

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

ArtReview

The Venice Questionnaire: Leonor Antunes

The artist representing Portugal finds the parallel Venice

May 3, 2019



*Leonor Antunes, ...then we raised the terrain so that I could see out, 2017.
Photo: Nick Ash. Courtesy the artist and Air de Paris, Paris; Ma...*

ArtReview sent a questionnaire to artists and curators exhibiting in and curating the various national pavilions of the 2019 Venice Biennale, the responses to which will be published daily in the lead-up to the Venice Biennale opening on 11 May.

Leonor Antunes represents Portugal. The pavilion is located at Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, San Marco, 2893 Venice

ArtReview: What can you tell us about your exhibition plans for Venice?

Leonor Antunes: My exhibition at the Palazzo Giustinian Lolin is titled *a seam, a surface, a hinge, or a knot*. The line appears as a quote in a wonderful text written by Briony Fer about my recent exhibition 'the last days in Galliate' at Hangar Bicocca in Milan. I often use quotes in my titles, but it's the first time I have quoted someone who is still alive. The title suggests the existence of these elements in space, but it also alludes to their existence in a previous life or moment, and how such elements appear and reappear. This project is a continuation of two previous exhibitions I have had in Italy in the past two years: Milan, and the last edition of the Venice Biennale in 2017.

As part of my working process, I have been interested in looking at the complex interactions of a number of protagonists in post-war Italy, including Franco Albini, and Carlo Scarpa, and with a particular focus on women such as Franca Helg and Egle Trinacnato, both of whom have remained unstudied in the history of museums and exhibitions because they stand outside the processes of canonisation. The radical museum displays and exhibition settings by Albini, Helg

N E W Y O R K P A R I S L O N D O N

WWW.MARIANGOODMAN.COM

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

and Scarpa offer not only continuity with pre-war experiments in Europe, but also a premonition of the issues at work in museums today. We have to understand that it was also a time of questioning, breaking with the Ventennio – the twenty-year period of Fascist rule – and building, at last, the cultural institutions of a democratic Italy. Architecture became the paradigmatic means to accomplish an education through art.

In this vast, collective enterprise for updating Italian culture after fascism, the Venice Biennale was an essential asset. Every two years, Italy had to present itself to the world and, in turn, it could take stock of the world's culture. Scarpa was at the heart of this programme of *aggiornamento*, where each exhibition weighed heavily with political and cultural stakes.

In Venice I am showing a group of sculptures which will deal directly with the characteristics of the site. Portugal does not own a pavilion, so for each Biennale, the Government, and its subsidiary the Ministry of Culture, rents a new space in the city, or sometimes they use a space they used in a previous edition (last year Palazzo Giustinian Lolin was used for the Architecture Biennial). It's a historical site with many decorative elements, so it's not been easy.

I have approached the exhibition as two moments, the first takes place in the entrance of the Palazzo, which is a semi private area. This 'private' courtyard belongs to the Palazzo, but it also serves the hotel there, as well as the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation. Since this space is so ambiguous, I want visitors to access my work at first glance – these people will not necessarily be the biennale audience, but anyone who happens to go to the hotel, or the Foundation, or just to have a view of the Grand Canal. This aspect of the site is very interesting to me. I will cover the existing floor with a work, and will install two wall lamps that were designed by the architect Egle Trincanato for the INAIL building in Venice. Trincanato was an important protagonist in the city, she was the first female architect to graduate from the Venice Architectural school and, among her many activities, she was crucial to the documentation of the City of Venice and its modernization. We have borrowed two lamps that Trincanato designed for that building, together with her partner Giuseppe Samona. In the same spot I will place two other sculptures based on a shade I saw in a house in Zurich, designed by Scarpa. It was his only project built outside Italy, and was commissioned by Savina Masieri, another very important figure who turned the wheels of the post-war bureaucratic machine in the city and was a promoter of modern architecture in Italy.

On the first floor of the Palazzo, a series of new sculptures will fit the space like stretchers, from floor to ceiling. These function as 'receivers' for new sculptures to climb and proliferate. I have, of course, been thinking about the sculptures of Lygia Clark, and the series she called 'trepanes' (climbers), which have no support, but instead adapt to each 'situation.'

What does it mean to 'represent' your country? Do you find it an honour or is it problematic?

The concepts of representation or under-representation are issues that interest me as an artist – what the notion of 'representation' means for one thing, or one entity, being 'representative' of the other.

N E W Y O R K P A R I S L O N D O N

WWW.MARIANGOODMAN.COM

M A R I A N G O O D M A N G A L L E R Y

As an artist, I have always asked myself the question about how, when, and under what circumstances could I accept such an invitation. I have not lived in Portugal for several years, my work does not deal with autobiographical issues, but rather incorporates elements that are

representative of the practice of other authors, and that in many ways pay homage to 'figures' that in my view were insufficiently recognised throughout history. In this case 'representation' has little in common with the issue of national representation, being the Portugal Pavilion.

For the first time in Portugal, there was an open call, where invitations were sent to curators, each one of them presenting a specific project for the Biennial, which was then selected by a jury. It was therefore not an invitation by the government but a gesture triggered by the decision to entrust this task to a professional jury. It's important to refer to the fact that the Portuguese Pavilion is overseen by the Ministry of Culture. At the moment Portugal is governed by the Social Democrats, and I must say, the procedure of selection has changed tremendously; it is these changes to the whole process that has made me accept the invitation.

Is your work transnational or rooted in the local?

I tend to think about the sites and context where my work is shown. In Venice I think about the craftsmanship which has been crucial in the development and unique nature of the city. Since the beginning of this process I thought about manufacturing the work partially in Venice, as a way of perpetuating and maintaining the many crafts of the city. I am working with a wood workshop, Cappovilla, the same atelier that collaborated with Carlo Scarpa, as well as a Murano glass factory. It's not about those workshops being better than others, it's about their specificity, which is also related to the local, and the passing on of their knowledge to others... this is an area in which, unfortunately, we are nowadays experiencing a decay.

If you've been the biennale before, what's your earliest or best memory from Venice?

Encountering the city with its many stages and processes, and different workshops that are still active in the city, and their incredible craftsmanship, one discovers, with time, that there is more than one Venice. There is a Venice that runs parallel to the one invaded by tourists. There are cafes, restaurants, shops, streets not used by the tourists. They find their own channels and how to navigate.

The Venice Biennale runs 11 May – 24 November

N E W Y O R K P A R I S L O N D O N

WWW.MARIANGOODMAN.COM