put together exhibitions, but also others that were so dull as to seem downright boring. This year, the intriguing theme of the Biennale ["Think with the senses, feel with the mind"] particularly aroused my curiosity, so I expected to see unusual, innovative, and meaningful works. I am an artist myself, so I make a concerted effort to understand each artwork, and avoid summing it up with just a one-liner. But, to my chagrin, I must say that I saw only a few pieces that I found attractive and that communicated anything meaningful to me.

I might not have had time to see all the collateral exhibitions, but I would say that overall the installations or pavilions to be "saved" are **5+1**.

Entering the Arsenale, my impression was of a conversion to the past. It was as if I was seeing again those "protest" works that were the rage in the '60s and '70s.

Without a single dissonant note from one installation to another, from one video to another, from photograph to photograph, from painting to painting, the register never changed. I noticed violence, ferocity, and then human bones in the

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shape of a lamp (almost like those in the church of Cappuccini in Via Veneto in Rome) and even a falling airplane with a crucified Christ tied to the fuselage. But also photos of people who died in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, panic and utopia put into video form while offering the vision of talking “deep throats”. And still more violence, war, decay, old age, and more death, as in the yet-beautiful works by Angelo Filomeno, who exhibited skeletons on blue panels with golden designs.

To be noted is the installation of the Brazilian Paula Trope, which is part of the *Morrhno Project*. This is one of the most hard-hitting and emotionally moving projects of this Biennale. Twenty young people came from Rio de Janeiro and, with the assistance of photographer Marco Oliveira and artist Francisco Franco, built a whole 300-square meter *favela* in the Giardini area, using recovered and diverse materials.

From this entire display of this chilling world, I would select the works of Felix Gmelin, who exhibited beautiful photographs that almost remind us of revisited works by Burri.

And perhaps as a result of this constant display of contemporary restlessness and conflict (that unfortunately, by the way, really exist . . . even in kids’ video-games!), some artists have felt the need to “play”, to return to their childhood, to look for fun.

Several videos, such as those by Japanese artist Tabaimo, depict situations through cartoons, almost as if she wanted to communicate a desire to play, to leave behind these serious and urgent circumstances. Likewise, the works of the famous African sculptor El Anatsui, who built two beautiful “weavings”, one draped over one of the Arsenale rooms and the other covering the façade of

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Palazzo Fortuny. The “weavings” are made of small pieces of aluminum cans, and are so colorful and attractive that they almost resemble mosaics.

At the end of the path through the Arsenale, here is the new Italian pavilion, one of the **5** to be “saved” that I mentioned at the beginning. The curator, Ida Granelli, who selected only two artists, was criticized quite strongly by those excluded. However, I think she made the right choice, not only because the pavilion is not very large, but also because the selected artists are significant, very interesting, and different from one another.

On the one hand, the older Giuseppe Penone, through his materials, leads us to the soul of his work. I want to quote only his meaningful thought, expressed with such clarity that one doesn't even need to describe the work itself: “Sculptures of lymph. Spaces covered with hands, spaces emptied by hands. The space of the sculpture filled with lymph. The flow of the hand that runs on the bark of the trees, that reveals the form of the wood and the lines of the marble”.

The work of the younger Francesco Vezzoli is more “contemporary”.

Democracy is inspired by the upcoming electoral campaign for President of the United States. Two videos facing each other transform the room into an arena where the challenge between two candidates, a woman and a man, takes place. The competition, however, is played out by two celebrities: Sharon Stone and Bernard-Henri Levy. So this communicates the idea that, in any given moment, a candidate can be manufactured, packaged, and sold to the voting public. It is important for each candidate to be in the expert hands of a team of professionals. Thus the world is shown to be subject to the laws of show business. Once again, a thought forms clearly in our minds: let's get rid of them. Of all of them?

After the visit to the Arsenale I went on to Giardini.

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Overall, but especially at the Italian pavilion, the exhibition looks like something we've already seen. Few--very, very few--surprises. Could it be that everything has already been said? Or is it that the curators cannot see what can "become" interesting?

In spite of this, the other installations that I would "save" are here at Giardini. The most fascinating work comes from a woman, the French artist Sophie Calle, who transforms the French pavilion into a sort of media "happening". Her idea is one that maybe everyone today would want to enact.

How many times have we received strange, peculiar emails that have surprised us and have caused us to reflect on many points of view? How many times have we begun with an idea and then built a show, a book, an artwork on it? Well, that is exactly what Sophie Calle has done. She was struck by a sentence that someone had written to her – "take care of yourself" – and she asked 107 women to elaborate on it, in order to exhaust it, to set it aside. Out of this came commentaries, but also analyses, recitations, songs, dances. An exploration which she then turned into an installation of video and written words that fills the pavilion in a rigorous structure. This is perhaps the most amusing, fascinating, contemporary work of this Biennale.

But Japanese artist Masao Okabe brings us work that is just as penetrating and meaningful, centered on an important argument. Civilization with the help of technology is capable of discovering and deepening its understanding of the past, but on the other hand it also seems to erase it. Contemporary man has to find the strength to counter this deletion of our lived past and has a duty to pass on a profound cultural inheritance to future generations. Okabe thought of doing this through 4000 works of *frottage*. For nine long years, he "traced" the rocks that

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border the shore of Hiroshima's military harbor. Today, a motorway has replaced the station, but the artist, with patience and perseverance, using only paper and pencil, was able to record history through his 4000 drawings. I must say that works so intense can only come out of Japan.

On the other hand, from imaginative Spain come four artists and an active duo who give us a beautiful pavilion through their project *Broken Paradise*. The project is articulated through the idea of the positive hybridization of contemporary art practices – photographs, animated images, bodily gestures, sound, voice, music. "Paradise" is the model of the vision, a preserved landscape in the midst of reality. These are all important works, full of ideas and even enjoyment.

Finally, among the works to be "saved" is an installation by Australian Daniel von Sturmer, *The Object of Things*. Through architectural models, the artist interacts with space, offering pictorial or real moments that ignite the anticipation and perception of the viewer. The viewer's thought runs on, only to stop in the moments when the videos allow us to enter into slow worlds that are parallel yet very real – worlds through which it is possible to build moments of intimate and intense reflection. Moments that make our spirit soar.

So I have exhausted the **5** pavilions to be "saved".

The collateral events are another story.

Very interesting are the digital images of artist Adi Da Samraj. The exhibit is curated by Achille Bonito Oliva (**+1**). This pavilion is the other one to be "saved" and, even if one makes only a brief visit to the Biennale, is not to be missed.

After the artist concentrated his work for many years on drawing and painting, in 1998 he began working with photography, creating his images

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through computer-elaborated manipulations. He has experimented with the transformations that these digital means allow him, finding his own unique expression. Work relatively common among those who, not having fully mastered the use of the computer, use it for manipulations that, at most, express a "knowledge" of the technical means and a personal contemporary expression.

I often wonder when the time will come when everyone will understand what it really means to make art using a computer. His formation and experience as an artist has prompted him to create images that are very complex and fragmented, giving origin to repeated geometric forms. The colors are splendid, though they are constricted and delineated by and in these geometric forms. He creates images that seem devoid of the fluidity characteristic of the best computer art. However, among the artists who use digital means in this way, he is certainly the best I have seen.

In the context of the courtyard of the Military Presidio of Riva degli Schiavoni in Venice, a significant installation, *The Room of the Artist*, by Loredana Raciti, an exhibition curated by Fabrizia Buzio Negri, deserves to be seen. Within the Presidio, this large installation allows the visitor to come into close contact with the artist's intimate process of inspiration. The emotional vision of the work is enclosed in a multimedia cube and takes shape in this ideal Room. Thus the spectator finds himself immersed in a multi-shaped path of visual and intellectual emotions. The artist came to this project after a long artistic journey, begun in 1996 by revisiting a Cubist-influenced collage technique, reinterpreted through printed photographic images that break out of chromatic backgrounds.

There are many collateral events, so it's very difficult to describe all of them, thus I will limit myself to a few.

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To be noted is the project "Room 312 promemory for Pierre", curated by Ruggero Maggi and dedicated to Pierre Restany. It is a fun, curious work centered on the use of many yellow Post-its, affixed in a hotel room by a large group of artists. Each of the different and bizarre pieces communicates the poetic work of the author. Among the most well known of the artists: Alba Savoi, Marzia Corteggiani, Gabriella Di Trani, Teresa Pollidori...

Another unique and interesting work is what has been brought forth for years by the Synaesthetic Group (M. Albertin, A. Sassu, G. Scordo), in the context of the *2PP3 PERFORMATIVE PAPER PROJECT*, curated by Carlo Damiani, Max Cerchia, Guglielmo Di Mauro, and Emiliano Bazzanella. This time in their performance, presented in the Chiostro of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, the Group has put their attention on the concept of elimination – elimination as a selection method or as hypothetical method of self-elimination within a system where the artistic concept feeds itself and in a sense makes itself immortal. In the performance, self-elimination is seen ironically, with subtle references to common places and to the daily media world. Through video or photography, the images created are elaborated especially to emphasize such a vision: the selection of the individual.

Also part of the same *2PP3* project, the works made of white metacrylic by Antonella Craparotta are particularly interesting and sophisticated.

In conclusion, a Biennale to be remembered only for a few works of value that arouse curiosity and interest, in a general context that's rather anguishing. Which is not surprising.