

La Biennale di Venezia
58th International Art Exhibition
May You Live In Interesting Times

Venice (Giardini and Arsenale), **May 11 – November 24, 2019**
Pre-opening, May 8-9-10

Venice, 8 May 2019 – The **58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia**, titled **May You Live In Interesting Times**, will open to the public from Saturday **May 11** to Sunday **November 24, 2019**, at the Giardini and the Arsenale; it will be curated by **Ralph Rugoff** and organised by **La Biennale di Venezia** chaired by **Paolo Baratta**. The **pre-opening** will take place on **May 8, 9 and 10**; the **awards ceremony** and **inauguration** will be held on **Saturday, May 11, 2019**.

THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION

“The title of this Exhibition could be interpreted as a sort of curse”, **President Paolo Baratta** stated, “where the expression ‘interesting times’ evokes the idea of challenging or even ‘menacing’ times, but it could also simply be an invitation to always see and consider the course of human events in their complexity, an invitation, thus, that appears to be particularly important in times when, too often, oversimplification seems to prevail, generated by conformism or fear. And I believe that an exhibition of art is worth our attention, first and foremost, if it intends to present us with art and artists as a decisive challenge to all oversimplifying attitudes.”

“Twenty years have passed since, in this same location, I presented my first Exhibition”, **the President** recalls, “after the Biennale underwent major reform in 1998. Let me tell you, they have been very interesting times. ‘Openness’ was our response to the many critics who accused the Biennale and its ‘national pavilions’ of being old-fashioned; in those years, cosmopolitanism and globalisation were in vogue. Now, twenty years later, some people raise the doubt that cosmopolitanism might also have been a way for dominant societies and economies to exert a sort of soft power.”

“To this end, I remember how the word ‘open’, more than any other, resounded in us in the early years”, **Baratta** continues, “and it characterised our choices in 1999 and 2001: to be ‘open’ to new spaces; to ‘open’ our exhibition, in order to represent art as a phenomenon of humanity (the title of our first Biennale was *APERTO overALL*, the second was entitled *Plateau of Humankind*; these two titles became the motto for all the following editions of the exhibition).”

“**During these years, we have increased the number of visitors and found a new partner.** Over the course of the past years, the double cost of transportation in the lagoon obliged us to ask for additional support, and our expressions of gratitude and our press books included many market participants. **The increase in the number of our visitors has allowed us to considerably cut back on this practice**, as you can see in the drastic reduction in our expressions of gratitude, both when presenting the works and in the catalogues, with the exception of a few ‘special’ presences (characterised by the high cost of their realisation and/or transportation). **Our visitors have become our main partner; more than half are under 26 years of age.** Calling notice to this result seems to me the best way to celebrate the twenty years which have passed since 1999.”

“**We want to offer them an open gym, where they can feel involved in encounters with the works and the artists, in the direct discovery of the ‘other’ which the work of art offers.** To us, it is important that, when entering the exhibit, the ‘public’ becomes ‘visitors’, who then become ‘observers’ of the work. First, the necessary disorientation, then the involvement, followed by the discovery; it is almost a fencing drill. **To share this direction is one of the reasons we have asked Ralph Rugoff to collaborate with us on this twentieth anniversary.**” (*The full text by Paolo Baratta is included in the press kit and the catalog*)

The Exhibition is **divided into two separate presentations, Proposition A in the Arsenale and Proposition B in the Giardini’s Central Pavilion**, comprising **79 participants** from all over the world.

“From the acceleration of **climate change** to the **resurgence of nationalist agendas** across the globe, from the **pervasive impact of social media** to the **growing disparity of wealth**, contemporary matters of concern are addressed in many of the works in this exhibition”, **Ralph Rugoff** explains. “But let us acknowledge at the outset that art is more than a document of its times.”

“*May You Live In Interesting Times* highlights artworks whose forms function in part to call attention to what forms conceal and the multifarious purposes that they fulfil. In an indirect manner, then, perhaps these artworks can serve as a kind of guide for how to live and think in ‘interesting times’. **We can certainly learn from the way the artists in this Biennale challenge existing habits of thought** and open up our readings of widely varied objects and pictures, scenarios and situations.”

“In order to call attention to the exemplary multiplicity of these artistic practices, with their open-ended and many-sided explorations, it seemed to me that this Biennale would need a slightly different approach. Hence **there is no over-arching narrative or thematic umbrella**. To underscore the fluid complexities of this kind of art, I have chosen to make a small adjustment to the usual format of the Biennale Arte: *May You Live In Interesting Times* **is divided into two separate presentations, Proposition A in the Arsenale and Proposition B in the Giardini’s Central Pavilion**. The works presented in these two venues, and the atmospheres they generate, are quite distinct from each other – not because they are grouped around separate ideas or principles, but because they feature different aspects of each artist’s practice.”

“Our encounters with works of art are invariably modified by the architectural contexts that frame them, and the dissimilar settings and viewing conditions offered by these two sites inevitably create a fissure in our experience of any exhibition staged across them both. **This edition seeks to make a virtue of that situation**. Meanwhile, the 58th International Art Exhibition also includes 89 national pavilions in addition to the international exhibition; it has thus always formulated itself in a kind of split format, in which the utopianism of the international exhibition is counter-balanced by the nationalist manifestations embedded in the separate pavilions. This is one of the unique characteristics of the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, which – to my knowledge – is unmatched by any other biennial of art and which links it to the tradition of world exhibitions that arose in the 19th century.”

“In his ground-breaking book *The Open Work*, first published in Italy in 1962, Umberto Eco drew attention to art’s capacity to inspire novel ways of seeing and behaving, which he linked to its relentless testing and questioning of cultural standards and norms. This activity includes continually disrupting the rules and conventions of current artistic practice and seeking open-ended conversations over any exercise of closure. Almost 60 years after the publication of Eco’s book, **it is precisely these characteristics of ‘the open work’ that this exhibition aims to explore through the work of the artists that it brings together**.”

“As many different thinkers and artists have proposed over the past 150 years, works of art are also collaborative transactions. The artist sets the initial parameters of this process, but the viewer’s own associative responses and interpretations continue its development. **All of the artists in this exhibition were selected because in some way their work acknowledges the open-ended character of this exchange. It takes seriously art’s role as a catalyst for inviting and inciting dialogue**. These artists recognise that the meanings that arise around their works are not embedded principally in objects but in conversations through which their possible significance and uses are extended and multiplied. Their works can accommodate this kind of exchange in part because they offer audiences multiple points of entry; they feature elements that are immediate, accessible and engaging. Through cultivating these qualities in various ways, the works in *May You Live In Interesting Times* **offer a profound type of hospitality: they welcome not only the presence of the public, but also their interpretations and critical engagement**.”

“Ultimately, what is most important about an exhibition is not what happens inside a gallery, but **how audiences use their experience afterwards to re-imagine everyday realities from expanded perspectives**. In other words, an exhibition should make the most of art’s capacity to open people’s eyes to previously unconsidered ways of being in the world so that they might change, however briefly, their view of that world and their place in it. This is what it means to live in interesting times.” (*The full text of Ralph Rugoff is included in the Press Kit and the catalogue*)

NATIONAL PARTICIPATIONS

The Exhibition will also include **89 National Participations** in the historic Pavilions at the Giardini, at the Arsenale and in the city centre of Venice. **Four countries will be participating for the first time at the Biennale Arte: Ghana, Madagascar, Malaysia and Pakistan**. The Dominican Republic participates for the first time in Biennale Arte with its own national pavilion.

The **Italian Pavilion** at the Tese delle Vergini in the Arsenale, sponsored and promoted by the **Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali**, Direzione Generale Arte e Architettura Contemporanea e Periferie Urbane, is titled *Neither Nor: The challenge to the Labyrinth* and curated by **Milovan Farronato**.

COLLATERAL EVENTS

21 Collateral Events, which are admitted by the Curator and promoted by non-profit national and international bodies and institutions, take place in several locations around the city of Venice. They offer a wide range of contributions and participations that enrich the diversity of voices that characterises the Exhibition.

SPECIAL PROJECTS realised by La Biennale di Venezia

Forte Marghera Special Project, Mestre

Ludovica Carbotta, one of the artists taking part in the International Exhibition, has been invited by Ralph Rugoff to expressly make a work in Forte Marghera. Carbotta presents a new sculptural installation, *Monowe (The Powder Room, 2019)*, which explores the ways in which human imagination can trigger powerful emotions even without a real imminent danger.

“We renew our presence in Forte Marghera this year”, President **Paolo Baratta** commented “with an exhibition inside the **Austrian Polveriera**. Rugoff has given artists the opportunity to each show two different artworks that reflect diverging aspects of their practice, thus creating a dialogue across the Arsenale and the Giardini. In the case of Ludovica Carbotta, the artist’s display in Forte Marghera makes reference to her other work shown at the Arsenale. This approach reinforces the full integration of the International Exhibition with what is exhibited in this place.”

Applied Arts Pavilion Special Project, Arsenale, Sale d’Armi

For the fourth consecutive year, the collaboration between **La Biennale di Venezia** and the **Victoria and Albert Museum**, London has made possible the **Applied Arts Pavilion Special Project** located in the Arsenale Sale d’Armi, jointly organised by the two institutions. *It’s About Time* is the title of the exhibition by **Marysia Lewandowska**, the artist selected by Curator of Biennale Arte 2019 **Ralph Rugoff**.

“This year’s exhibition project finds inspiration from the visit to **La Biennale’s Historical Archives and V&A’s collections**”, Presidente **Baratta** explains. “Marysia Lewandowska turned her attention to the history of La Biennale and specifically to its origins. She was struck by the clear dominance of ‘men’ among the people mentioned in its official history since its foundation.” (*See document attached herein*).

MEETINGS ON ART

Meetings on Art is the programme of **conversations, performances, and talks** that will run throughout the opening period of the Exhibition to allow visitors to learn more about *May You Live In Interesting Times* from the voice of its participating artists. **Lara Favaretto** will engage in conversation with the art historian and curator **Angela Vettese** (June 14); **Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Tomàs Saraceno, Margaret Wertheim** and **Anicka Yi** will meet **Ralph Rugoff** for a conference addressing art’s relationship with technological, social and environmental issues (September 14 - 15). As part of the Pavilion of Applied Arts Special Project, a **symposium on Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa** will be held on October 22. Lastly, **Paolo Baratta** and **Ralph Rugoff** will meet the public on Sunday, November 24 at the Teatro alle Tese Arsenale to discuss the legacy of Biennale Arte 2019.

A variegated programme of **performances during the opening weekend and the closing days** of the Exhibition will activate the ‘in-between’ spaces of the Biennale’s Giardini areas, outdoor walkways, and interior spaces in short and durational episodes. In addition, the Teatro alle Tese and the Teatro Piccolo Arsenale will host an array of performances, scheduled daily, and create a focused space for the unfolding of more concentrated narratives (artistic organiser Aaron Cezar; with the additional support of Arts Council England and Delfina Foundation).

In relation to the *Thinking Head* installation by **Lara Favaretto** in Giardini’s Central Pavilion and for the duration of the steam clouds rising from its façade, **there will be a series of “clandestine talks”, closed-door roundtable discussions**, hosted in a bunker-like performance space **in the Arsenale**. There will be no audience, though the talks will be recorded and audible online in La Biennale’s official website. (*For further information and a detailed programme of the Meetings on Art, see document attached herein or visit www.labiennale.org*).

BIENNALE SESSIONS, the project for Universities

For the tenth consecutive year, La Biennale dedicates the **Biennale Sessions** project to institutions that develop research and training programmes in architecture, the arts and related fields, and to Universities and Fine Arts Academies. The aim is to facilitate self-organised three-day visits for groups of at least 50 students and teachers, with the possibility of organising seminars in the exhibition venues offered free of charge and assistance in organising travel and accommodation (*see document attached herein*).

EDUCATIONAL

For the past decade, La Biennale di Venezia has been devoting increased attention to learning activities, and has developed a growing commitment to so-called “*Educational*” initiatives addressed to the audience of its Exhibitions, to universities, young people, and children, from schools at all levels. In the past two years, the Art and Architecture Exhibitions had **114,814** participants in *Educational* activities in total, amongst whom **68,794** were youngsters. A broad *Educational* programme has been scheduled for 2019 as well, addressed to individuals and groups of students, children, adults, families, professionals, companies, and universities. All the initiatives aim at actively involving the participants, and are led by professional operators, carefully trained by La Biennale di Venezia. They are divided into two categories: **Guided Tours** and **Workshop Activities** (*see document attached herein*).

PUBLICATIONS

The official catalogue, titled **May You Live In Interesting Times**, consists of **two volumes**. **Volume I**, curated by Ralph Rugoff, is dedicated to the International Exhibition. **Volume II** is focused on the National Participations and the Collateral Events. The **Exhibition Guide** is conceived to accompany the visitor through the Exhibition. The **graphic identity** of the Biennale Arte 2019 and the layout of the books are designed by Melanie Mues, Mues Design London. The three books are published by **La Biennale di Venezia** (*see document attached herein*).

PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

The 58th International Art Exhibition was also made possible thanks to the support of **Swatch**, **Partner** of the event.

Main Sponsor of the 58th Exhibition is **illycaffè**.

Sponsors: **JTI (Japan Tobacco International)**, **Artemide**, **Vela-Venezia Unica** and **Seguso Vetri d'Arte**.
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We especially wish to thank Ralph Rugoff and all his team.

And finally we would like to thank the highly professional staff of La Biennale, who work with such great dedication on the organisation and management of the Exhibition.

Official website of Biennale Arte 2019: www.labiennale.org

Official hashtag: **#BiennaleArte2019 #MayYouLiveInInterestingTimes**

IMAGES of the 58th International Art Exhibition may be downloaded at the following link:

<http://ftp.labiennale.org> | *Account*: biennalearte2019 | *Password*: biennalearte2019

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