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LAGOON SQUAD

Pia Capelli at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale

May 28, 2021 • Venice



Markus Reymann, director of TBA21-Academy; Graziano Meneghin, Ocean Space fellowship coordinator; Shoghig Halajian & Johanna Breiding, Ocean Fellows 2021; Barbara Casavecchia, The Current III, curator; Rosalyn D'Mello, Ocean fellow 2021, Mentor; Beatrice Forchini, TBA21 Academy; Daniela Zyman, artistic director of TBA21 and curator of

the exhibition "Oceans in Transformation" by Territorial Agency.

The most convivial moments happen at Ocean Space, inside the church of San Lorenzo dei Greci, the breathtaking Venetian venue of hyper-multidisciplinary TBA21 Academy, which now hosts Taloi Havini's "The Soul-Expanding Ocean" (curated by Chus Martinez) and "Oceans in Transformation – Territorial Agency" (curated by Daniela Zyman). On Friday afternoons, I always try to attend their itinerant conversations, curated by Barbara Casavecchia and Pietro Consolandi. The 2021 series is about "Lagoon Micro-Ecologies" and takes explorers to remote, bird-inhabited islands of the Venetian ecosystem. But after a week of biennale fatigue, this Friday's event takes the shape of a short, joyful pilgrimage to a small food collective (Tocia!) in Castello, where chef Marco Bravetti distributes bowls of raw seafood, algae, herbs, and flowers that will become our dinner. "Preserve and evolve," his keywords, seem to sum up the city's philosophy for the near future.

Another atypical show stands out: "Non-Extractive Architecture - On Designing without Depletion," curated by Joseph Grima and Space Caviar at the VAC Foundation. The posh building on Zattere is transformed into a workshop, with teams of young architects clicking away and walls covered in handwritten notes that chronicle the progress of their research. "We opened with an empty building, says Grima. "The idea is that throughout the course of the year, like a laboratory, we'll produce things in here." This concept—Venice as laboratory—keeps popping up in conversation. Architect Luca Molinari, in his multiple roles as curator (of the



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exhibition "EST" at Fondazione Cini), member of the Biennale Jury, and newly appointed director of M9 Museum in Mestre, expresses it well while we sit in the sun: "The future of Venice is supremely challenging. The goal is to avoid going back to the usual tide of indifferent visitors and present future Venice not just as a stage or a postcard, but as a *laboratorio*. With the rumored 2022 arrival of the Kapoor Foundation, the recent acquisition of the iconic Giudecca building Casa dei Tre Oci by the Berggruen Institute, and many new institutions and two universities, this city is getting more and more relevant." The future of life in Venice is a political matter, Molinari continues. "Architecture today is a synonym of responsibility. It is a form of care."

Care is the mission for a number of institutions that have been very busy during the pandemic. "We have never stopped working," says Toto Bergamo Rossi, the advisor and soul of Venetian Heritage, as he guides me through the magnificent restoration of Museo di Palazzo Grimani that has been brought back to its splendor during the lockdown, and which now also hosts a long-term installation by Baselitz (this one supported by Gagosian and curated by Mario Codognato). Venice International Foundation has appointed a new architect president, Luca Bombassei, as well as the first of a new series of Venice Ambassadors, Angela Missoni. In partnership with Venetian museums, VIF will finance the education of younger "potential Venetians" to bring fresh talent to the city. On the way home one afternoon in the heart of Dorsoduro (a *sestiere* that is now home to the very successfully rebranded "Museum Mile"), I bump into Teresa Mavica, director of VAC. "This is the strangest Biennale," she notes. "Such few people, and this palpable mix of desire and fear. But have you seen? Everyone here is a professional. In the end, the core of the Biennale community has come to Venice."

