

Group exhibition

PEI'S WORLD

A brief history of a Chinese gallery in Italy

A cura di Luca Beatrice

Spazio Thetis, palazzina Modelli
Arsenale di Venezia – Sestiere di Castello

May 10 – November 24 2019

Tuesday - Sunday 11.00 – 06.00p.m.

Press Preview May 10 h. 4.00p.m.

Opening May 10 h.5.00p.m.

Press release

A collective exhibition in Venice, with works by international artists that highlights the wide and courageous cultural and entrepreneurial project of a young woman.

The story of a brave and enterprising young woman arrives in Venice, with **the exhibition Pei's World - A brief history of a Chinese gallery in Italy**, at **Spazio Thetis** during the new edition of Biennale 2019 from May 10 to November 24. This exhibition tells the world of Pei and of the artists, coming from different continents, which she represents exclusively.

“For once, therefore – says the curator Luca Beatrice - an exhibition is not only focused on artists, but also on those who have literally created a project from scratch.”

Peishuo Yang was born in Tian Jin, a metropolis in the north-east of China that has a population of 15 million inhabitants. Over twenty years ago, when she was very young, she left China to come to live in Italy, attracted by the quality of life, by the history of art and by the landscapes of our Country. Since 1997, therefore, Pei (so called by her friends) is resident in Italy. She studied Literature and Philosophy, and then she graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence in 2008.

In the same year she founded the company Present Contemporary Art: its mission is to establish relations between Italy and China whose market is experiencing a period of extraordinary and growing expansion.

In 2011 she opened her gallery in the center of Florence and then, in 2013, she moved to Milan, where she founded MA-EC, not only a traditionally art gallery, but a real interactive platform, a center for international meetings to enhance creativity and exchanges between West and East, organize events, promote synergies.

Recently MA-EC has moved to a new venue, the prestigious Palazzo Durini, very close to the Duomo di Milano.

Artists

Afran (Cameroun), Jorge Cavelier (Colombia), Ma Cong (China), Huiming Hu (China), Tannaz Lahiji (Iran), Giorgio Piccaia (Italy).

Bios:

Afran (Francis Nathan Abiamba) was born in Bidjap (Cameroon) in 1987, he lives and works in Italy since 2009. Trained in Africa, he studied at the Academy of Bergamo; works with different languages from painting to sculpture to public art. He has numerous international exhibitions in Africa, Europe and America. He has received various international art awards including the first San Fedele in Milan and the Liliana Nocera della Permanente award in Milan.

In recent decades the art geography has changed profoundly. While the concept of "local" has lost the charm that characterized it in the 1980s, now Western cities have become the gathering point for experiences from many parts of the world. New York, London, Berlin, Paris, Milan therefore result as polyformal identities that are being realized through the sum of multiple languages. What fails in society, especially in politics, finds breeding ground in art and culture, where exchanges, interactions and integrations are daily activities. This is Afran, the Cameroonian artist who trained in Italy, through the academy and street painting experience. Searching for an element that acts as a bridge between two very different cultures, he found the answer in *jeans*, since the denim fabric is among the most eloquent symbols to express the contradictions and the complexity of our age. "A kind of platform where everyone can shape their identity. A kind of zero degree $E=mc^2$ is the title of Afran's installation, two circular paintings. The first picture depicts Albert Einstein's face in a more or less realistic way. The second, instead, shows an abstract image. The title, of course, mentions Einstein's equation: $E = mc^2$, Energy equals mass per squared velocity. "Energy - says Afran - is without doubt one of the most urgent issues in the new century. From managing fossil energies to finding more sustainable alternatives, the only certainty is the urgency to consider energy savings. The energy demanded to our planet is far superior to what it can offer us. But the environmental aspect is only one of the keys to understanding the work. After the theorization of postmodernism and liquid modernity, post truth is today an undeniable reality. Whether scientific or historical, there is no longer any truth that is safe from suspicion. Not even the news with the advent of fake news are safe from that. From the efficiency of vaccines to the shape of the earth, conspiracy theories challenge any certainty or goal. At the same time, anyone from the pulpit of the right of expression, can advance his theories, authoritative neither more nor less as an opinion and spread them for free through social media as irrefutable truths: everything and / is the opposite of everything. The jeans then become the most eloquent figurative expression of this concept: casual is clothing, casual is the habit. Thanks to a "democratization of truth", anyone can doubt or question any mathematical theorem ... Why is it not $E > mc^2$?

Jorge Cavalier was born in Colombia in 1953, and lives in Florida. He is an observer of the images of nature, a painter, slow and sophisticated, who introduces the dimension of the passage of time into his delicate watercolors and oils.

It's certainly not new today that we discuss about paintings in residual terms. The contemporary painter prefers to call himself an all-round artist, painting is no longer a dogma and is necessarily compelled to dialogue with space, expanding beyond the limits of two dimensions. This condition is also present in the poetics of Jorge Cavalier, which we know as a cultured and refined painter. His new work, *El Dorado*. The legend is presented as an installation painted on eight silk panels, supported in an almost invisible way, freely fluctuant and lightweight. Walkable, traversable painting, with, in addition, a mirroring sculptural element. Cavalier wants to rebuild an environment that refers to the "cloud forest in Colombia a country with the highest biodiversity in

the world". As usual, the symbolic element is inserted into the dialogue with the observer. "This forest of the highlands - tells the artist - contains in itself the representation of mother nature, the regenerator of life, on which it's resiliency depends: clean water, renewed air, harmony and balance of ecosystem. The further message contained is the urgency to awaken the consciousness on urgency of the forests' conservation. The ancient Spanish chronicle tells that a yearly ritual of retribution to mother nature took place in Colombia performed by natives of those lands. On the predicted full moon night the cacique would slide on a raft to the center of the sacred lagoon. There, carrying all the gold pieces produced by the community, he dived into the water, releasing the gifts in the water. For those communities gold was "sun drops", symbol of the male presence on earth. The lagoon is, parallelly, the womb of humanity, since it was believed that the first woman on earth originated from those waters. The combination of water and gold ensured then the continued fertility of nature".

Ma Cong, born in Nachino in 1970 devotes himself to design, 3D graphics, virtual sets for an extremely current proposal, between irony and social criticism. Red Dot Award Winner: Best of the Best in Germany. As an experienced design consultant in Greater China for global hotel brands including Hilton, Hyatt and Carlson.

Very well known in China and in Europe in the field of design, a language through which he criticizes in an ironic, at times harsh, habits and fashions of the global contemporary society, Ma Cong often asks himself the question of the context, a determining element in attributing value and meaning to a work. We are well aware, in fact, that in contemporary art the "context theory" is currently predominant even more than the so-called questionable concept of quality. What is inside the museum, or the gallery, is defined art regardless, and if the same object is hosted in an international context, the judgment will still be different. A cultural background, a natural or stylistic environment, and any other factor that determines an event, aims to define the "great context of art".

The title chosen by Ralph Rugoff for the new edition of the Venice Biennale, "May you live in interesting times", constitutes the theoretical and inspiring starting point of Ma Cong's new work. This phrase could be a curse from ancient China and instead is an invention of the West. "This - the artist asks himself - it leads us to reflect on how we should deal with misunderstandings, such as misinterpretation and the dissemination of false informations. Should we face the consequences of the result?".

Not even art can avoid the apparently banal things like the language of emoticons that we need today to communicate - on WhatsApp messages and in general on social- with moods rather than words, since they synthesize an emotion with an icon, making themselves empathetic and likeable. A global language, even if brought back to zero, which overcomes any type of language and vocabulary barrier. In brief, images can do more than words.

Huiming Hu was born in China in 1990 and like most artists of her generation works on specific projects, as in the case of Wall, the installation for this exhibition. At MIA Photo Fair 2018 was selected among the top 15 photographers in the BNL A Curator's Guide. She has exhibited all around Italy, in Spain and United States.

Exactly thirty years have passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the Center Pompidou was inaugurated the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, the first major international exhibition that united western artists with other worlds, at that time considered very far, if not exotic. Globalization was therefore coming to swift steps. But returning to the image of the Wall, for us Westerners there

is no suggestion (and today no celebration) that does not refer to that extraordinary need to break down barriers for a new desire for freedom. On the other hand, every wall that is erected proposes the sense of limit, as if history had really taught us nothing. The Wall is also the main theme of Hu Huiming's installation, but the inspiration feeds once again on the relationship with the culture of origin. Inside each cement brick that forms this barrier, a pressed book is hidden, which can no longer be accessed or read. The episode refers to a specific historical event: when Emperor Qin Shihuang burned the books, the ninth generation of Confucius, a descendant of Kongzhen, hid many classic texts of tradition within a wall. All the the books were got safe, saved but illegible. Later, at the time of Emperor Hanjing, Liu YuYu, prince of Lu Gong, expanded his palace and demolished the original house of Confucius. So nothing remains of the wall, and this is an extreme attempt to bring it back to life.

Tannaz Lahiji was born in Tehran in 1978 from a family of artists, very active in every field of creativity. Her constant research prompts her to experiment continuously with new forms of artistic expression an reworking in painting, performance art, and installations. She recently completed in Florence her new project "Riflessioni su Dante" at Palazzo Vecchio, at Museo della Casa di Dante and at Palazzo Bastogi. She has exhibited in shows all over Italy and abroad, in London, Moscow, Los Angeles, Shanghai.

Eclecticism, plurality of artistic languages, creations of enormously spectacular impact that combine in equal doses elements of Conceptual Art and a strong emotional charge. Between Tehran and Florence, Iran and Italy, Tannaz works as a global artist, inventing an ever-surprising world that generates a dialogue – and sometimes a clash – between West and East, between ancient native tradition and contemporary approaches. Her large environmental installations are like open pages, not giving any answers, but asking new questions. Fundamentally, art unveils a mystery and this mystery leaves room for numerous interpretations.

Tannaz Lahiji's project in Venice has come about as a result of her recent "scattered" exhibition in various Florentine historical buildings, conceived of as a homage to Dante, celebrating a couple of years in advance the 700th anniversary of his death, due to be commemorated in 2021. Inferno and Paradise, in any case, are metaphors that pertain not just to the Catholic culture, but also to the Persian one. The use of the metaphor is Tannaz' most characteristic mode of procedure, with copious literary and historical references, creating artworks that are extremely cerebral, strikingly chromatic, highly spectacular and theatrical in vein, where the element of time takes on a special significance and vision is transformed into active participation.

For her Venice project, the artist returns to a subject that is dear to her, the waterfall, already employed in previous exhibitions. "It will be a site-specific installation, over five metres high, consisting of a frozen waterfall, made with various materials, reminiscent of the style of ancient Persian mosques".

Giorgio Piccaia was born in Geneva. He studied architecture with Corrado Levi at the Milan Polytechnic where he was strongly involved in performance art. He works with the papyrus technique and a pottery maker. In 2019 he was invited by the Italian Embassy in Egypt to realize a Murales inside the Embassy headquarters.

To frame the artist Giorgio Piccaia it is essential to retrace some of the many stages of the training process that led him to become a really interesting character on the Italian scene. Born in Geneva, student in architecture and with Corrado Levi as teacher in Milan, in the '80 he was a performer, editor and activist in the Theater group of Jerzy Grotowski. There are different ways to reach

painting, Piccaia has certainly chosen the less traditional and more eclectic one, built on solid cultural foundations and deep questions. Despite its hypercontemporary vein, in the language of Piccaia often return words that refer to the classical tradition: logos, primary act of knowledge, wisdom, beauty, strength, terms that are hidden, hidden under the weft of his painting as sources of inspiration not declared yet still present. While moving between installations and three-dimensional interventions, Giorgio Piccaia feels the need, the exigency, the periodic necessity to return to painting within the framework dimension. A framework constructed by plot, design, imprint, embellished with interwoven polymathic interventions that demonstrate how the inspiration derived from the informal abstract has not absolutely finished its run. By rejecting images that are too frontal, in a time where the abuse of the icon is under everyone's eyes, Piccaia reinvents painting as a space to think. Where thought corresponds to freedom.

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