

and Robert Capa and from the Cuban Revolution, as well as from younger photographers.

Regrettably, from an organizational standpoint and from that of the informed viewer, the Triennial was unmanageable. It was not conceived to make it rise above the sum of its, admittedly very good, parts. To be sure, some of the exhibitions are fun, intelligent and informative, but with shows

and openings scattered all over town and over more than two months, it has no center, and no one, other than those actually living in Hamburg, can make the best of it. This third Triennial was a great "what might have been" event that, if better coordinated and more tightly curated, might well have risen to be something spectacular. Fortunately, there is still time to put together the next version.

VENICE AND THE MOVING IMAGE

**BIENNALE VENICE 2005:
51ST INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION
VENICE, ITALY
JUNE 12-NOVEMBER 6, 2005**

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The 51st Venice Biennale includes two international exhibitions, "The Experience of Art," curated by María de Corral at the Italian Pavilion, and "Always a Little Further," curated by Rosa Martínez at the Arsenale. Both exhibitions provide the context for a third event in September, a symposium organized by the next director of the Biennale, Robert Storr, intended to explore future directions for the world's oldest art event. While the existence of two international shows clearly invites a comparative analysis, the Biennale also encompasses an array of national and "collateral" events.

Both de Corral and Martínez have selected a large number of film and video works, but employ very different approaches to presentation. Within the Italian pavilion, separate sound-proofed, dark spaces are clustered together at the corners, so that painting and sculpture remain in the center of the building. This strategy emphasizes the integrity of individual works, but also produces a sense of disorientation (the dark spaces are very dark indeed) in keeping with de Corral's stated interest in the concept of the labyrinth and the notion of disparate "personal aesthetic universes." The strongest works are those that examine the particular role of cinema, television and video games in the ongoing formation of these "personal universes." Willie Doherty's powerful *NON-SPECIFIC*

THREAT (2004) is among the most striking. Composed of a looped steady-cam shot, endlessly circling around a static white male figure, the piece is driven by a voice-over that builds steadily towards a dramatic climax ("I am all that you desire, I am forbidden, I am inside you...") but refuses to deliver an easy resolution.

Vocal performance is also a key factor in Vasco Araújo's *The Girl of the Golden West* (2004), featuring a monologue delivered to the camera by a middle-aged black woman seated in a darkened cinema. The performer assumes the role of a minor character in a 1930s Western and from this perspective she evaluates the moral and narrative qualities of her fictional world, constantly shifting between recall, invention and evaluation—underscoring the key thematic emphasis on "experience" in de Corral's selection. A process of oscillation is also inscribed within the structure of Stan Douglas' 16mm installation "Inconsolable Memories" (2005), set in Cuba in 1980. Here, the rhythmic insertion of multiple, precisely synchronized audio and visual elements serves to reframe a personal narrative of loss and regret, directing attention to the smallest details of dialogue, costume and setting.

Tacita Dean's 16mm film *Palast* (2004), an assemblage of reflections on the glass and metal façade of the modernist Palast der Republik in Berlin (the

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Inconsolable Memories (still) (2005) by Stan Douglas; courtesy: David Zwirner, New York

former government building of the German Democratic Republic), is a more overtly romantic meditation on memory and loss. The deliberately modest scale of projection seems to suggest the impossibility of return, rather than any celebration of political ideology. Eija-Liisa Ahtila's *The Hour of Prayer* (2004) is an equally personal meditation on loss and is arguably more self-conscious, particularly in its use of song. But here the scale of the installation ultimately tips the balance too much towards sentiment.

Much of the dialogue featured in film and video works at the Italian Pavilion is in English (even Ahtila's work). By comparison, Martínez's project at the Arsenale takes a more overtly critical stance with respect to Eurocentrism as well as the globalization of the art market. The absence of dividing walls within the building is presented as a deliberate attempt to create "new forms of neighborhoods" between disparate artists, cultural contexts and audiences.¹ This approach ensures that the exhibition appears cohesive, but it also generates some problems, particularly when superficial similarities between otherwise distinct practices are over-emphasized. In the opening room, for example, Joanna Vasconcelos' *A Noiva/The Bride* (2001), a chandelier constructed from tampons is surrounded by Guerrilla Girls' billboards, which develop a more

overtly political critique of women's experience. Videos by Adrian Paci and Berni Searle, both shot at night but otherwise unconnected, are also presented in close proximity, creating confusion rather than a productive interplay.

Some moving image works are effective within this open space, most notably Emily Jacir's *Ramallah/New York* (2004-05) and Runa Islam's *Be The First To See What You See As You See It* (2004). The latter piece is a highly formal examination of gesture, depicting a young woman engaged in the slow destruction of porcelain objects. Otherwise, many of the most engaging projects are self-contained exhibitions, including Sergio Vega's exploration of evolution and tropical modernism, Kidlat Tahimik's *The Perfumed Nightmare* (1977) and the collection of materials documenting Leigh Bowery's remarkable performances. *Swansong* (2004), a collection of works curated by the partnership The Centre of Attention (an experimental curatorial arts center founded in London in 1999), also includes some interesting elements, particularly Damien Roach's slide/monitor piece *A Small Big Thing* (2003).

"Always a Little Further" is certainly enjoyable and coherent, but overall it lacks the sense of experimentation that is suggested by the title. This quality is far more evident in the Chinese representation, entitled "Virgin Garden" and located at the back of the Arsenale. This display encompasses a number of intriguing process-based works, such as *Unidentified Flying Objects* (2005) by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu. The artists are collaborating with Du Wenda, a farmer who has spent years handcrafting a flying saucer, and plan to test launch the craft during the Biennale. Another participant, the architectural historian Wang Qiheng, has produced *Fengshui Project for Venice* (2005), an analysis of the Giardini (gardens) and the city at large, which will inform the future development of the Chinese pavilion. A sense of the unexpected also links some of the smaller national pavilions, inside and outside the Giardini. The Irish, Korean, Taiwanese and Scottish exhibitions all feature groups of (generally) younger artists, and gather together an array of works in various media ranging in tone from the playful to the contemplative or

even melancholic. Within these shows, installations by Mark Garry (Ireland), NAKION (Korea), Cathy Wilkes and Alex Pollard (both Scotland) all stand out, along with video works by I-chen Kuo and Kuang-yu Tsui (both Taiwan).

There are generally fewer overtly spectacular pavilions than in previous years, but both Annette Messager (France) and Hans Schabus (Austria) deliver high impact, memorable installations, referencing fantasy and fairytale. Elsewhere, both the Nordic and Brazilian representations successfully alternate or juxtapose sound and image-based practices. The Nordic Countries pavilion appears, at times, to be empty but actually houses distinct projects on alternate days. Matias Faldbakken's video work *Black Screen* (2005) tracks through an empty cinema to reveal a void, while Miriam Bäckström and Carsten Höller fill the space with live sound, recorded in the trees above the building. In the Brazilian pavilion Chelpe Ferro's dramatic site-specific sound installation features a huge speaker suspended over a pool of shallow water through which cables conduct live signals. The adjoining room consists of a series of somber large-scale photographs by Caio Reiszewitz, exploring relics of a colonial past. The moving image is also favored in many other national representations and, again, some of the most interesting pieces rework the codes of disparate media genres. Sandra Johnston's *Conduct Best Calculated for Obtaining Victory* (2005) forms part of the collateral project "The Nature of Things: Artists from Northern Ireland" and recalls aspects of both 24-hour news and the oppositional cinema of Peter Watkins. A different form of oppositional practice is suggested by the presence of Jonas Mekas in the Lithuanian pavilion and (more obliquely) by Joachim Koester's exploration of film phenomena in *Message from Andre* (2005) in the Danish pavilion.

Mandarin Ducks (2005), a 16mm film presented by Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij at the Dutch pavilion, is among the most opaque works in the Biennale but seems to draw upon the mise-en-scene of European art cinema and Brechtian modes of performance.

The Swiss presentation includes several film and video works but here

a distinction is made between artists of "national" and "international" stature. The pavilion in the Giardini houses, among other works, Ingrid Wildi's low key, genuinely moving exploration of her brother's depression, entitled *Portrait Oblique* (2005), while Pipilotti Rist's lush *Homo sapiens sapiens* (2005) is presented off-site. Throughout the Biennale, several other works place a premium on "star status," through the casting of well-known performers.

Francesco Vezzoli's *Trailer for a Re-make of Gore Vidal's Caligula* in "The Experience of Art" features a host of celebrities, while Marianne Faithful and Catherine Deneuve appear in his collateral project *Trilogia Della Morte* (2005). Elsewhere, arthouse diva Tilda Swinton takes the leading role in Hussein Chalayan's *Genometrics* (2005), although she competes for attention with an array of impressive animation effects.

This latter, effects-driven project can be contrasted with the overt modesty of the animation-related works produced by a range of artists in the Biennale, including Isabel Nolan (Ireland), Donna Conlon (Always a Little Further), Robin Rhode (The Experience of Art), Oscar Muñoz (Latin America), William Kentridge (The Experience of Art) and Chung-li KAO (Taiwan). Even where they make use of digital technology, these artists tend to privilege handmade approaches, positioning animation in relation to a wider recovery of drawing and small-scale installation.

Evidently, popular cinema and television continue to provide a very important framework for artists' film and video, but it appears that there is also room for the exploration of a range of practices, and forms of collectivity, that are more obviously rooted in the personal and artisanal.

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NOTE

1. Martínez's catalog introduction also attributes aspects of the open plan design to a "reduction in budget."