

**Clarissa Ricci**  
**Towards a Contemporary Venice Biennale:  
Reassessing the Impact of the 1993 Exhibition**

**Abstract**

This paper argues that *Cardinal Points of Art*, directed by Achille Bonito Oliva has been decisive in the formation of the contemporary Venice Biennale. The 45<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, (1993) was memorable for many reasons: the first exhibition of Chinese painters in Venice, its transnational approach, and because it was the last time the *Aperto* exhibition was shown. Nevertheless, this was a complex and much criticised Biennale whose specific characteristics are also connected to the process of reform that the institution had been undergoing since the 1970s. The analysis of the exhibition starts with the examination of this legacy and continues by questioning Bonito Oliva's curatorial contribution in order to define the specific features which helped to shape the contemporary Venice Biennale.

**Keywords**

Venice Biennale, Aperto, 1993, Achille Bonito Oliva, Nomadism, Coexistence, Contemporaneity

# Towards a Contemporary Venice Biennale: Reassessing the Impact of the 1993 Exhibition<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The format of today's Venice Biennale is the result of a long intellectual and political negotiation. To understand how it emerged in its current form, as an international platform for contemporary art, it is crucial to reconsider the 1993 Biennale.

The conspicuous but fragmentary studies on the Venice Biennale don't allow an overall understanding of the 45<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, which has often been analysed in the light of specific episodes but never in its totality.

Mentions of this exhibition are often made when referring to the Chinese exhibitions in Europe in the 1990s, since a large group of young painters exhibited at the *Giardini* (gardens) that year or because it was the last edition of *Aperto*, the emergent art section established in 1980 by Harald Szeemann and Achille Bonito Oliva which attracted a lot of interest from the press. More recently the exhibition has been indicated as a reference point by Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh in their introduction to *Former West* and has been discussed for its transnational orientation.

New archival findings,<sup>2</sup> as the documents on the cancelled exhibition of *Winds of Art*, or the examination of minutes and correspondence has shed light on many important aspects which allow a deeper understanding of this complex exhibition.

This account begins by contextualising the Venice Biennale in order to understand the historical and curatorial frameworks within which it has taken shape. This examination is based on a plethora of archival findings which define the scenario in which the innovations and propositions of 1993 were made. The second part of the paper analyses the curatorial contribution of the Director of the Visual Art Department, Achille Bonito Oliva, and evaluates his role in transforming the Biennale.

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This paper relies on the archival research conducted for the author's PhD thesis and broadens its scope, investigating a specific edition of the Biennale which was part of the transformation of the institution from a proto-fair type format into a contemporary platform for the arts. This latter research was assisted by a Getty/ACLS Postdoctoral Fellowship in the History of Art from the American Council of Learned Societies, generously supported by the Getty Foundation.

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Archival research was conducted at the Biennale's Historical Archive (ASAC). All the abbreviations used in the footnotes are listed at the end of the paper.

After investigating the reception of the 45<sup>th</sup> exhibition, the final part of the paper outlines what elements of the 1993 exhibition contributed to the remodelling of the Biennale into a contemporary art platform.

## 1. Reforming the Biennale

Founded in 1895, a year before Pittsburgh's Carnegie International, the Venice Biennale is the longest running biennial in the world. Over the next 120 years, it transformed from a proto-fair<sup>3</sup> into a contemporary art platform, and there are specific historical moments which can be used to mark its continuous, but inconstant, endeavours to adapt and rejuvenate.

In the period following the Second World War, the student protest in 1968 was the most notable moment. When the Biennale opened in June that year, artists covered their works.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, outside the Giardini, students were clashing with the police. However, the tumultuous events of 1968 were also backed by the Biennale staff and local politicians, and led to the first major reform since Fascism.<sup>5</sup> This reform forced the institution to reflect on its role and democratised its governance,<sup>6</sup> but it was an “unfinished revolution”<sup>7</sup> because it failed to free the Biennale from political interference.

The second main transformation of the institution took place in the 1990s, during a significant political and economic crisis that shook the whole of Italy and that forced the Biennale to accelerate the reforms which had been left incomplete since the 1970s. The devaluation of the Lira in 1992 caused the temporary withdrawal of Italy from the European Monetary System (EMS).<sup>8</sup> The consequences of increased taxation, together with policies to curb public spending, was accompanied by corruption scandals known as “Tangentopoli” (Bribesville), and together this caused the First Italian Republic to collapse.<sup>9</sup> While this epochal shift was occurring, the Biennale was losing its international impact. Its national pavilions were viewed by some as anachronistic<sup>10</sup> and visitor numbers had dropped

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Until 1972 the Venice Biennale sold artworks and acted also a proto-fair. Cf. Clarissa Ricci, “Breve storia dell'Ufficio Vendite della Biennale di Venezia 1895-1972. Origini, funzionamento e declino”, *Ricerche di S/Confine*, VIII, no. 1 (2017): 1-20, <http://www.ricerchedisconfine.info/VIII-1/RICCI.htm>, accessed December 2019.

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The opening was held on the June 18, 1968. Chiara Di Stefano “The 1968 Biennale. Boycotting the exhibition: An account of three extraordinary days”, in *Starting from Venice. Studies on the Biennale*, ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milan: et. al, 2010); Vittoria Martini “The Evolution of an Exhibition Model. Venice Biennale as an Entity in Time” in Federica Martini and Vittoria Martini, *Just Another Exhibition* (Milan: Postmedia books, 2011), 119-138; Stefania Portinari, *Anni Settanta. La Biennale di Venezia*, (Milan: Marsilio, 2018), 17-117.

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The Biennale was reformed in 1973 (Law n. 436, July 26, 1973). Cf. Wladimiro Dorigo, “Lineamenti bibliografici generali sulla Biennale di Venezia”, in *Annuario 1975, Eventi del 1974*, ed. Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1975), 707-716; Nancy Jachec, *Politics and painting at the Venice Biennale 1948-1964: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 36-38; Marla Stone, “Challenging Cultural Categories: The Transformation of the Venice Biennale under Fascism”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 4, no. 2 (1999): 185.

6

“Democratic” was the adjective used to describe the institution in the new charter of 1973: “Democratically organised institution of culture” (art. 1, Law n. 436, July 26, 1973). Practically this was mirrored in a large board of directors made of nineteen members.

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See Vittoria Martini, *La Biennale di Venezia 1968-1978. La Rivoluzione Incompiuta* (PhD diss. Iuav University and Ca' Foscari University in Venice, 2011). All translations hereafter, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

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Salvatore Rossi, *Aspects of Italian Economic Policy from 1992-93 Crisis into 2008-2009 Crisis*, Università Roma Tre, Rome March 5, 2010, [https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/interventi-vari/int-var-2010/en-rossi-050310.pdf?language\\_id=1](https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/interventi-vari/int-var-2010/en-rossi-050310.pdf?language_id=1), accessed October 2019.

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Carol Mershon, *Italian Politics: Ending the First Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995).

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There is a long debate around the anachronism of the national pavilions in Italy. Cf. John Russel “Ciao with friendship”, *Studio International*, no. 913 (July-August 1959); Bruno Alfieri, “Biennale portfolio”, *Metro: An International Review of Contemporary Art*, no. 15 (1968): 41 and 55.

to 100,000.<sup>11</sup> Reform became essential to secure the Biennale's future.

The closure of the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale of 1990, directed by Giovanni Carandente, coincided with the end of the mandate of the fourth board of directors (1987-1991).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the political crisis made it impossible for the Italian Government to make new nominees. The board continued to operate throughout the first half of 1992 on a deferred basis.<sup>13</sup> In this situation, renovating the institution by 1995, its centenary, became the main goal.<sup>14</sup> In order to provide enough time for this, the exhibition was shifted from 1992 to 1993. On May 22, 1992, just before the board's deferral year expired, Achille Bonito Oliva was nominated, though not without disagreement, Artistic Director of the Visual Art Department.<sup>15</sup> Although he was given only a short time to conceive the exhibition, Bonito Oliva made a tremendous effort to make it grand, both in terms of size and relevance. He thought and behaved as if the 1993 Venice Biennale was the first step in a larger project that would usher in a new era with the 1995 centennial anniversary. Because directorial appointments were for four years, he thought he would be working on this too.<sup>16</sup>

The first project presentation of the 45<sup>th</sup> Biennale *Punti Cardinali dell'Arte (The Cardinal Points of Art)* was made to the board on June 26, 1992.<sup>17</sup> Bonito Oliva proposed an exhibition that would revolve around two goals: making the Biennale a permanent artistic and cultural laboratory, and strengthening its relationship with Venice:

We need to conquer a permanent activity, in order to guarantee a continuous relationship between the Biennale and the city.<sup>18</sup>

The tone was bold, but the board was enthusiastic. As a matter of fact, none of his proposals were new. The statement above can be understood only in relation to the history of the Biennale's postwar reformation process.

When the Biennale re-started after the Second World War in 1948, it was evident that the institution needed a different organizational structure to guarantee it the cultural autonomy it lacked during the Fascist Regime. Alongside governmental planning, the temporary commissions<sup>19</sup> in charge of the Biennale in

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In 1988 visitors were 90,125; in 1990 125,000. Enzo Di Martino, *La Biennale di Venezia: 1985-1995. Cento anni di Arte e cultura* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1995), 86.

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The 4<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale Board of Directors was formed by: President: Paolo Portoghesi; Vice President: Ugo Bergamo; General Secretary: Raffaello Martelli; Advisors: Ulderico Bernardi, Ludina Barzini, Gianni Borgna, Luca Borgomeo, Paolo Ceccarelli, Enzo Cucciniello, Umberto Curi, Ottaviano Del Turco, Sandro Fontana, Fabrizia Gressani Sanna, Bruno Marchetti, Stefania Mason Rinaldi, Luigi Mazzella, Gianluigi Rondi, Giorgio Sala, Augusto Salvadori, Dario Ventimiglia.

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Minutes of the LIV Board of Directors Meeting (January 31, 1992): 1, *La Biennale di Venezia - ASAC*, FS, VCA, b. reg. 30.

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A commission to write the reform was created. Cf. Draft law, Folder "President", XIV Board of Directors Meeting (October 29, 1993) in *La Biennale di Venezia - ASAC*, FS, dep. b. 127: 1.

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The result of the first day of discussions (Minutes LVIII of the Board of Directors Meeting, May 4, 1992, *La Biennale di Venezia - ASAC*, FS, dep. b. 112) was a head-to-head between Germano Celant (7) and Achille Bonito Oliva (6). In the following meeting it was clear that Celant for bureaucratic reasons could not be nominated, thus, in the third vote Bonito Oliva was nominated director of the Visual Art Department with 10 votes out of 12. Minutes LIX Board of Directors Meeting (May 22, 1992), *La Biennale di Venezia - ASAC*, FS, dep. b. 112.

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Since the 1973 reforms, most Artistic Directors were appointed for four year. During the 1980s this tradition continued, i.e. Maurizio Calvesi was director of the Visual Art Department in 1984 and 1986, and Giovanni Carandente in 1988 and 1990.

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Minutes LX Board of Directors Meeting (June 26, 1992), in *La Biennale di Venezia*, ASAC, FS, dep. b. 113: 26-66.

18

Ibid., 27.

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After the Second World War the Italian Government replaced the representative of the National Fascist Party with representatives of the government. Cf. Footnote 12 in Nancy Jachec, *Politics and painting at the Venice Biennale 1948-1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 58.

the immediate aftermath of the war attempted to fine-tune the exhibition's cultural goals. For the first postwar biennials, Rodolfo Pallucchini, Director of the Visual Art Department from 1948 to 1956, looked to those original "Biennale principles"<sup>20</sup> that inspired the founding committee in 1893. Returning to these guidelines helped to dissociate the institution from its Fascist legacy while also giving it a framework within which a new statute could be developed.

The questions surrounding the Biennale's role were made even more pressing as new biennials were starting to develop, making increased competition a real concern. During the conference to promote a new statute in 1957, art historian Sergio Bettini warned his colleagues that "Venice could be overtaken by concurrent similar national and international exhibitions, e.g. Menton, Madrid and São Paulo".<sup>21</sup> Competition was made even greater in the 1970s when the quinquennial exhibition *documenta*, founded in Kassel in 1955, started to gain greater relevance as a platform for contemporary art.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless, it was only in 1973 that major reform was made. The first article of the new charter declared the Biennale's mission as offering "documentation, research and experimentation"<sup>23</sup> by promoting "permanent activities" such as events, exhibitions, conferences and publications. The Biennale was imagined to be a place of constant and continuous cultural production in which all of its sections (music, theatre, cinema, visual art, permanent activities) were superintended by the Historical Archive (ASAC).<sup>24</sup>

During the first decade after the reform, this goal was attempted several times but never really fulfilled. As late as the *1987-1991 Piano Quadriennale* (Quadrennial Plan)<sup>25</sup> – the cultural programme of each mandate – the board members declared that, in continuity with the previous plan, they aimed to accomplish the goals expressed in Article 1 of the charter by improving the permanent activities section.<sup>26</sup> If this showed the resilience of the Biennale's attempts to accomplish its reforms, it also demonstrated that they were failing to get anything done.

The Italian critic and curator Bonito Oliva had several assignments at the Biennale between 1978 and 1990,<sup>27</sup> most notably as curator, together with Harald Szeemann, of the first *Aperto* exhibition in 1980, and he was very familiar with the board's main concerns. Therefore, in accordance with the Biennale's project of becoming a place for permanent cultural production (in Bonito Oliva's terms "conquering for the Biennale the everyday"),<sup>28</sup> the curator started the Biennale's

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Rodolfo Pallucchini, "Introduzione alla XXIV Biennale", in *Ventiquattresima Biennale di Venezia*, (Venice, May 1 - September 30, 1948), exh. cat. (Venice: Serenissima, 1948), XII-XVI.

21

Sergio Bettini, in *Atti del convegno di studio sulla Biennale*, proceedings of the conference held at Ca' Loredan, Venice, October 13, 1958 (Venice: Arti Grafiche, 1957), 30.

22

Anna Cestelli Guidi, *La 'Documenta' di Kassel. Percorsi dell'Arte contemporanea* (Milan: Costa & Nolan, 1997).

23

article 1. [...] it is a democratically organized cultural institute and its object is the promotion of permanent activities and the organisation of international events relating to documentation, information, criticism, research and experimentation in the fields of the arts, whereby full freedom of ideas and forms of expression is guaranteed [...], Law No. 438 of July 26, 1973. New regulations of the autonomous body "la Biennale di Venezia" in *Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee, Annuario 1974 Eventi 1975*, 31.

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The Historical Archive of Contemporary Art existed since 1928.

25

*Piano quadriennale 1987-1991* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1989).

26

"3.2. Le attività permanenti" in *Ibid.*, 7-8.

27

In 1978 Achille Bonito Oliva was commissioner of the Italian section; in 1980 he was part of an advisory committee of the Biennale; in 1990 he curated a collateral event on Fluxus (see footnote 85).

28

Minutes LX Board of Directors Meeting (June 26, 1992): 27.

activities in the winter of 1992, long before the exhibition's opening date, which was usually in June. The first event to be launched was an educational project; a school for curators in partnership with the *École du Magasin*, the first of its kind to be opened in Europe.<sup>29</sup> This was followed by the *Production, Circulation and Conservation of Artworks*, a conference held at Fondazione Cini (December 11-12, 1992) which gathered museum directors and curators from all over the world<sup>30</sup> and helped to attract the attention of the press in order to validate Bonito Oliva's directorship. Seeking to demonstrate the international reach of the Biennale, Bonito Oliva himself travelled to all corners of the world to promote the exhibition<sup>31</sup> and nominated international personalities to serve in the advisory committee, including Richard Koshalek, Krud Jensen and Dieter Honnisch.<sup>32</sup> The conference and the school for curators were part of a larger educational project that was meant to be the backbone of the Biennale's permanent activities. The initial project, which was only partially realised, also comprised events and shows throughout the exhibition's duration.<sup>33</sup>

Because they were powered by the intellectual and managerial energies of Venetian entrepreneurs, the permanent activities were also Bonito Oliva's key tool in reinforcing the relationship with the city and in reconnecting the Biennale with its foundations. This re-connection was driven by the cultural politics of decentralisation in Italy in the 1970s<sup>34</sup> and, in practical terms, meant that the exhibition was extended out of the Giardini. Often artworks occupied squares and streets, e.g. *Sculture nella città* (Sculptures in the city) (1972)<sup>35</sup> and special projects were organised to revitalise abandoned buildings, e.g. the rehabilitation of the "Saloni" (Zattere and Magazine del Sale).<sup>36</sup>

However, the rhetoric of rebuilding relationships with Venice was also part of an attempt to solve the practical problems with the Biennale's venues. There were no longer enough buildings to accommodate the scale of the exhibition, and the existing structures were in a bad condition.<sup>37</sup> By the 1960s the Giardini had filled up and a heritage law made it impossible to build new pavilions.<sup>38</sup> At the same

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The International Curatorial Programme of *École du Magasin*, Grenoble, was founded in 1987. It is the first school of this kind in Europe, anticipating the MA Contemporary Curating Art course at the Royal College of Art (RCA), London in 1992 and Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, which was founded in 1990 as a research center and offered courses from 1994. The agreement of a joint programme of *École du Magasin* with the Biennale throughout the 1992-1993 academic year was formalised on November 15, 1992 (La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, dep., b. 115). Part of the curatorial program, directed by Adelina von Fürstenberg, was the participation of the students during the installation phase.

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Draft Programme in La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, AVEB, b. 521/2.

31

Hou Hanru, "Bi-Biennali. Biennale and the Biennale de Lyon", *Third Text* 7, no. 24 (1993): 93-101.

32

The Advisory Committee (Comitato Consultivo) was formed by Richard Koshalek (Museum of Contemporary Art, Moca, Los Angeles), Krud Jensen (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk), Dieter Honnisch (Neue National Galerie, Berlin), Tommaso Trini (Italian art historian) and Mimmo Rotella (artist), in Minutes LX Board of Directors Meeting (June 26, 1992): 33-35.

33

Achille Bonito Oliva's first draft programme, Minutes LX Board of Directors Meeting (June 26, 1992): 31.

34

"Attività del Gruppo permanente di lavoro per i convegni" reprinted in English in *La Biennale di Venezia: Annuario 1978: Eventi del 1976-77* (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1979), 437. Cf. Martina Tanga, "Flipping the Exhibition Inside Out: Enrico Crispolti's Show *Ambiente come Sociale* at the 1976 Venice Biennale", *OBOE Journal* I, no. 1 (2020): 62-77.

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*Sculture nella città* (1972) was displayed both in the Palazzo Ducale's courtyard and in the main Venetian squares.

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*Annuario 1975. Eventi 1974*, 589-595 and 848-851.

37

Giandomenico Romanelli, "Le sedi della Biennale", in *Ibid.*, 645-697.

38

Tiziana Favaro and Francesco Trovò eds., *I giardini napoleonici di Castello a Venezia: evoluzione storica e indirizzi = Historical Development of the Giardini di Castello and guidelines for maintenance and restoration* (Venice: Libreria Cluva, 2011), 59-60.



time, the number of national pavilions continued to grow, cramping the Central Pavilion which hosted exhibitions of pavilion-less countries.<sup>39</sup> Bonito Oliva also attempted to tackle this problem by giving the board a large list of possible venues in Venice for his numerous exhibitions.<sup>40</sup>

In sum, the exhibition that Bonito Oliva proposed would incarnate a reformed Biennale. His presentation programme therefore gained the board's immediate consensus.<sup>41</sup> At last it seemed possible to act on what for a long time had gone unheeded.

## 2. The Curatorial Contribution of Achille Bonito Oliva

Achille Bonito Oliva's main goal was to reinstate the Venice Biennale as an international cultural guide, a role which in those years seemed lost. This ambitious scope was already implicit in the exhibition's title, *Cardinal Points of Art*, which cast the Biennale as a kind of compass for contemporary culture. Bonito Oliva's mega project, formed of many and large sub-exhibitions, exceeded the budget of the Biennale,<sup>42</sup> and, despite the fact that he was looking for sponsorships until the very last moment,<sup>43</sup> some parts of it were never realised. In fact, the exhibition that most closely corresponded with his concept was among those that were eventually cancelled: *Winds of Art*.<sup>44</sup> Organised together with the committee, and in particular with Italian art historian and commissioner Tommaso Trini, this show was planned to be split between the Central Pavilion at the Giardini and the Palazzo Ducale, and brought together artists of diverse eras and nationalities, from Eugène Delacroix to Anish Kapoor.<sup>45</sup> The display was not meant to follow a chronological order but was organised around parallel strands named after winds, for example "tornado" and "trade winds". This manner of organisation privileged complexity and curatorial choice over the presentation of artistic development. The central ideas of the exhibition – exchange both between and within cultures, and the migration of themes, styles and media over time and space – would be left implicit, unexplained by catalogue texts or wall panels. Similarly, the artworks were meant to be exhibited without captions in order to encourage each visitor to have a more direct experience of the artworks. This approach was sparked by the idea that it is not possible to tie art to a single theme: an exhibition can only follow or replicate maps and routes

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National exhibitions were organized since the beginning of the Biennale, and called International Rooms. After 1907 these exhibitions, which were managed directly by the nations, moved into dedicated pavilions. After the Second World War, due to increased requests of spaces, those countries without a pavilion were hosted in the central exhibition venue at the Giardini. Cf. Clarissa Ricci, conference paper, for "The Politics of Display: Collateral Events and Pavilions at the Venice Biennale" (24 November 2017), University of Saint Andrews, organised by Dr Karen Brown, Kate Keohane, and Dr Catherine Spencer as part of the EU-LAC-MUSEUMS project, run by the Museums, Galleries and Collections Institute. Clarissa Ricci, "From Obsolete to Contemporary: National Pavilions and the Venice Biennale After 1993", *Journal of Curatorial Studies* (forthcoming) 2020.

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The initial list comprises Magazzini del Sale, Cà Pesaro and Palazzo Fortuny, Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Punta della Dogana, La Misericordia, the former Ospedale Umberto I in Minutes LX Board of Directors Meeting (June 26, 1992): 36-38.

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Minutes LX Board of Directors Meeting (June 26, 1992): 41-44.

42

Minutes of the III Meeting of the Board of Directors, (March 19, 1993) in La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, VMCA, b. 112: 140-170; Deliberation n. 25 (March 20, 1993; Prot. Gen. n. 95) in La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, DCD, b. reg. 63.

43

A month before the opening, Bonito Oliva wrote to the Biennale staff that he managed to find sponsorship for the exhibition *Il Suono Rapido delle cose*. Letter of Achille Bonito Oliva in La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, AV, b. 524: Deliberation n. 92 (May 13, 1993; Prot. Gen. n. 219), in La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, DCD, b. reg. 64.

44

Folder 4.2.1. "Venti dell'arte", in La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, dep., b. 116.

45

Draft project "Venti dell'Arte/Winds of Art", in La Biennale, ASAC, FS, AV, b. 567: 2.

between artworks.<sup>46</sup> The shift from a chronological approach to a focus on the “links, flows, people, ideas, and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between politics and societies”<sup>47</sup> follows a methodological and critical commitment that Bonito Oliva had already expressed in exhibitions he curated, above all *Contemporanea*, which was held in an underground park between 1973 and 1974.<sup>48</sup> In the exhibition catalogue, Bonito Oliva wrote against the linear chronology of what he called “linguistic Darwinism”.<sup>49</sup> He inverted the dates (1973-1955) in order to radically express the “inevitable partiality of [the critic’s] selective and discriminatory management of power”.<sup>50</sup> In his project for Venice, instead of looking for “lines of criticism”, he grouped artworks in “winds” emphasising peculiarities like gait, motion, and pace over those of style, media, or the artist’s nationality.

The cancellation of *Winds of Art*, which survived only partially in the exhibition *Points of Art*,<sup>51</sup> was nevertheless fruitful since it allowed the 1993 Venice Biennale to focus on more recent and contemporaneous artistic production. *Cardinal Points of Art* thus became more than a title. It described a Biennale which aimed to interpret the “global complexity of art through many exhibitions which acted as tiles of themes, contexts, personalities of artistic creation”.<sup>52</sup> Using the metaphor of the “mosaic”, Bonito Oliva assembled an event made of fifteen exhibitions each delegated to a group of curators which came together to form a complex picture. Even though the title *Cardinal Points of Art* sounded like a theme, Bonito Oliva emphasised that he wanted to deconstruct the partiality of unitary interpretations.<sup>53</sup> From a practical point of view, the expansion of the Biennale outside the Giardini and into the city of Venice was part of the Biennale’s aim of strengthening relationships with the city. From a curatorial point of view, it represented a rupture with the tradition of organising exhibitions by theme, which had informed the Biennale’s curatorial approach from the 1970s as a way to prevent the exhibition fragmenting.<sup>54</sup>

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Draft project “Venti dell’Arte/Winds of Art”, *Ibid.*

47

Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Transnational”, in Akira Iriye, Pierre-Yves Saunier eds., *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 1047–1055, [http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/theories-and-methods/transnational-history/klaus-kiran-patel-transnational-history#InsertNoteID\\_6](http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/theories-and-methods/transnational-history/klaus-kiran-patel-transnational-history#InsertNoteID_6), accessed March 2019.

48

*Contemporanea* was organized by Incontri Internazionali d’Arte, directed by Graziella Lonardi Buontempo. The exhibition comprised many events and was divided into ten sections (art, cinema, theatre, architecture, photography, music, dance, artist’s books and records, visual and concrete poetry, counterinformation). Bonito Oliva was curator of the art section. *Contemporanea* (Villa Borghese Car Parking, Rome, November 1973-February 1974), exh. cat. (Florence: Centro Di, 1973).

49

Achille Bonito Oliva, “Contemporanea (arte 1973-1955)”, in *Contemporanea*, 25; Bonito Oliva “La Transavanguardia italiana”, *Flash Art*, no. 92-93 (October/November 1979): 18.

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Bonito Oliva, *Contemporanea*, 25. This approach was then theorised by Bonito Oliva shortly after in his main text *L’ideologia del traditore. Arte, maniera, manierismo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976) and in *Il passo dello strabismo. Sulle Arti* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977).

51

Anish Kapoor, Enzo Cucchi, Jannis Kounellis, Francesco Clemente, Gino De Dominicis, Luciano Fabbro, Daniel Buren. Minutes of the III Meeting of the Board of Directors (March 19, 1993), La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, dep., b. 120; Clarissa Ricci, *La Biennale di Venezia 1993-2003. L’Esposizione come piattaforma* (PhD diss. Iuav University and Ca’ Foscari University in Venice, 2014), 47-54.

52

Achille Bonito Oliva (ed.), *XLV Esposizione internazionale d’arte: Punti cardinali dell’arte*, vol. 1-2 (Venice: Marsilio, 1993); Bonito Oliva ed., *Cardinal Points of Art: Theoretical Essays: XLV International Art Exhibition*, vol. 3. (Venice: Marsilio, 1994).

53

Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 10.

54

Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 153; Vittoria Martini “The Space of the Exhibition. The Multi-cellular Structure of the Venice Biennale”, in *Pavilions. Art in Architecture*, eds. Robert Ireland and Federica Martini (Brussels: Muette, 2012), 145-167.



This notion of an exhibition as a mosaic resembles the idea of “archipelago thinking” which Édouard Glissant had started to explore in his Caribbean texts<sup>55</sup> only a few years before and which Bonito Oliva was certainly acquainted with.<sup>56</sup> The fifteen exhibitions could be seen as a collection of islands, connected to each other by the city of Venice. Closer though to a mild situationist approach,<sup>57</sup> the mosaic metaphor was intended to suggest a kind of multiculturalism; the mixing of ethnic groups, languages and cultures within society. In Italy the debate around multiculturalism was introduced at a political level in the late 1980s and it gradually became more relevant as migrants started to land on Italian shores after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>58</sup> As Bonito Oliva declared,

It is no longer possible to recognise the purity of a national nucleus; instead we must acknowledge the positive contribution of a trans-nationality, of an intertwining of nations capable of producing cultural eclecticism and necessary interracial unity.<sup>59</sup>

Such approach chimed with the core concept of *Molteplici Culture (Multiple Cultures)*<sup>60</sup> held in May-June 1992 in Rome. This exhibition, to which Bonito Oliva contributed a text which was a draft of the second part of his essay in the Biennale’s catalogue,<sup>61</sup> was a model for the 45<sup>th</sup> Biennale’s format, and, in particular, for *Aperto '93*, as it delegated parts of the exhibition to other curators, allowing for an openness and complexity of views which was described by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev as “a mosaic of psychological, ethical, moral, economic, political, ethnic subjects”.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the “multi-mosaic” assembled by Bonito Oliva in Venice stresses continuous movement. The “circular exchange of art culture”<sup>63</sup> becomes, in this Biennale, an operational metaphor, which Bonito Oliva explains using two keywords – coexistence and nomadism. These words are both catalysts of the exhibition’s methodological approach and interpretative tools for understanding contemporary art.<sup>64</sup>

55

Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989); Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

56

This could be the case, considering Bonito Oliva knew Alighiero Boetti well, and Boetti was an admirer of Glissant. On the importance of Glissant to Boetti: “Édouard Glissant & Hans Ulrich Obrist”, in *100 Notes-100 Thoughts: DOCUMENTA 13* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

57

Guy Debord, “Theory of Dérive”, *Internationale Situationniste*, vol. 2 (1958), trans. Ken Knabb, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/all/en/display/314>, accessed December 2019.

58

Christof Van Mol and Helga de Valk, “Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective”, in *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe*, eds. Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas and Rinus Penninx (Cham: Springer, 2016), 31-55.

59

Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 10.

60

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Ludovico Pratesi eds., *Molteplici Culture. Itinerari dell'arte contemporanea in un mondo che cambia* (Rome, May, 19-June, 19, 1992), exh. cat. (Rome: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1992).

61

Confront “The System of Politics and Culture” in Christov-Bakargiev and Pratesi, *Molteplici Culture*, 55-57 with “The System of Politics” in Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 11-14. However the founding argument of this text was sketched in *Arte e sistema dell'arte. Opera pubblico critica mercato* (Pescara: Galleria Lucrezia de Domizio Durini, 1975).

62

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, “Molteplici Culture” in Christov-Bakargiev and Pratesi, *Molteplici Culture*, 13.

63

Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 14.

64

Ibid., 12.

## 2.1. The Coexistence of Art

As with many other concepts utilised by Achille Bonito Oliva, “coexistence” has a broad and shifting meaning. Above all, the fifteen exhibitions of the 45th Venice Biennale, together with the national pavilions and the collateral events, are a response to the principle of spatial coexistence.

The idea of artwork from different nations coexisting became a central principle which shaped all the exhibitions. As was typical in the Biennale in those years, the Central Pavilion was devoted to thematic exhibitions organised by the Biennale’s curators, exhibitions of Italian artists and to countries without a pavilion at the Giardini. Bonito Oliva, however, tried to free up space in the Central Pavilion<sup>65</sup> since the countries requesting space were increasing every year. It was with this in mind that Bonito Oliva put forward the “transnational proposal” in which he asked the countries with a built pavilion to host artists from nations without a permanent one.<sup>66</sup>

However, spatial coexistence wasn’t simply the inevitable condition of the Central Pavilion, it was for Bonito Oliva “the choice of spatial and synchronic categories which would help to think of art as an order made of coexistences, and not a clear sequence”.<sup>67</sup> This principle of *Cardinal Points of Art* was exemplified in the display of the Central Pavilion which hosted, as was customary, the Artistic Director’s exhibition, together with the exhibitions of those countries without pavilions, and the Italian section *Opera Italiana*. The coexistence of these exhibitions, however, was not paratactic. Artworks and sections were not simply placed alongside each other. An example of this principle was visible at the entrance rotunda of the pavilion, which exhibited *Terremoto a palazzo (Earthquake at the palace)* (1981) by Joseph Beuys, a dramatic space containing broken glass and heavy trunks, alongside pieces of furniture that survived the 1980 earthquake in Naples. This entrance acted as an opening statement of the curatorial principle of structuring an exhibition through references, connections and proximities. The installation, with an egg perched precariously on trunks supported by drinking glasses, is a representation of the instability of life. Nevertheless, a more positive purport of the capacity of art to console and enrich was created by virtue of the artwork’s belonging also to the adjacent section in *Terrae Motus*, a project conceived by the gallerist and collector Lucio Amelio following the Naples earthquake. Beuys’ intervention, in fact, was part of both *Points of Art* and *Opera Italiana* which also corresponded to the pavilion’s exit, recalling even more the ideas of circularity and synchronicity, which are, for Bonito Oliva, fundamental to the notion of coexistence. Furthermore, at the back of Beuys installation was *Les Archives de la Biennale de Venise en 1938 (The Venice Biennale’s archives in 1938)* (1993) by Christian Boltanski, which assembled photographic documentation of the Biennale in 1938 including the visit of Adolf Hitler; this proximity emphatically marked a new era for the Biennale which was definitely overcoming its Fascist past.

The display of Beuys’ work at the beginning of the exhibition also reflects the artist’s significant role in Bonito Oliva’s curatorial thought. Ever since the publication of *Territorio Magico*<sup>68</sup> in 1971, the German artist was described by Bonito Oliva as a key player in the formation of contemporary art.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the installation acted both as a doorway and as a point of convergence for the many

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65

This happened only in 1999 when the Biennale agreed to have more space at the Arsenale.

66

Minutes of the I Countries Meeting (Hotel Bauer, July 3-4, 1992), in *La Biennale di Venezia*, ASAC, FS, AV, b. 518.

67

Translation of the author, Minutes LXII Board of Directors Meeting (September 4, 1992), in *La Biennale di Venezia* ASAC, FS, dep., b. 62: 19-20.

68

Achille Bonito Oliva, *Territorio Magico. Comportamenti Alternativi dell’Arte* (1971), Stefano Chiodi ed., (Florence: Le lettere, 2009).

69

Ibid., 68-69.

aspects of contemporary art that Bonito Oliva wanted to highlight, in particular the nomadism – the second of Bonito Oliva’s keywords – which Joseph Beuys embodied. Even if Beuys’ moment of awakening following his encounter with nomad tribes in Mongolia is more fictional than real,<sup>70</sup> he nevertheless advocated the myth of the artist in search of the “elsewhere”, as a nomad of the world and of meaning in general.<sup>71</sup>

In other exhibitions “coexistence” translated more clearly into inter-disciplinarity. For example, in *Slittamenti*<sup>72</sup>, the coexistence of diverse disciplines allowed the authors to move within wide artistic realms where the writer William Burroughs and the philosopher Jean Baudrillard could exhibit their paintings, and the film director Pedro Almodovar could curate an exhibition of his favourite artworks.<sup>73</sup>

Although the cross-references were not always successful, every room and every exhibition in Bonito Oliva’s Biennale was sparked by the logic of connections. The ‘points’ of art can be read as junctions between the artworks, different media, exhibition sections, people and situations in time which make art possible.

Through the fifteen exhibitions, “the coexistence of art” became not only a curatorial practice but also a principle of enquiry which aimed to grasp art’s capacity to trespass, to move from one terrain to another, to blur different languages and to allow the different sections of an exhibition to interact in a common cultural discourse. For this reason, part of the mosaic-exhibition was also the catalogue which collected an unprecedented number of essays by philosophers and theoreticians who introduced each exhibition.<sup>74</sup>

This same rationale of coexistence informed *Aperto ’93* at the Corderie of the Arsenale. Bonito Oliva paid special attention to this exhibition and wanted to make it the Biennale’s flagship.<sup>75</sup> There were certainly personal reasons behind this. Together with Harald Szeemann he had organized the first *Aperto* in 1980.<sup>76</sup> Following its success, the Biennale transformed it into a section devoted to young artists. In 1993, however, Bonito Oliva abolished the age limit of thirty five,<sup>77</sup> following a trend initiated with the last *Paris Biennial* (1985) in which he served as one of the commissioners.<sup>78</sup> The aim was both to establish his paternity over the exhibition, to reinstate its original scope and to make it a “cultural arena”<sup>79</sup> devoted

Table 1.

Venues map, 45<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition, The Venice Biennale, 1993 design by Martina Salvaneschi

Table 2.1/2.2

List of the fifteen exhibitions of the 45<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition, The Venice Biennale, 1993 design by Martina Salvaneschi

70

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique”, *Artforum* 18, no. 5 (January 1980): 35-43; Peter Nisbet, “Crash Course: Remarks on a Beuys Story”, in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: DAP/Ringling Museum of Art 2001), 5-17.

71

Victoria Walters, “Joseph Beuys and EURASIA”, *Tate Papers*, no. 31 (Spring 2019), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/31/joseph-beuys-eurasia>, accessed March 2020.

72

*Slittamenti* was divided in three venues, see table no. 2. For a more detailed description cf. Ricci, *La Biennale 1993-2003*, 88-89.

73

Bonito Oliva, *XLV Esposizione internazionale d’arte* (vol. 2), 680-712.

74

Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 10. Bonito Oliva already experimented with the catalogue as an exhibition site. Cf. Luigia Leonardelli, “Amore mio, ovvero il catalogo come pratica curatoriale”, *Ricerche di S/confine*, dossier no. 4 (2018): 32-41, <https://www.ricchedisconfine.info/dossier-4/dossier4-2018.pdf>, accessed September 2019.

75

Minutes of the I Countries Meeting (July 3-4, 1992): 3.

76

Achille Bonito Oliva, “Aperto 80”, in *Biennale di Venezia, Visual Art Section 1980* (June 1 - September 28, 1980) exh. cat. (Venice: La Biennale, 1980), 48-49. Denis Viva, “Aperto 80. La pittura come novità” in *Crocevia Biennale*, eds. Francesca Castellani and Eleonora Charans (Milan: Scalpendi Editore, 2017), 280.

77

Aperto ’80 did not have an age limit of 35 years.

78

The 13<sup>th</sup> Paris Biennale was organized in the Grande Halle de la Villette by an international curatorial staff: Georges Boudaille (France), Kasper König (Germany), Alanna Heiss (United States) and Achille Bonito Oliva (Italy). *Nouvelle Biennale de Paris 85* (Paris la Grande Halle de La Villette, October 2 - November 10, 1985), exh. cat. (Paris: Electa/Moniteur, 1985); Cf. Also Georges Boudaille, “Parigi Sfida Kassel e Venezia”, *Il Giornale dell’Arte*, III (March 21, 1985): 1-2.

**XLV International Exhibition of Art The Venice Biennale**  
**Cardinal Points of Art**  
**13 June/10 October 1993**

**Venues**



- ▲ **Cardinal Points of Art**
- ▲ **National Pavilions**
- ▲ **Collateral Events**
- ✱ **Special Events**

- OFF MAP**
- Monastero Mechitarista**  
San Lazzaro degli Armeni
  - Gipsoteca Antonio Canova**  
Possagno (TV)
  - Campo del Getto**  
Cavallino

**Exhibitions****PUNTI DELL'ARTE  
Giardini di Castello,  
Central Pavilion****Project:** Achille Bonito Oliva**Exhibition committee:**  
Adelina von Fürstenberg,  
Tommaso Trini, Mario  
Codognato, Thierry Ollat.**Artists:**  
(*Grave/Nord*) Joseph Beuys,  
Robert Morris, Per Kikerby,  
Georg Baselitz. (*Fermo/Ovest*)  
Christian Boltanski, Emilio  
Vedova. Enzo Cucchi,Jannis Kounellis (*Aureo/  
Sud*), Gino De Dominicis,  
Lucio Fontana, Anish Kapoor,  
Susanna Solano. (*Araldico/Est*)  
Sigmar Polke, Daniel Buren,  
Cy Twombly,  
Francesco Clemente.**OPERA ITALIANA  
TRANSITI E TRITTICI  
Giardini di Castello,  
Central Pavilion****Project:** Achille Bonito Oliva**Exhibition committee:**  
**TRANSITI** Fulvio Abbate,  
Viana Conti, Francesco Poli,  
Vittorio Rubiu, Anne-Marie  
Sauzeau, Aldo Tagliaferri,  
Angelo Trimarco.  
**TRITTICI** Jole De Sanna,  
Corrado Levi, Demetrio  
Paparoni, Loredana Parmesani,  
Duccio Trombadori.**Artists:**  
**TRANSITI** (*Parabilia*) Ugo  
Carrega, Martino Oberto  
Nanni Balestrini, Patrizia  
Vicinelli, Eugenio Miccini,  
Franco Vaccari. (*Transiti  
Premonizioni: Emilio Villa e  
Carla Lonzi*) Emilio Villa, William  
Xerra, Corrado Costa, Carla  
Accardi, Pino Pascali, Giulio  
Paolini, Jannis Kounellis, Pinot  
Gallizio, Lucio Fontana, Pietro  
Consagra, Mimmo Rotella,  
Salvatore Scarpitta, Mario  
Nigro, Getulio Alviani, Enrico  
Castellani, Luciano Fabbro, Cy  
Twombly. (*Persona*) Fabio Mauri,Emilio Isgrò. (*Concessione  
d'Immagine*) Gianfranco  
Gorgoni, Paolo Mussat Sartor,  
Plinio De Martiis, Claudio  
Abate; (*Terrae Motus*) Andy  
Warhol, Robert Mapplethorpe,  
Silvio Merlino, Julian Schnabel,  
Nino Longobardi, Carlo Alfano.  
(*Fabrica Civica*) Carla Accardi,  
Alighiero e Boetti, Renata  
Boero, Isabella Ducrot, Giulio  
Turcato. (Museum Luciano  
Giaccari).  
**TRITTICI** (*Imagina*) Cloti  
Ricciardi, Carol Rama, Giosetta  
Fioroni. (*Extroversa*) Marisa  
Busanel, Antonio Recalcati,Aldo Mondino. (*Complessa*)  
Luciano Fabbro, Hidetoshi  
Nagasawa, Luisa Protti.  
(*Oggettistica*) Salvatore  
Scarpitta, Gianni Piacentino,  
Piero Gilardi. (*Abstracta*) Sergio  
Fermariello, Domenico Bianchi,  
Remo Salvadori.**APERTO 93 -  
EMERGENCY/EMERGENZA  
Corderie dell'Arsenale****Project:** Achille Bonito Oliva**Exhibition committee:**  
Helena Kontova (coordinator),  
Francesco Bonami, Nicolas  
Borriaud, Antonio d'Avossa,  
Jeffrey Deitch, Mike Hubert,  
Thomas Locher, Kong Changan  
(Lauk'ung Chan),  
Robert Nickas, Rosma Scuteri,  
Berta Sichel, Matthew Slotover,  
Benjamin Weil.**Artists:**  
(*After the Event* - Hubert)  
Dawn Clements, Gianmarco  
Montesano, Angelo  
Papadimitriou, Alexis  
Rockman, Mario Dellavedova.  
(*Riavvicinamenti* - Kontova)  
Milena Dopitová, Róza El-  
Hassan, Zbigniew Libera,  
Eva Marisaldi, Liliana Moro  
e Bernhard Rüdiger, Eran  
Schaerf, Maria Grazia Toderi,  
VSSD, Dimitris Kozaris,  
Premiata Ditta, Pipilotti Rist.  
(*Il semplice scambio* - Bonami)  
Maurizio Cattelan, Jessica  
Diamond, Carter Kustera, Paul  
McCarthy, Gabriel Orozco,  
Charles Ray, Rudolf Stingel, Alix  
Lambert, Kristin Oppenheim,  
Rainald Schumacher. (*Reality  
Used to be a friend of mine* -  
Slotover) Christine Borland, Mat  
Collishaw, Damien Hirst, Simon  
Patterson, Vongphrachanh  
Phanit, Steven Pippin,  
Julie Roberts, Rirkrit Tiravanija,Sadie Benning, Paper Tiger  
Television, Georgina Starr.  
(*Can Art Still Change the  
World?* - Deitch) Janine  
Antoni, Renée Green, Kohdai  
Nakahara, Kiki Smith, Noboru  
Tsubaky, Nari Ward, Yukinori  
Yanagi, Andrea Zittel, Cheryl  
Donegan. (*Das Reale/ Die  
Arbeit* - Locher) Biefer &  
Zraggen, Meg Cranston,  
Regina Möller, Hirsh Perلمان,  
Dan Peterman, Shade of Green,  
Rolf Walz, Peter Zimmermann.  
(*Indicatori* - D'Avossa) Pep  
Agut, Bigert&Bergstrom,  
Giorgio Cattani, Maria Eichhorn,  
Carsten Höller, Kirsten Mosher,  
Luca Quaranta, Sergio Sarra,  
Marcelo Expósito.  
(*Indifference and non-  
Indifference* - Changan)  
Kathe Burkhart, Cazzomatto,  
Formento, Sossella, Michael  
W. Joo, Anatoly Osmolovsky,  
Nedko Solakov, Youshen  
Wang, Wu Shan Zhuan.(Standards - Bourriaud)  
Angela Bulloch, Cercle Ramo  
Nash, Fabrice Hybert, Sean  
Landers, Philippe Parreno,  
Patrick Van Caekenbergh,  
Niek Van de Steeg, Nicolaus  
Schafhausen, Kai Althoff, Lukas  
Duwenhögger. (*News from Post  
America* - Sichel) Laura Aguilar,  
America J. Martinez, Rosàngela  
Rennó, Doris Salcedo, Andres  
Serrano, Rigoberto Torres,  
José Antonio Hernández.  
(*Forse...* - Scuteri) Filadelfo  
Anzalone, Hany Armanious,  
Samuel Kane Kwei, Mondo/  
Mokoh, Bonnie Ntshalintshali,  
TODT, Oliviero Toscani. (*An  
Essay on Liberation* - Nichas)  
Félix González - Torres, Scott  
Grodesky, Nancy Rubin, Julia  
Scher. (*Vaporetti* - Weil) Henry  
Bond, Sylvie Fleury, Dominique  
González-Foerster, Lothar  
Hempel, Roth & Stauffenberg.**PASSAGGIO A ORIENTE  
Giardini di Castello,  
Israel and Venice Pavilion****Exhibition committee:**  
Virginia Baradel, Francesca del  
Lago, Giacinto di Pietrantonio,  
Li Xianting, Marco Meneguzzo,  
Roland Sabatier, Kazuo  
Yamawaki.**Artists:**  
(Gutai) Jiro Yoshihara,  
Sadamasu Motonaga,  
Saburo Murakami, Shozo  
Shimamoto, Fujiko Shiraga,  
Kazuo Shiraga, Yosuo Sumi,  
Atzuo Tanaka, Tsuruku  
Yamasaki, Toshio Yoshida,  
Mischio Yoshiara. (Gruppo  
Ispezione Medermeneutica)Sergej Anufriev, Vladimir  
Fedorov, Pavel Pepperstein,  
Monastyrskij, Jurij Lejderman.  
(Letterism) Isidore Isou, Gabriel  
Pomerand, Maurice Lemaitre,  
Roland Sabatier, Micheline  
Hachette, Alain Satié, François  
Poyet, Gérard Philippe Broutin,  
Woody Roehmer, Albert  
Dupont, Frédérique Devaux,Michel Armager, Virginie  
Caraven e Jean-Paul d'Arville.  
(Chinese Artists) Fang Lijun,  
Liu Wei, Yu Hong, Wang  
Guangyi, Li Shan, Yu Youhan,  
Song Haidong, Ding Yi,  
Feng Mengbo, Sun Liang,  
Wang Ziwei, Xu Bing,  
Zhang Peili.**MURI DI CARTA  
Giardini di Castello,  
Central Pavilion****Exhibition committee:**  
Gloria Bianchino, Arturo Carlo  
Quintavalle.**Artists:**  
Man Ray, Daniel Schwartz,  
Florence Henri, Walker Evans,  
Dorothea Lange, Nino Migliori,  
Mario Giacomelli, Luigi Ghirri,  
Mimmo Jodice, Gabriele  
Basilico, Fulvio Ventura,Karl Dietrich Bühler,  
Mario Cresci, Giovanni  
Chiaromonte, Olivo Barbieri,  
Vincenzo Castello,  
Cucchi White, Guido Guidi,  
Francesco Radino e Paolo  
Rosselli.



<b>SLITTAMENTI</b> Sala Guardi alle Zitelle, Palazzo Fortuny	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Luca Massimo Barbero, Chiara Bertolla, Franco Bolelli, Vittoria Coen, Furio Colombo, Gabriella Di Milia, Gabriella Drudi, Corinna Ferrari, Jan Foncé, Enrico Ghezzi, Marco Giusto, Luigi Meneghelli, Heiner Müller, Giovan Battista Salerno, Fulvio Salvadori, Barbara Tosi, Giorgio Verzotti, Marisa Volpi.	<b>Artists:</b> Pedro Almodovar for Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Mapplethorpe, John Steinbach, Ettore Sottsass et al; William Borroughs, Wim Wenders, Jean Baudrillard, Pino Pascali, Derek Jarman, Luca Patella, Vettor Pisani, Mario Schifano, Vincenzo Agnetti, Bob Wilson, Enrico Ghezzi for	Mario Schifano, Bob Wilson, Peter Greenaway.
<b>FIGURABILE:</b> <b>FRANCIS BACON</b> Museo Correr	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> David Sylvester (director), Gilles Deleuze, David Mallor, Daniela Palazzoli, Lorenza Trucchi.	<b>Artist:</b> Francis Bacon.	
<b>FRATELLI.</b> <b>FRACESCO LO SAVIO</b> <b>E TANO FESTA</b> Museo di Ca' Pesaro	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco (supervisor), Francesca Alfano Miglietti, Massimo Carboni.	<b>Artists:</b> Tano Festa and Francesco Lo Savio.	
<b>IL SUONO RAPIDO</b> <b>DELLE COSE</b> <b>CAGE AND COMPANY</b> Granai delle Zitelle, Guggenheim Foundation	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Alanna Heiss (supervisor), Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Ludovico Pratesi, Angela Vettese.	<b>Artists:</b> Gianfranco Baruchello, John Cage, Giuseppe Chiari, Lucio Fontana, Sasper Johns, Daniele Lombardi, Sergio Lombardo,	Renato Mambor, Piero Manzoni, Walter Marchetti, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Luigi Russolo, Gianni Emilio Simonetti.
<b>MACCHINE DELLA PACE</b> Giardini di Castello, Ex-Jugoslavia Pavilion	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Laura Cherubini, Paola Ugolini.	<b>Artists:</b> Mario Ceroli, Tony Cragg, Shirazeh Houshiary, Ange Leccia, Roman Opalka, Julian Opie, Panamarenko.	
<b>LA COESISTENZA DELL'ARTE</b> Ex vetrerie San Marco	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Lòránd Hegyi (director), Paolo Balmas, Danilo Eccher, Luisa Somaini, Biljana Tomic.	<b>Artists:</b> Marina Abramović, Stefano Arienti, Herbert Brandl, Jiri David, Gianni Dessi, Braco Dimitrijević, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Mirjana Dordević, Manfred Erjautz, Franz Graf, Herwig Kempinger,	Thorsten Kirchhoff, Peter Kogler, Felice Levini, Amedeo Martegani, László Mulasics, Nunzio, Piero Pizzi Cannella, Marjetica Potrč, Dubravka Rakoci, Hubert Schmalix, Tamás Trombitás, Manfred Wakolbinger, Die Damen.
<b>VIAGGI VERSO CITERA.</b> <b>ARTE E POESIA</b> Ca' Vendramin Calergi	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Francesca Pasini, Giuliana Setari.	<b>Artists:</b> Marco Bagnoli, Bizhan Bassiri, Nicola De Maria, Günther Förge, Isa Genzhen, Rodney Graham, Bertrand Lavier, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Reinhard Mucha,	Mimmo Paladino, Giulio Paolini, Alfredo Pirri, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Thomas Schütte, Susana Solano, Ettore Spalletti, Haim Steinbach, Franz West.
<b>DETERRITORIALE</b> Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> Giulio Alessandri, Virginia Baradel, Luca Massimo Barbero, Chiara Bertola.	<b>Artists:</b> Michele Anzenton, Gianluca Balocco, Maria Bernardone, Daniele Bianchi, Christiano Bianchin, Constantino Ciervo, Luca Clabot, Giuliano Dal Molin,	Maria Degenhardt, Riccardo De Marchi, Elisabetta Di Maggio, Marco Ferraris, Michelangelo Penso, Maria Grazia Rosin, Carmen Rossetto, Mariateresa Sartori, Ampelio Zappalorto.
<b>ART AGAINST AIDS.</b> <b>VENEZIA 93</b> Peggy Guggenheim Collection	<b>Exhibition committee:</b> John Cheim, Diego Cortez, Carmen Gimenez, Klaus Kertess.	<b>Artists:</b> Carlos Accardi, Afrika, Curtis Anderson, Giovanni Anselmo, John Armleder, Charles Arnoldi, Richard Artschwager, Frank Auerbach, Donald Baedchler, Marco Bagnoli, John Baldessari, Miguel Barcelo, Matthew Barney, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Mike Bidlo, Ross Bleckner, Alighiero e Boetti, Jonathan Borofsky, Frédérick-Bruy	Bouabré, Louise Bourgeois, James Brown, Grisha Bruskin, Peter Cain, Alexander Caler, Saint Clair Cemin, Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, George Condo, Tony Cragg, Enzo Cucchi, Hanne Darbove, Richard Deacon David Deutsch, Braco Dimitrijevic, Jime Dine, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Carroll Dunham, Pepe Espalieu, and many others.
<b>IL CAVALLO DI LEONARDO</b> Riva dei Sette Martiri	Supported by José Luis Brea.	<b>Artists:</b> Ben Yacober, Yannik Vu.	



to the most cutting edge artistic production, with a concentration on contemporary artistic discourse. Helena Kontova was nominated coordinator of the project and other curators were asked to collaborate [Table 2.2]. The result was thirteen exhibitions of ground-breaking art. This collaborative format, which characterised all of the Biennale's exhibitions, was to achieve great success in the following years. Most significantly it was the model for the 2003 Venice Biennale directed by Francesco Bonami, who was part of the *Aperto '93* team. In contrast to the spatial cross-referencing of the Central Pavilion, the exhibitions at the Corderie were more distinct. However, the collaborative spirit sparked the whole project.

Coexistence therefore meant not only the spatial coexistence of artworks, viewers, exhibitions within the city, but also the metaphorical reconfiguration of different aesthetics when placed next to each other.

## 2.2. From nomadism to transnationalism

The artistic coexistence that Bonito Oliva insists upon is connected to another crucial keyword: nomadism, or what he calls the “horizontal movement” of artists. This term is very nuanced and its associations need untangling.

The concept of nomadism was used by the curator in his essays in the 1970s in order to describe avant-garde artistic practice. The word, even if it suggests the peripatetic movements of globalisation, is more closely related to the discourse of post-modernism. In particular the nomad becomes the central figure of contemporary social theory.<sup>80</sup> Marshall McLuhan, for example, puts forward the concept of the global village in which, thanks to technology, different forms of knowledge contaminate and intertwine with each other.<sup>81</sup> According to this perspective, history and culture are essentially nomadic.<sup>82</sup>

It is also possible to detect in Bonito Oliva's writing the influence of Deleuze and Guattari. Bonito Oliva specifically picks up the concept elaborated in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972)<sup>83</sup> and then furthered in a *Thousand Plateaus* (1980).<sup>84</sup> In these texts the movement of the nomad is described as horizontal, which allows it to resist and also to threaten the verticality of power.<sup>85</sup> The space in which the nomad moves resists normalisation and is therefore always a ‘de-territorialisation’ (a term which Bonito Oliva borrowed for one of his exhibitions *Deterritoriale*). Nomadism destabilises the hierarchical ordering of bodies and introduces chaotic movements whose patterns are only temporary and sometimes indiscernible. This close link to Deleuze and Guattari makes it clear why Bonito Oliva doesn't shift to the concept of migrant, since the movement of a migrant is from space to space while the movements of the nomad are distributed in an “open space”.<sup>86</sup>

Even though Bonito Oliva derived the concept of the nomad from

79

Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 17.

80

Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 19. Cf also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: the War Machine* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Later Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

81

Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

82

Gaetano Chiurazzi, *Il postmoderno. Il pensiero nella società della comunicazione* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2002).

83

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Œdipe* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972/1973).

84

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1986).

85

Tim Cresswell, *On the move*, 50.

86

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 380.

Deleuze and Guattari, the Italian curator left aside its political implications. It is definitely also influenced by Fluxus' understanding of the continuously changing nature of the artist's condition. Fluxus' international and interdisciplinary community – which Bonito Oliva emphasised in the title of his large 1990 exhibition, *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus* (Where is Fluxus There is Movement)<sup>87</sup> – broadened what was considered art and offered a practical example of international artistic nomadism.

It was the exhibition *Passage to the Orient* which embodied in particular the centrality of the concept of nomadism to Bonito Oliva's practice and, accordingly, he gave it a central position in the Biennale's display. *Passage to the Orient* greeted the visitor at the entrance of the Giardini with remakes of Gutai installations. *Mizu* (water) and *Akai Mizu* (red water) [fig. 1] by Sadamasa Motonaga, were tied riotously to the columns of the Central Pavilion. The exhibition also comprised works by Russian artists from the 1980s, the French group Lettrism, and the solo exhibitions of Shigeko Kubota, Yoko Ono and Jiro Yoshihara. Thanks to the help of Francesca Dallago, a large area was also dedicated to fourteen young Chinese painters including Fang Lijun, Liu Wei, Xu Bing, Zhang Peili.<sup>88</sup> This peculiar coexistence of diverse groups of artists was guided by the idea that, as Elémire Zolla makes explicit in the catalogue,

there are no differences, not even marginal, between those who try to express themselves artistically (whatever this term may still denote) here and in India, or China, or Japan [...] the avant-garde movements of this century do not have a nationality. [...] A painting does not reflect the historical movement, [...] it places itself outside history, in the single wholly unified globe.<sup>89</sup>

fig. 1  
Sadamasa Motonaga, "Mizu"  
1956 (part of the exhibition  
*Passaggio a Oriente*), Giardini  
di Castello, 45<sup>th</sup> International  
Exhibition, The Venice Biennale  
© 1993 by Heimo Aga



87

Achille Bonito Oliva ed., *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus 1990-1962* (Venice, May 26 - September 30, 1990) exh. cat. (Milan: Mazzotta, 1990).

88

John F. Andrews, "Asia Art Archive Conference. Sites of Construction: Exhibitions and the Making of Recent Art History in Asia. Exhibition as Site—Extended Case Study (China 1993) Why 1993? Coincidence or Convergence?", *Yishu. Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 13, no. 3 (May/June 2014): 19-22.

89

Elémire Zolla "The International Character of the avant-garde and the Japanese specificity", in Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 41.

It was under the influence of the two concepts of nomadism and coexistence that Bonito Oliva proposed to the pavilions' commissioners that they should "get out" of their narrow frontiers,<sup>90</sup> host artists of other countries, and put forward a trans-national interpretation of the pavilion.<sup>91</sup> Most of the commissioners didn't react enthusiastically, revealing how keen countries still were to exhibit their works in separate showcases. After the culmination of years of debates around the need to abolish national pavilions, this "transnational" proposal actually gave new life to the principle of national pavilions. As Nam June Paik and Hans Haacke showed through their intervention at the German Pavilion that year, a transnational approach offered the possibility to "develop an alternative model of political structuring on a national level".<sup>92</sup>

### 3. Reception of the XLV Biennale

In the conference gathered just after the 1993 exhibition to plan the Biennale's centennial anniversary,<sup>93</sup> a general dissatisfaction towards Bonito Oliva was expressed.<sup>94</sup> These objections, together with the different orientation of the new board of directors,<sup>95</sup> contributed to Bonito Oliva's failure to be appointed again as Artistic Director. For the first time the board nominated a foreign director to the Art Department, Jean Clair.<sup>96</sup> This decision, instead of marking a new era, aggravated the obsolescence of the institution. The French curator, who was highly respected in Italy, entered into conflict with the board on the organisation of the exhibition,<sup>97</sup> while the reforms were stalled in Parliament. The Centennial exhibition was well attended but not distinctive.<sup>98</sup> At this impasse, Germano Celant accepted the position of Artistic Director of the following Biennale in 1997. His "miraculous" realisation of an exhibition in six months, however, did not save the institution from being perceived as a lost chance in comparison to documenta X, curated by Catherine David. Moreover, that year the Biennale was competing with a plethora of other biennial type exhibitions: Skulpture Projecte, the second Johannesburg Biennial, and Manifesta in Rotterdam.<sup>99</sup> At the end of 1997, however,

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90

Ricci, "From Obsolete to Contemporary".

91

Minutes of the I Countries Meeting (July 3-4, 1992): 2-4.

92

Lóránd Hegyi, "Preface", in *La Coesistenza Dell'arte: Un Modello Espositivo*, eds. Achille Bonito Oliva, Lóránd Hegyi, Marina Abramovic, exh. cat. (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1993), 8.

93

"Quale Biennale dopo 100 Anni/Which Biennale after 100 years?" The conference was divided over several days in 1994: January 29 (Cinema), January 31 (Theatre), February 5 (Music), March 12 (Architecture), March 19 and 29 (Visual Arts), ASAC, FS, dep., b. 128.

94

An open letter against the nomination of Bonito Oliva was sent to the Biennale's President and was signed by fifty-one artists. Ricci, *La Biennale 1993-2003*, 110.

95

The new board started in January 1993 with Gian Luigi Rondi as President; General Secretary: Raffaele Martelli; Advisors: Barbiana Laura, Barzini Ludina, Bergamo Ugo, Borgomeo Luca, Cucciniello Enzo, Curi Umbero, Dal Co Francesco, Gentile Ada, Gentile Francesco, Giannuzzi Miraglia Anna Maria, Giugni Gino, Gressani Sanna Fabrizia, Lattuada Alberto, Marchetti Bruno, Mazzella Luigi, Rosada Bruno, Trevisi Paolo.

96

Minutes XIX Board of Directors Meeting (March 11, 1994), in *La Biennale*, ASAC, FS, dep., b.129: 12: 38.

97

The main problems were related to the decision to move the main part of the Biennale at Palazzo Grassi and to interrupt *Aperto*. Cf. Folder 1 (Exhibition Program, Gerard Regnier) in *La Biennale*, ASAC, FS, dep., b.132: 2 and Minutes XX Board of Directors Meeting (April 8, 1994), in *La Biennale*, ASAC, FS, dep., b. 133: 40-42.

98

Minutes LVIII Board of Directors Meeting (October 11, 1996) in *La Biennale*, ASAC, FS, VCA, b. reg 25: 28-30.

99

Pierre Restany, "Venezia-Kassel: l'ordine dei manager e i capricci dei sovversivi", *Domus*, no. 797 (October 1997): 101-116; Richard Shone, "Venice. Biennale and other exhibitions", *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXXIX, no. 1134 (September 1997): 651-653; Mireille Descombes, "Venise-Kassel, le match de l'été", *l'Hebdo*, July 27, 1997: 66-68.

the Biennale's fortunes changed. The reform draft, which had been blocked at the Italian Parliament for more than four years, became, in only a few weeks, a new charter.<sup>100</sup> The protagonist of this new phase of the Biennale's development was its president Paolo Baratta,<sup>101</sup> who agreed a contract with the Nautical Ministry for the use of a large area of the Arsenale docks.<sup>102</sup> This achievement was marked by the first Biennale of Harald Szeemann in 1999, *dAPERTutto*. Its great success gave the Biennale new credibility and repositioned it among the multitude of competing biennials.<sup>103</sup>

This particular sequence of events made the 1993 Venice Biennale slip away from memory but other factors have also contributed to this exhibition's obscurity. Despite the fact that Bonito Oliva had gathered years of thinking at the Biennale and combined it in one of the largest exhibitions in its history, anticipating many features of today's Venice Biennale, and even if visitor numbers nearly tripled,<sup>104</sup> its reception was largely negative, especially after the highly critical review by Robert Hughes.<sup>105</sup> This prevented a mature and sustained consideration of the exhibition's relevance. The whole event was organized on a low budget and with a short deadline; therefore flaws and disorganisation were inevitably detected by the press and by visitors. One of the main criticisms of the exhibition was the inability of Bonito Oliva to offer a clear curatorial perspective.<sup>106</sup> The multiculturalism of the exhibition was seen as confused and was deemed to favour survey over analysis.<sup>107</sup> It was decried as the exhibition of "sex and death",<sup>108</sup> particularly because of the works exhibited in *Aperto*, such as the photographic series *La Morgue* (1992) by Andres Serrano, the auto-erotic sculptures of Kiki Smith (*Mother/Child*, 1993), the vagina wall photo (*Immagini di consumo di massa*, 1993) of Oliviero Toscani and Damien Hirst's cows in formaldehyde (*Mother and Child Divided*, 1993). These works were continually pointed to by the press as examples of excess or incomprehensibility; "a political and cultural despair that the Biennale has never previously exhibited".<sup>109</sup>

Objections were also levelled at the size of the exhibition.<sup>110</sup> It was one of the first examples of the mega-exhibition of the 1990s, comprising many venues scattered across the city. This is now the norm, but the Biennale of 1993 tripled the number of venues compared to the previous exhibition. The number of

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100

The new charter differed mainly in the organisational structure, concentrating the institution's decisions in the president and an Administration Board. This structure was perfected in the transformation into a Foundation in 2004. Cf. Girolamo Sciullo "La Biennale di Venezia come società di cultura", *Aedon*, 1 (1998), <http://www.aedon.mulino.it/archivio/1998/1/sciullo2.htm>, accessed May 2019.

101

"Doppia promozione per Baratta", *Il Gazzettino di Venezia*, April 14, 1998.

102

Folder "Arsenale", in *La Biennale di Venezia*, ASAC, FS, CP, PB, b. 13.

103

Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, (Karlsruhe, ZKM, September 17, 2011 – February 5, 2012), exh. cat. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2012), 102-108.

104

Visitors at the Venice Biennale in 1993 were 270,000, Di Martino, *La Biennale di Venezia: 1985-1995*, 86.

105

Robert Hughes, "Incoherence at the Biennale", *TIME* (June 28, 1993): 67-68.

106

"Bonito Oliva's curatorial "method" has been to jumble works together in the Italian pavilion under the title "The Cardinal Points of Art" [...] this biennale is quite incoherent and achieves the near impossible feat of making what still passes for "radical" creation look even weaker than it actually is", Hughes R, "Incoherence at the Biennale" (1993), 68.

107

Emanuela Caretto, "Multiculturale? Una parolaccia", *La Repubblica*, July 2, 1993, 31; Catherine Millet, "45e Biennale tout et n'emporte quoi", *Art Press*, no. 183 (September 1993): 64.

108

Geneviève Breerette, "Le malaise planétaire sur la Lagune", *Le Monde*, June 18, 1993, 17; Adam Gopnik, "Death in Venice", *New Yorker*, August 2, 1993: 66-73.

109

Tim Hilton, "The matter of life and death", *The Independent on Sunday* (June 20, 1993), <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art-exhibitions-the-matter-of-life-and-death-a-spiky-new-show-in-venice-suggests-that-francis-bacon-1492756.html>, accessed March 2020.

110

Hervé Gauville, "Le marathon de Venise", *Libération* (June 14, 1993): 47.



represented countries also rose significantly. Most importantly, African countries like Ivory Coast and Senegal were hosted for the first time. Nevertheless, the persistence of national pavilions was also central to the criticisms, and was challenged by the new biennials.<sup>111</sup> The transnational project wasn't immediately perceived as ground-breaking, with the exception of the Austrian Pavilion.<sup>112</sup> Largely, Bonito Oliva's push towards a more global perspective was more attacked than praised. The exhibition was accused of showing an international homogeneity rather than a global complexity: "The trouble is that all the nomads seem to have gone to art school at the same oasis".<sup>113</sup> This was a critique which the Venice exhibition shared with the 67<sup>th</sup> Whitney Biennial (1993),<sup>114</sup> to which it was often compared for what Michael Kimmelman called its "political sloganeering and self-indulgent self-expression".<sup>115</sup> Similar critiques regarding the lack of analysis and clear theme were also levelled at Jan Hoet for his choice not to title documenta IX (1992) and to the second Lyon Biennial (1993) for its failure to consider "the show as a whole".<sup>116</sup> If the Lyon Biennial was much smaller than the Venice Biennale, the organisers were no less ambitious, naming their exhibition *Et tous ils changent le monde* (And They All Do Change the World).<sup>117</sup>

Regardless of criticisms, the 1993 Biennale was never totally forgotten. For example, Frederic Jameson<sup>118</sup> discusses it as an example of a postmodernist biennial. When the 1993 Biennale took place, the exhibition scene was starting to explode. "Biennalisation"<sup>119</sup> was warming up and, indeed, the same topics which informed the 1993 Venice Biennale also emerged in the new exhibitions of the 1990s. Manifesta, for example, also defined its exhibition practice through the concept of nomadism.<sup>120</sup>

Over the last decade, scholars have started to explore the 1993 Venice Biennale because it was the first time Chinese artists were shown in Venice, even if there was no specific Chinese pavilion.<sup>121</sup> This is part of the general increase in attention around Bonito Oliva's introduction of the concept of transnationality.<sup>122</sup>

111

Thomas McEvilley, "Venice the Menace", *Artforum* XXXII, no. 2 (October 1993): 102.

112

Peter Weibel "The transnational Pavilion" in *Österreichs Beitrag zur 45. Biennale von Venedig 1993 = Austrian contribution to the 45th Biennale of Venice 1993 = Il contributo austriaco alla 45a Biennale di Venezia 1993*, eds. Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Müller, Gerwald Rockenschaub (Wien Bundesministerium für Unterricht und Kunst, 1993), 7-20.

113

Adam Gopnik, "Death in Venice".

114

The 1993 Whitney Biennial was the 67th (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993) by Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, Lisa Phillips, and Elisabeth Sussman, in the series of annual and biannual surveys of art at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

115

Michael Kimmelman, "Death in Venice (at the Biennale)", *New York Times*, June 27, 1993: section 2, 4.

116

"Et tous ils changent le monde", interview de Marc Dachy, *Art Press*, no. 183 (September 1993).

117

Hou Hanru, "Bi-biennale...", 98.

118

Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), ix; 419; 431.

119

Cf. Thierry de Duve, *The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon: Strategies in Neo-Political Times* (Rotterdam: NAI/SKOR, 2009); Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø "Biennialogy", in *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Haland, Solveig Øvstebø (Ostfildern: Hatje Kantz, 2010), 15; Sabine B. Vogel, *Biennials: Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer, 2010); Bernard Lafargue, Louise Possant, *Le syndrome de Venise: la biennalisation de l'art contemporain* (Pau Cedex: PUPPA, 2011).

120

"Manifesta has a nomadic character", <https://manifesta.org/biennials/about-the-biennials/>, accessed November 2019.

121

Chinese artists were exhibited in *Passage to Orient*, cf. Exhibition list in table no. 2.

122

Marian Pastor Rocés, "Crystal Palace Exhibitions" in *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, eds. Gerardo Mosquera and Jens Fisher (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005), 234-250; Royce W. Smith "Cultural Development? Cultural Unilateralism? An Analysis of Contemporary Festival and Biennale Programs", *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*, 36, no.4 (2007): 259-272; Maria Hlavajova, Simon Sheikh eds., *Former West. Art and the Contemporary after 1989* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017).

#### 4. Reassessing the Impact of the 1993 Exhibition

Assessing the impact of an exhibition is necessarily an open ended task as most of the time exhibitions are also incidental. As archival documentation showed, this was certainly the case. In addition, the analysis of the 1993 Venice Biennale reveals how few of Bonito Oliva's propositions were actually new and how many of them were simply extrapolated from the reforms of the 1970s. This awareness frustrates any interpretation of Achille Bonito Oliva as a heroic champion of contemporaneity.

Nevertheless, he was an incredibly energetic, far-sighted, if narcissistic, curator. Indeed, the references to Bonito Oliva's previous exhibitions and texts were noted by journalists who argued that this Venice Biennale was an autobiographical exhibition.<sup>123</sup> It was certainly the case that many of the exhibition's aspects can be traced to his previous productions. But Bonito Oliva isn't alone in his curatorial self-consciousness. Biennials, especially large scale events such as Venice, or documenta in Kassel, were and are considered to be an achievement in a curator's career and often become the testing ground of their thinking.

Nevertheless, the 1993 exhibition wasn't simply the fulfilment of Bonito Oliva's past projects, but a positive proposition which was latent in the Biennale's DNA. The curator's ability to distil the most important features of the Venice Biennale's unfinished reformation and to fine tune its cultural discourse on contemporary topics like globalisation (nomadism) and multiculturalism (coexistence) was strategically fundamental for the survival of the Biennale and allowed it to overcome the crisis of the 1990s.

Archival findings have shown that the most prominent contribution of Bonito Oliva's exhibition was its dynamic attempt at realising the Biennale's permanent activities, which meant giving the Biennale a wider reach both in terms of spatiality, allowing the exhibition to extend outside the Giardini, and temporality, increasing the exhibition's duration by nearly a year, making the Biennale an institution of constant interdisciplinary cultural production. Today's Biennale still markets educational and cultural events, such as the Biennale College, the Historical Archive, and the Ca' Giustian Conferences, all under the banner of "permanent activities".

Bonito Oliva was not only hoping to fulfil the reforms of the 1970s. The curator introduced curatorial concepts which rejuvenated the Biennale's format without disrupting it.

The first was the revision of the concept of the national pavilion.<sup>124</sup> From the student protests in 1968 and into the 1990s, critiques on the outdated model of national representation were very strong. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe and the world fundamentally changed, and some of the old national pavilions became politically problematic.<sup>125</sup> Despite the fact that only a few pavilions were attuned to the concept, the introduction of "transnationality" transformed the understanding of national representation. The "transnational" being something of a cliché in Italian politics and it wasn't used often by Bonito Oliva. Rather, it was mostly implied as the practical result of the concepts of "nomadism" and "coexistence". Nevertheless the term allowed the following exhibitions to adopt a more critical approach to "national representation". Brief examples<sup>126</sup> of this can be seen both in artistic interventions,

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123

Philippe Daverio, "Vittoria ai punti", *Il giornale dell'Arte* (July-August 1993): 33.

124

Ricci, "From Obsolete to Contemporary".

125

For example in 1993 the former Yugoslavia pavilion was used for a Biennale exhibition *Macchine della Pace* because no agreement between the countries was made as the war in the Balkans was ongoing.

126

The list is much longer but these are clear examples of how national pavilions have become a means of enquiry around issues of national representation.



for example the works of Santiago Sierra<sup>127</sup> and Antoni Muntadas<sup>128</sup> for the Spanish Pavilion, in 2003 and 2005 respectively, and in curatorial propositions such as Bice Curiger's expansion of the concept of pavilions as spaces of negotiation in the "para-pavilions",<sup>129</sup> or the project of the Nordic Pavilion that same year.<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, critically addressing "national representation" transformed one of the Biennale's weakest peculiarities into a point of distinction, guaranteeing differentiation from the growing number of competitors.<sup>131</sup> The pavilions allow an ever increasing number of countries to colonise a section of the exhibition in order to show off their work, while collateral events have become a practical way to avoid the political limitations of this format.

However, the main feature of 1993 which contributed to the formation of the Biennale as a contemporary art platform was the move away from the thematic exhibition format. What was thought in the 1970s to give unity to the exhibition was disrupted in favour of an engagement with contemporary reality.<sup>132</sup> As with the Whitney Biennial of the same year, this created a difficult reception. Even a proponent of Bonito Oliva's exhibition asked: "how can one of the best curators that we have [...] assisted by more than 200 people [...] not even manage to make an exhibition whose format is recognisable?"<sup>133</sup>

The cancellation of *Winds of Art* increased the risk that visitors would miss the themes implied by the title "*Cardinal Points of Art*" and shifted the exhibition's focus onto the "emergent art" exhibited in *Aperto '93*. This was a shift that also affected Bonito Oliva's understanding of the exhibition. If at the beginning his methodological approach made use of expressions such as "mostra zapping" or "mosaic", towards the end, the term that prevails is "laboratory".<sup>134</sup>

This change is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, it is connected to the history of the Biennale. Since the 1973 reforms, "laboratory" was often used to define the scope of the exhibition or as a synonym of "permanent activities". In 1975, for example, the institution was called an "international laboratory".<sup>135</sup> And secondly, because the term helps Bonito Oliva to reject the authoritative presentation<sup>136</sup> of new content in favour of the attitude of "reframing, capturing, reiterating and documenting"; characteristics of what David Joselit has called the "epistemology of search".<sup>137</sup> Using the term "laboratory", the exhibition becomes less of what Bonito Oliva described in 1972 as a "magic territory" in which art and viewer enter

127

Santiago Sierra, *Spanish pavilion. 50th Venice biennale = Pabellon de España, 50a Bienal de Venecia* (Venice, June 15- November 2, 2003), exh. cat. (Madrid: Turner 2003).

128

Antoni Muntadas and Bartolomeu Mari, *On Translation. I Giardini* (Barcellona: Actar, 2005).

129

Bice Curiger, "ILLUMInazioni", in *La Biennale di Venezia – 54 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. ILLUMInazioni = 54th International Exhibition of Art ILLUMInations* (Venice: June 4 - November 27, 2011), exh. cat. (Venice: Marsilio, 2001), 43.

130

Marta Kuzma, Pablo Lafuente and Jacques Rancière eds., *The State of Things* (London: Koenig, Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2012).

131

Angela Vettese, *The National Pavilions of the Venice Biennale: Spaces for Cultural Diplomacy* (Venice: Monos, 2014).

132

Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 9.

133

Vittorio Fagone, "Fatti, misfatti e lampadine", *il Messaggero*, July 1, 1993: 19.

134

Alain Elkann, "La mia Biennale, un capolavoro, intervista con Achille Bonito Oliva", *La Stampa*, July 12, 1993; Achille Bonito Oliva, "Come sei piccola..... America", *L'Espresso*, July 18, 1993: 98-10.

135

*Annuario 1975*, 9-11.

136

Iwona Blazwick, "Temple/White Cube/Laboratory" in *What makes a great Exhibition?*, ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia: Reakticon books, 2006), 118-133.

137

David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

into connection, and more a place “for investigating processes of meaning-making and for understanding wider developments within culture and society.”<sup>138</sup>

The insistence on the exhibition as an active site, where a multiplicity of times, epistemological registers and media exist together in an interconnected and heterogeneous form, was confusing. Nevertheless, the ‘93 Biennale consolidated the idea that contemporary biennials should act as means of enquiry into social and political reality.<sup>139</sup> Another major example of this from the decade was 1997’s documenta X which used conferences and catalogue notes in order to make discursiveness and critical thinking pillars of the exhibition.

The ideas embodied in the 45th Venice Biennale were really destined to detonate a decade later. It was one of the first examples of a distinctively contemporary exhibition platform, a term which, in the words of Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund:

refers to the temporal complexity that follows from the coming together in the same cultural space heterogeneous cultural clusters [...] Across different scales, and in different localities.<sup>140</sup>

138

Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Stenberg Press, 2016), 32.

139

Rafal Niemojewski, “Venice or Havana: A polemic of the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial” in *The Biennial Reader*, 88-103; Panos Kompatsiaris, *The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials: Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art* (London: Routledge, 2017).

140

Cox and Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, 13.

#### Abbreviations

**ASAC** Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee

**FS** Fondo Storico

**dep.** deposito

**AV** Arti Visive

**b.** busta

**AVEB** Arti Visive, Esposizioni biennali, mostre storiche e speciali [...]

**VCA** Verbali del Consiglio di Amministrazione (poi Consiglio Direttivo)

**VMCA** Verbali e altri Materiali del Consiglio di Amministrazione (poi Consiglio Direttivo)

**DCD** Deliberazioni del Consiglio Direttivo

**CP** Carte Personali

**PB** Paolo Baratta

**Prot. Gen** Protocollo Generale

#### Author’s Biography

Clarissa Ricci is Adjunct Professor at the the Università di Bologna. She was recipient of the Getty/ACLS Postdoctoral Fellow in Art History (2019-2020). Previously, she was entrusted by Iuav University in Venice (2017–2019) with researching the foundation of Arte Fiera and analysing the art market in Italy in the 1970s. She completed her PhD in 2014 with a thesis dedicated to the Venice Biennale displays (1993-2003) at the School of Advanced Studies in Venice

(SSAV) at Ca’ Foscari. She was a visiting scholar at Columbia University in New York City (2009-2010). She has written numerous essays and her research interests focus over the History of Exhibition and the formation of the Contemporary Art system of which *Starting from Venice: Studies on the Biennale* (Et al., 2011) was a starting point. She is co-founder and editor of *OBOE: On Biennials and Other Exhibitions*.