

# Artwork's *Fania* as an Essential Act of Art

Angela Vettese

## Editorial

What is the first cell of an exhibition, or rather of any exhibition event? The simple manifestation of the work, even of a single work. This is an unconditional first step in order to talk about art. Among the few characteristics of art that can be defined and shared, and that makes art as such, is the communicative act. Art's proposition to the viewer, that is, its *fania* (greek term for appearance), is essential. If the artwork does not lean outwards, it should be considered a diaristic act, a solipsistic tale that fails in its function of mediation and in establishing a common ground between people. Art is language, that is, an instrument for exchange and an opportunity for the intertwining of two poles, of those who make it and those who receive it. It doesn't matter where this manifestation takes place: it can happen in the artist's studio, as happened for years in Picasso's *Demaiselles d'Avignon*, or in large museum installations, prepared in a site-specific way; or at a random and unscheduled moment. The work can be presented as a fragment or as a finished whole, it can also be in the middle of a process of change, as happens for land art, for performances and for all works that involve time. The author can accompany it and regulate its fruition, as in the case of the rules with which some Pierre Huyghe films must be seen or in other cases the author can let it go, as something that has legs to walk on its own, such as some blackboards or notice boards that Joseph Beuys gave to collectors at the end of a performance, or the author can suggest that we live it with him, like the works of Bruce Nauman centred on his, as well as on our, perceptive faculty. The work can appear in a volumetric, tactile fragrance, present as a vital body, but it can also manifest itself through a photograph or film diaphragm, in other words, with a technological filter that returns only the appearance suitable for the eye and not the aspects that other senses could grasp. The work can show itself in the ideal conditions so that its internal logic can be read, but it can also appear fleetingly, as if it were a clue to itself, leaving traces and fragments only in the memory. A notable point of the issue lies in the counterpart, in those to whom the work is addressed to. What is the public? How does it react? Is there a way in which the work itself manages to guide its own public or to choose it? Who is the spectator *par excellence*? Is there something already implicit in the response that will elicit its exhibition? The articles in *OBOE*'s second issue offer multiple answers.

Those who perceive a complex artistic operation, with a vast background of internal rules and devices, can learn about the processes by which it works. This is often the case with the works orchestrated by Philippe Parreno accounted by Monica

Amor. In the essay Amor highlights how the public reacts to the work as if it is a novel that has multiple levels of reading: there is the reader who appreciates the writing, the one who follows the plot, the one who penetrates even hidden or implicit devices of the narrative and can come to a thorough appreciation. Indeed, to fully appreciate an artwork's meaning, we should never forget that most artworks, contemporary or ancient, follow an underlying narrative that might be informed by mythology, theology, natural sciences or by a palimpsest of cultural references that should be known. The translation of a feeling into an artistic phenomenon is, in fact, always a migration of meaning, through procedures that imply premises mediated in an intellectual way even when, as in some apparently impulsive art, it would seem that there is no gap between work and instinct. The public should always start from the idea that, as in opera or classical music, relying solely on the immediacy of taste rarely leads to full enjoyment and broad understanding. The ideal audience is that to whom the work appears as something that asks for and receives full attention; an attention so profound that it pushes the viewer to want to fully understand the entire process of conception of the artwork or exhibition. When this does not happen, especially if an institution fears hosting exhibitions that demand too much effort, the public ceases to be challenged but also properly stimulated: a failure of audacity in communication. Hence, exhibitions can lose courage and flatten themselves on easier tastes, as has happened, as Jens Hoffmann states in his text—the first in our newly launched column of critical reflections titled “Echoes”—for the most recent iterations of the Whitney Biennial.

However, something else can also happen; something which engages the audience though more than just simple knowledge, on a more participatory level. Recent art, committed to this relational and participatory trend, tends to transform its audience from a group of observers into a community of co-authors, who contribute to the very creation of the work. Lorenzo Balbi's article goes on this direction and discusses the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* project and the transformation of the MAMbo Museum into a place where the processes of creation and realisation of the work by the artists in residence are made visible to the public. Meschini's essay—which focuses on the Austrian group WK's work and their cultural activism, in relation to precedent exhibition moments such as the presence of the Gruppo Oreste at the 1999 Venice Biennale or the activity of the collective of art critics *a.titolo*—leads us to confront ourselves with the possibility that the artwork does not have mere spectators, but proper co-authors; and transforms the dimension in which the value of “how much public” is lost and replaced by “which public”. In Miriam De Rosa's essay, devoted to an artist's residency, she reveals how in this case the public ceases to be a public and becomes the subject of a gift and the protagonist of a living together, of a confidential exchange, of a mutual giving between guest and host. Arnon Ben-Dror's contribution focuses on Dutch artist herman de vries' *sanctuariums*, site-specific artworks where nature is allowed to grow uninterrupted. These become an unexpected stage for interaction with local publics that attempt to experience them or engage with them directly in limitless ways. From taking actions to defend the works from the municipality, to vandalising them, the public transforms these installations from sites of curiosity addressing the lack of human-nature relationships into ever-evolving entities. Marco Bertozzi's review on the 2020 Cinema Festival in Venice, reflects on the changes in the audience, not only after the pandemic and the technological revolution that came with it, but also the ones that came with the transformation of cinema habits which moved from a collective experience to an isolated one—domestic—through the use of a computer rather than through the big screen; and that even in its most refined productions, tells us of an increasingly less collective and coral embedding of the audience itself. At the same time, however, it shows us a private and thus enlarged dimension of cinematic perception, as if, having brought the experience to the domestic walls has freed it from the need to go to a collective and widely social place to enjoy it.

In all these cases, the audience becomes an entity that collaborates to the making of the work, rather than passively witnessing it, so that its appearance becomes a

process triggered by the artist, but that develops collectively. Indeed, the subtext to the work, in this case, does not need to be known beforehand by the spectators, because it is something the spectators themselves will realise and contribute to create, especially now that they have become accomplices of the apparition itself.

The phenomenology with which an artwork presents itself, whatever role is intended for the public, is in any case, anything but unitary. The ways in which the work reveals itself to us, are as numerous as the images in a kaleidoscope, for which we would have trouble in establishing which ones are right or wrong, fertile or sterile. The same work of art can appear to us in such different physical, contextual and historical forms that it can never be said to be definitive or ideal. Each appearance offers itself to a different result, that could be even one of rejection and distancing. For this reason, drawing attention on the *fania* of the artwork opens up a vast discourse, on which we have followed only a few steps in this issue, but which we must indicate as a ground for further investigation, perhaps potentially infinite as well as inevitable for any reflection on exhibiting.