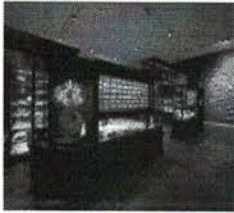


# Art in America

by Robin Cembalest



Installation view of Joan Jonas's *They Come to Us Without a Word (Homeroom)*, 2015; at the U.S. Pavilion, Giardini, commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Center, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015. Photo Moira Ricci.



*"All the World's Futures," the 56th Venice Biennale presentation curated by artistic director Okwui Enwezor, takes a strong political position. As Gregory Volk wrote for A.i.A. last week, "this complex, tough-minded exhibition decisively shifts focus from the art world to, well, the world."*

*Beyond Enwezor's show, yet another universe of national exhibitions and collateral events dot the Venetian islands, occupying places from established pavilions in the Giardini to churches, gardens and beyond. Here are ten additional exhibitions selected by Robin Cembalest not to be missed in Venice this biennial season.*

Giardini, United States Pavilion

Joan Jonas, "They Come to Us Without a Word"

Commissioner and Curator Paul C. Ha; Curator Ute Meta Bauer

There are lots of mirrors in Joan Jonas's hypnotic installation in the U.S. Pavilion, but you don't look like yourself in them, because when the artist had them made in Murano, she asked for the surfaces to be rippled. That remove from reality sets the mood for "They Come to Us Without a Word," a meditation on nature's fragility as told in drawings, sculpture and videos. Pieces of ghost stories and ghost narratives provide a sort of plotline for the passage through the pavilion's four rooms, where bees and starfish and large birds line the way, and kites, beads and props from the artist's prior projects create a sort of set. Videos show children performing against backdrops of

landscapes Jonas shot in Nova Scotia and New York, and the artist appears onscreen in various performative guises, often accompanied by her ghostly white dog. A soundtrack designed by Jonas, using excerpts of music by Jason Moran and songs by the Norwegian Sami singer Ánde Somby, helps you let yourself succumb.

#### Giardini, Pavilion of Belgium

Vincent Meessen and guests, "Personne et les autres"

Curator: Katerina Gregos

Two flags fly over Belgium's pavilion in the Giardini this year: the traditional tricolor and a black-and-gray one by the Virginia-born New York-based artist Adam Pendleton. This one says "Black Lives Matter," scrawled over a faintly visible African mask. It's part of "Personne et les autres," the presentation organized by the nation's selected artist Vincent Meessen, who shrewdly looks at the way African lives have been represented, or often misrepresented, in history. Working with curator Katerina Gregos, Meessen invited 10 "guests" to exhibit with him, including the first Africans to show in the pavilion of this former colonial power, as well as artists from the Americas and Europe. Scarification patterns on copper bas-reliefs by Sammy Baloji, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, honor the native groups that resisted forced labor in the copper mines. Meessen's film follows Congolese Situationist Joseph M'Belolo Ya M'Piku as he records a new version of a protest song he wrote in 1968. Tamar Guimarães and Kasper Akhøj contribute a work of conceptual storytelling about South African-born artist Ernest Mancoba, a founding member of the CoBrA group. Meanwhile, performers engage in Patrick Bernier and Olive Martin's *L'Echiqueté* (2012), a lifesize chess game in which every piece captured merges with that of its captor, becoming a hybrid-and forcing a change in tactics.

#### Giardini, Pavilion of Australia

Fiona Hall, "Wrong Way Time"

Curator: Linda Michael

The new Australian Pavilion, the first constructed for the Biennale this century, presents a dim view of the future. Political domination, environmental degradation and colonial oppression are the main themes of Fiona Hall's solo exhibition, "Wrong Way Time." Luckily, the artist treats the heavy subjects with a sense of humor, a light touch and a generous spirit. A menagerie of extinct and endangered animals, rendered in fiber and interwoven with military camouflage

garments, is a collaboration with women of Tjanpi Desert Weavers, an organization that supports Aboriginal women. Another wall features a salon-style hanging of driftwood, carved by nature into the forms of humans and animals. Other displays include currency from around the world (organized into categories based on imagery, like dams and dictators), creatures crafted from bread dough and tin cans, and a big row of cuckoo clocks. Do they mean it's time to change, or that time is up?

Conservatorio Benedetto Marcello. Palazzo Pisani, San Marco

Pavilion of Angola

"On Ways of Traveling"

Curator: António Ole

Deputy Curator: Antonia Gaeta

"Utopia Luanda Machine" is what Francisco Vidal, a Lisbon-born, Luanda-based artist, calls his mighty contraption in year's Angolan pavilion, housed in grand galleries in the 15th-century Palazzo Pisani. Vidal's mixed-media work—which, incredibly, folds up into a modest number of crates—features images of Zadie Smith on the front and Kanye West on the back, along with cotton plants painted on a ground of machetes. The artist aspires to launch a new kind of African industrial revolution where art, craft and design converge. The five-artist exhibition, "On Ways of Traveling," is organized by António Ole, an éminence grise whose lyrical assemblage of plastic tubs is featured here. Other works include a hilarious short video of four boys on a make-believe road trip by Binelde Hyrcan, haunting basins with layers of images floating in tinted water by Délio Jasse, and witty mask-inside-mask sculptures by Nelo Teixeira.

Museo Correr

"New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933"

Curator: Stephanie Barron

Did you hear about the exhibition of art that trashes capitalism, ennobles workers and veterans, and spotlights technology's evils—all created when dark powers were positioning themselves for World War II? "New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919 - 1933," at the Museo Correr, wasn't planned in conjunction with Okwui Enwezor's themes in "All the World's Futures," but it offers a fascinating prequel to the main Biennale event, showing how left-leaning artists confronted social and political

turmoil nearly a century ago in Germany. This survey is a creepy, kinky knockout, full of political satire and perversion, with an eye-popping array of profiteers, prostitutes, sinister children, androgynous women and sex murderers glaring icily from the walls. An expanded version of the show travels to LACMA this fall.

Fondazione Querini Stampalia

Jimmie Durham's "Venice: Objects, Work and Tourism"

Curator: Chiara Bertola

A humanistic affection for discarded things and their anonymous makers suffuses "Venice: Objects, Work and Tourism," Jimmie Durham's poetic series of interventions in the 16th-century residence that is now the home of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia. The show is the result of a four-year collaboration between Durham and Chiara Bertola, the foundation's curator, who traveled around Venice and its islands collecting fragments of glass, marble, lace, bricks, wood beams and other articles made by master craftsmen, including immigrants, who are invisible to the public eye. For Durham, these orphaned fragments have more value than the intact originals, and he elevates them to equal status with the building's fine collections of seven centuries of art and furnishings, installing his treasures in unexpected places that animate their surroundings. In the "Scenes of Venetian Life" room, featuring Gabriele Bella's iconic paintings, he installed a pipe and ceramic construction. Among the porcelain dinnerware you'll find smoky glass with steel antlers; alongside the collection's most famous treasure, Giovanni Bellini's Renaissance masterpiece *Presentation at the Temple*, the artist hung a humble metal basket. On the ground floor, in the spaces renovated by Carlo Scarpa in 1963, Durham places more elaborate assemblages. These include displays of found broken glass that resemble birds and other flora and fauna, and a headless dolphin transformed by the addition of a mask into a shark.

Palazzo Benzon

"My East is Your West"

Curator: Natasha Ginwala

India and Pakistan are two countries that lack permanent national pavilions in Venice. In a gutsy move, the Gurjal Foundation has staged a show uniting these historic antagonists, featuring one artist from each place: Rashid Rana, from Lahore, and Shilpa Gupta, from Mumbai. The 17th-century Palazzo Benzon on the Grand Canal is the setting for this pioneering event, where Rana has set up a live feed

with a room in a market building in Lahore, connecting Biennale visitors with his friends and colleagues and random strangers. His video *My Sight Stands in the Way of Your Memory* remixes Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* with pixelated news coverage, as though the painting were part of today's daily diet of horrors. Gupta's installations document her research around the India-Bangladesh border, exploring the flow of goods and bodies, human and animal. There is a performer there too, using carbon paper to draw lines on a 3,394 meter-cloth handwoven in the border town of Phulia. The number represents the length of the fence between the countries, but the lines he draws are arbitrary.

Giardino della Marinaressa

"Ursula von Rydingsvard in Venice"

Curated by Peter Murray

Ursula von Rydingsvard's open-air show is a dazzling public artwork whose impact will remain long after the Biennale. It's sited on a piece of prime real estate—the Giardino della Marinaressa, a park on Riva dei Sette Martiri, off the Grand Canal between San Marco and the Giardini—that had fallen into disrepair. The Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which is presenting this exhibition, worked with various partners to raise 100,000€ to re-landscape the gardens, adding new soil, turf, and benches, and planting new vegetation. Among them rise six sculptures, three of cedar, two of bronze, and one of icy blue-gray resin. The artist's tough, elegant forms seem particularly at home in Venice, playing off the canopy of pine and poplar trees and the reflections of light on the water. In a setting where ivy creeps up buildings and clothing dangles from lines everywhere, *Bronze Bowl with Lace* (2014), a monolith that sprouts a delicate irregular lattice, looks like it planted roots right there.

Museo Fortuny Venezia Palazzo Orfei

"Proportio"

Organized by Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation and the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

The group shows staged by the Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation in the Museo Fortuny are always true cabinets of wonder, with conversations staged across civilizations and centuries, and this one does not fail to delight. "Proportio" examines the theme of sacred geometry, from the human body to the cosmos, from architecture to pure abstraction. On the ground floor, Axel Vervoordt and architect Tatsuro Miki set the tone with a series of hemp pavilions whose

volumes are based on classical and mathematical proportions. The quest for the perfect ratio continues through the show, an unfolding narrative that features Old Masters, Le Corbusier, Botticelli, Anish Kapoor (paired with a Giacometti modeled on a skull), an Otto Boll helix (with a Korean moon jar), Tomás Saraceno, Fred Sandback, Izhar Patkin, Kimsooja, theater models and paintings by Mario Fortuny, a section on the color white and so much more. An installation and performance by Gutai artist Shuji Mukai—a graffitied hall of mirrors called "Space of Signs Selfie Studio"—offers another perspective on perspective.

Chiesa di San Gallo

Patricia Cronin, "Shrine for Girls"

Curated by Ludovico Pratesi, presented by the *Brooklyn Rail*

Presented by the *Brooklyn Rail* and created by Brooklyn artist Patricia Cronin, this might be considered the Brooklyn Pavilion. The spare, eloquent installation "Shrine for Girls" speaks volumes with a minimum of intervention. Its basic elements are garments of young women, which stand for the mute victims of violence and oppression around the world. Working with curator Ludovico Pratesi in the confined space of the tiny 16th-century Chiesa di San Gallo, Cronin has piled the clothing on three stone altars: one with brightly colored saris to honor girls in India; one with hijabs representing the kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria, and one with aprons and uniforms like those worn at the Magdalene Asylums and Laundries, where young women were forced to work in Europe and the United States. The mounds are beautiful and tragic.