

INtheFRAME



INtheFRAME (ITF) was initially created in 2011 as a platform to promote and bring together the contemporary artists of the Iraqi diaspora through curated exhibitions and events. The work of talented emerging and established artists of Iraqi descent who live and work internationally is significant and diverse in number. Some of these artists either do not have coherent representation, or would benefit from focused projects exposing their concepts to a wider audience. ITF aimed to make a significant contribution to the development and increased exposure of these Iraqi artists. ITF has since grown to be a curatorial platform, artist management hub, and online site that facilitates access to, and engenders intelligent debate on, art emanating not only from Iraq but the wider North African and Middle Eastern region. It embraces artists who are both of the diaspora and who reside in their countries of origin.

ITF's curatorial and artist management services now form the crux of its activities. Its exhibitions and events are organised around harmonised themes or concepts acting as a framework for the works of the artists who participate. The concept of freedom is a core tenet of ITF, which does not demand exclusivity or continued involvement from artists. Rather, ITF aims to create a community founded on relationships of honesty, loyalty, and common purpose.

ITF's bespoke curation services are available to galleries that wish to host such projects and thereby involve their own artists, be introduced to new artists, or both. In its curatorial capacity, the concept comes before the artist selection. ITF's ambition is to bring artists from the Middle East into juxtaposition or interplay with artists of Western origin, under common and often universal themes. ITF's first major exhibition, "[dis]orient", was held in a Mayfair gallery in London, in June 2013. It brought together the works of a prominent Iraqi artist and that of an Italian artist, under the concepts of 'Home' and 'Displacement'. Through its curated projects, ITF aims to challenge audi-

ence's notions of 'otherness', and to highlight differences or similarities in approach between artists of an occidental and oriental background.

In its artist management capacity, ITF offers tailor-made services to artists. The services offered range from consultancy services on all aspects of the artists' activities, including management of gallery relationships and portfolios, organising one-off solo or group exhibitions, editing texts and statements, and marketing and general commercial advice.

A voluntary charitable angle exists to many of ITF's projects. The Iraqi Art Auction, featuring the works of prominent artists such as Dia Azzawi, Mahmoud Obaidi, and Ahmed Al-Bahrani, that took place in Dubai in January 2012, was its inaugural charity event. The auction drew in a diverse international audience and was successful in creating exposure for both the established and emerging artists on display. ITF continuously strives to locate and support genuine arts initiatives for its charitable projects, as a fundamental part of its mission.

ITF is also involved in fostering intelligent debate on the arts in the Middle Eastern region and beyond. ITF organised a roster of speakers ranging from the Abraaj Capital Art Prize's principal founder, in Dubai, to the directors of artistic charities, in Dubai in November 2011. ITF was also sought by BOLDTalks, Dubai, to contribute the artistic element to its annual event of international speakers, whose topics ranged from global health and poverty to science and technology. More recently, ITF participated in a London panel hosted by Ibraaz, on the subject of Iraq's looted heritage during the war.

For more information on ITF's activities and services, please visit the website www.intheframe.org or contact Noor Kadhim (Founder) on noor@intheframe.org. You can also keep up to date with ITF's activities on Twitter @intheframeart and on its Facebook page.



Labourers in Al Quoz participating in ITF's Paint-A-Sack workshops, December 2012

A REVIEW ON VENICE BIENNALE 2013

By: Beral Madra

“Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it, or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little.” - Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities.



Venice in front of Spirito Santo

These are the feelings I have experienced this time in Venice: maybe because I have not organized an exhibition, but just came to see the biennale and feel somehow alienated and misplaced. Or, maybe, when I was in Venice - a model of urban preservation and resistance-, my city, Istanbul was resisting rapidly losing its architectonic identity, its ecological values and its Byzantine-Ottoman aura due to the phantasy of a prime minister to engineer a neo-Islamic society, neo-Ottoman utopias, unprecedented economic growth. This has been the main dictum of the government and its authoritarian prime minister, since 10 years. Being a dissident individual within the 50% of the population that did not vote for AKP Part I joined my colleagues and friends in San Marco to support the protesters in Istanbul and to attract the attention of the international art world.

I have attended two conferences: *Venice Agendas* and *Continental Breakfast* which are ongoing private and institutional initiatives to open discussion platforms and networking possibilities for art experts and artist's culture and art since the beginning of 2000.

The first session of *Venice Agendas* focused on the visibility and meaning of Performance Art in public sphere and in the institutional programmes. The speed dating next morning which is currently a very popular way of connecting art and culture people was a child's game with the educational preset questions! The third day was programmed in three tables. Visual art production at international events and on the alternative scene, cultural production in times of financial constraint, production, networking, alternative cultural policies and the usual question "what is going on and what can be done to improve, the conditions of work in Venice during the biennale" were the topics to be discussed. I would like to summarize my opinion on the topics of these three days: Despite the transcultural intellectual and artistic relations, production-consumption process of culture industry, global-market interests, collector-sponsor-corporate art assets, the contemporary art industry has its financial, infrastructural and ideological deficits in many countries, including those who are well advanced! Art people are seeking for effective solutions but the existing political systems with their consumption and neo-liberal excess loaded culture policies do not hear their voice!

Continental Breakfast Forum has celebrated its 10th year with a one day forum in Palazzo Zorzi (Unesco Building) with the topic "*Running Time*", asking its members to discuss their curatorial choices within the their local conditions and within the global cultural discourses. Most of the speakers were from East and South EU countries. What makes this platform estimable is its sustainability due to the generous contribution of Trieste Contemporanea and its president Giuliana Carbi. During these 20 years of integration into the EU cultural system, all infrastructural transformation in East and South-east Europe is still moving on and the institutions are more or less managed or directed by the generation of the 80's.

The first preview day in Giardini and Arsenale, apart from the collector and

gallerist groups was not as crowded as I have expected, probably due to the various austerity regulations that also hit the culture sector in EU! As a member of AICA TR I have to protest here the VB administration that refuses the press card of this global art critics and curators association. Moreover, most of the pavilions had rich sponsors and galleries and therefore "austerity" was not an issue in VB, as most of the countries have made lavish receptions and parties.

Russia was the first pavilion I have visited in Giardini; as I had to meet Leonid Bazhanov and take from him the post-cards they have produced in Moscow for Alanica 2013, which I have the task to curate 1-15 August with 20 artists in Vladikavkaz. Vadim Zakharov, whom I have met during our co-curated Russia, Greece, Ukraine, Turkey exhibition in Bakhcesarai (Crimea, 2008) has created an interactive installation with the title Danae, in reference to the ancient myth of Zeus and Danae. King Acrisius was told that he would be killed by his daughter's son. His daughter Danae was childless and, to keep her so, he shut her up in a cave. Zeus impregnated her in the form of golden rain, and Perseus was born. He masterfully used the western mythology as a basic narrative to reflect the meaning of a major global trouble and as the most effective perceptual atmosphere for EU people. This golden rain in the form of golden coins spread out from a mechanism is the main feature of the installation. Zakharov used the flexible architecture of the pavilion by letting people witness from above the people in the first floor ravenously collecting the coins. The coins should be brought to a bucket in the next room from where it is again hoisted up through a conveyer belt to be poured down. The wall text of this installation briefly disclosed the character of today's consumption culture or the society of spectacle: "Gentleman time has come to confess our rudeness, lust, narcissism, demagoguery, falsehood, banality and greed, cynicism, robbery, speculations, wastefulness, gluttony, seduction, envy and stupidity".

The next pavilion I could enter easily was of Spain as there was no queue in front of it. The installation of Lara Almarcegui reminded me of the installation of Santiago Sierra when he has closed the same pavilion space with a thick wall and invited the viewer from the back door. Lara Almarcegui however has filled the pavilion with construction waist, such as bricks, cement rubble, roofing tiles, investigating the urban transformation which is mainly called as gentrification in the cities and questioning the outcome of this accumulation. The construction material is supposed to correspond to the material used for the construction of this pavilion in 1922. Apart from the ecological problematic she is engaged in; this de-construction of construction material is a metaphor for the construction or de-construction of EU culture out of different cultural entities.

Next to the Spanish Pavilion, the mysterious installation of the Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere's *Kreupelhout - Cripplewood* filled the pitch dark space of the pavilion. A giant tree stem and its branches horizontally disappear into this darkness; however one can distinguish some feebly lit parts wrapped with some fabric as if it is wounded. For me this work had a significant meaning, as at that moment, thousands of people have started an upheaval against the slaughter of trees in Taksim Square Park in Istanbul. This tree reflected the ecological slaughters. However the artist is referring

to St Sebastian, frequently portrayed in Venice murals and paintings, he is depicted tied to a tree and shot with arrows, which are supposed to spread plaques. De Bruyckere was particularly fascinated by the mental strength of this saint. Once again the artist is using a religious narrative as a reference to today's political and economic plaques.

The main exhibitions (Giardini and Arsenale) of the biennale curated by Gioni with over 160 artists' wide-ranging works, is underlining his statement of "*the impossibility of knowing*", or better to say "*impossibility of visual knowing*". In the impeccable white cube aesthetics of the exhibitions, the viewer is invited to feel the respect and admiration very reminiscent of Modernist dictates. Yet, not with the intention to undervalue the quality, enticing aesthetics and historical content of the works, one cannot but ask some essential questions about his statement and about this maze of "obsessive and paranoid visual material". One of the questions is: Is the impossibility of knowing only related to the European knowledge? The other question might be: Is it so impossible to acknowledge that there is the "other" encyclopaedia? Among the 162 artists the number of artists selected from Asia and Africa (Japan, China, Vietnam, India, Nigeria) are 12, only one of them from Morocco, which is the only Islamic artist. It seems that in his encyclopaedia the world of Eastern cultures and Islam have no chapters! It is a paradox that his exhibition starts with Gustav Jung's Red Book, which is full of mythological visual material of mostly ancient East. Gioni has wrapped up the film as good as to the beginning, to the roots of Eurocentric discourse and to its de-construction attempts at the end of 80's, when with Magician de La Terre, Jean Hubert Martin has tried to open the eyes of European public to the existence of "other" cultures. This exhibition with all these works of mostly Western-world artists, mostly born in the first half of 20th century, rooted in European visual subconscious, strongly advocates that European Modernism is the basic visual encyclopaedia of the world.

The third question is: "What is the difference between that exhibition (Magician de La Terre) and this exhibition?" At that time Modern art in Europe needed a new energy and the practice of borrowing from the Non-Western territories of the early Modernist was up-dated. Gioni, proclaims almost the same: "We must not herd contemporary art into a fenced-off area, isolating art means relegating it to the realm of entertainment..." This asserts that the art in EU has lost its energy and tends to be "entertainment". Is contemporary art herded into a fenced-off area? I wonder what the diaspora or immigrant artists from the Islamic territories living and working in EU are thinking when their immense visual and aesthetic contribution since the 90's which has charged the EU art production with new energy is not estimated as enough within this exhibition model! Can this exhibition with its 20th century Freudian and Jungian visual encyclopaedia give energy to the extremely heterogeneous cultural fusion of contemporary art production?

The Pavilion of Turkey presented a six channel video by Ali Omer Kasma, titled "*Resistance*", dealing with different versions of treatment, control, usage, cure, and preservation, consumption of human body documented in private and public spaces. One can appreciate the professional style and aesthetic of the videos, but the missing dimension of any surrealistic and metaphorical transcription and the ordinary installation of the screens

placed above eye level deprived the viewer to be seduced or captivated by the provocative concept as declared in the statement of the artist and the curator. Furthermore, the subject may be universal, but the relevance of it within the current socio-political and cultural discourse in Turkey can be debated. In juxtaposition to Kasma's eclectic interpretation of body politics, another artist from Turkey Ahmet Güne tekin, independently presented a protagonist multi-channel video installation, questioning the language as a tool for political ideology. Due to the current civil upheaval in Turkey, this work revealed the background story of Turkey's half a century long democratic dilemma. Ahmet Güne tekin's pivotal installation *Momentum of Memory*, consists of a large scale wall relief entitled *Confrontation*, an iron cage filled with wooden letters entitled *Recm* (the Arabic word for stoning, the punishment that consists of a group of people throwing stones at the sentenced individual until the person dies) and a series of videos conveys a conviction, message and foresight based on an auto-biographical experience and a decisive political stand. The aesthetic gaze - even if it produces a fiction - towards concealed and denied history and towards the unknown dark labyrinths of human civilisation has the power to decelerate the unbearable flux of history for a moment, and gives the individual the possibility to determine its controversial position in the continuing historical progress. Here, the aesthetic instrument helps the individual to release himself from the undeniable sovereign existence of history.

There are a series of documentary films in this Biennale, which show the indispensable choice of the artists to deal with the current state of global affairs, loaded with common memory, with visible or invisible global episodes. Making research like a journalist, sociologist, anthropologist or historian and mostly focusing on the past and present wars, massacres, genocides and immigrants seem to be the main art-making process. In consideration to the main pavilions, most of the national pavilions had strong political manifestations and dissident positions towards the current global order. For some of the works one can ask the question "what is the border between documentary and art?" as in these works direct documentation expertise is more discernible than the aesthetic and transformative intervention of the artist. If the camera is being used as a witness to the subject rather than a tool to deconstruct its enigma, the document character becomes dominant. Three documentary based films have surpassed all the obstacles of direct documentation and became mesmerising art works. Richard Mosse's (Ireland, b. 1980) multichannel immersive infrared video installation at the Irish Pavilion, a collaboration with Trevor Tweeten and Ben Frost, documenting the ongoing conflict, massacre, sexual violence in the Eastern Congo, "*The Enclave*", was masterfully installed as multi-channel giant scale screen labyrinth, on which the scenes were simultaneously and dramatically juxtaposed accompanied by the real Congolese sound. What makes this direct and real-time documentary which undoubtedly shot in extremely dangerous conditions is its presentation as if it is not real, but a nightmare fantasy. Akram Zaatari's video installation titled *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, in the Pavilion of Lebanon is a semi-documentary story of a school in South Lebanon. The installation consists of a 16 mm film and a stage chair awaiting an actor or a spectator. The film has autobiographic background as his

father had been the director of the school for twenty years and as a child he had heard rumors about an Israeli pilot who was ordered to bomb the school but refused to bomb it. The rumor became a real event, when Zaatari has told it to the Israeli filmmaker Avi Mograbi, and a version was published in a book and the pilot came into the open. Zaatari has endowed this heroic story with a literary perspective which is based to Albert Camus' essay "Letters to a German Friend" and created a poetic film.

The last day in Venice, just 1 week after the opening, the Giardini looked deserted and lonesome. I could directly enter French Pavilion - there were 1-2 hours queue during the opening days - to see Anri Sala's remarkable film *Ravel, Ravel, Unravel*, which is also a documentary in its technique. Sala has divided the Pavilion of Germany into three parts and placed the entrance and the exit to the sides of the building. Three videos based on the piano concerto for the left hand in D major by Maurice Ravel completed in 1930. The two films in the central space that are acoustically prepared show Louis Lortie and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet playing this concerto accompanied by the Orchestre National de France. The camera is focused to the left hand of the pianists, but the two films are projected simultaneously, so that it creates a discrepancy and a kind of musical competition. In the two side-rooms two films which show a woman DJ interpreting the two versions of the concerto. Through these documentary films Sala invites the viewer to an unique experience of perceiving the "total artwork", consisting of an impeccable music piece, miraculous language of human hands (of the pianists and the DJ), the usage of sound and documentary techniques and the intellect of the artist to re-construct a new spatial environment out of an existing creation. Pushing the economic power of the artwork away, which we are almost unfairly hindered to question by the ongoing global neo-liberal discourse, we have to see the other power of the art work which is the metaphor of "remake the world". As we can all over again clearly see in this biennale many artists have brought together the elements of myth and memory, ritual and space, recovery and regeneration and confronted the most difficult political issues and traumatic happenings through visual thinking and language. When I came back to Istanbul, the Taksim Gezi Park protests against the anti-democratic governance of the ruling party were fiercely continuing. After it was brutally stopped by the police force during the night of 16th June, and when all hope was fading away, the next day a young artists Erdem Gündüz, made a performance in Taksim Square entitled "*# standingman*" in the social media. For 8 hours, until the police interrupted his performance, he stood still and became an icon. He remade the world for the protesters.

About the writer

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