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Front cover: Production still from *When the Kellys Rode* 1934, written and directed by Harry Southwell, and starring Hay Simpson as Ned Kelly. Tasman Higgins was the cinematographer. The feature was shot on location in the Megalong Valley in the Blue Mountains, and this photograph is one of sixty original stills from the film discovered recently in a suitcase under the floorboards of a house in Vaucluse, Sydney. Courtesy of Screen-Sound Australia, the National Screen and Sound Archive, Canberra.

Opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the publisher and editors, and readers are invited to make up their own minds on issues debated in *Art Monthly*.

All letters are welcome.

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Feeling the heat at the 50th Venice Biennale

STEPHEN NAYLOR



The Australian Pavilion in the Giardini di Castello, home to the International Exhibition of the Visual Arts, Biennale of Venice. The Pavilion was designed by Phillip Cox, and opened in 1988.

With temperatures in the high thirties the 'art mafia' of over 6000 accredited journalists and many more curators, artists and other associated art dignitaries converged on the island of Venice, armed with laptops and digital everything.

The 50th Venice Biennale, *Dreams and conflicts – The dictatorship of the viewer*, was not to be a grand master statement, but a collection of work reflecting the complexities of the contemporary world, and based on 'multiplicity, diversity and contradiction'.¹ With this in mind, the Director, Francesco Bonami, outsourced the curatorial responsibility to eleven colleagues, giving them complete autonomy to present displays within the larger context of the Biennale. In spreading the workload and the opportunity for diversity he enabled the event to happen at a time when international travel and global stability are being buffeted by both 'natural' and human phenomena. One must acknowledge the changed face of the world since the 49th Biennale, particularly with massive upheavals in the Middle East, and our elevated political concern with vitriol and retribution in the face of questions of human rights and the sanctity of life.

Delays and revolutions is one of the many segments of the Biennale events and occu-

pies the Italian Central Pavilion in the Giardini. It tackles the inter-generational links from Duchamp to the contemporary. On the first day open to the press, a monitor with some enigmatic black and white screen tests of Duchamp taken by Andy Warhol in 1964-66 was positioned in a room with thirty or forty fire extinguishers, and set up a discourse with the past as the viewer attempted to fill in the gaps. Two days later at the official opening the extinguishers (which had just been temporarily stored in the space) were distributed throughout the Central Pavilion, and the joke was on me! Duchamp would have loved it.

Richard Prince's [USA] large format photographs – *Untitled (cowboy)* – filled the upper level of the Pavilion: man in union with the horse, charging across the plains, lasso in hand, the Marlboro man reincarnated. The graininess of the images conjured up the glorious myth of the cigarette advertisements. From the window we look down onto Rivane Neuenschwander's [Brazil] work, *Globos*, an assortment of balls from all manner of sports: basketballs, volley balls, footballs etc. Each is painted with automotive paint and adhesive in the format of flags of all nations. The size of the ball is disproportionate to the scale of the countries, with

Finland being at least three times larger than the USA. Australia is slightly smaller than a tennis ball, nestled amid some giants but rearranged when I saw it at the official opening. *The black horse* by Berlinde de Bruyckere [Belgium] is a disturbing work made from a horse skin crudely stretched over a polyurethane and wooden armature in a contorted pose. High on a shelf on the wall is de Bruyckere's Mary Magdalene figure, *Hanne* 2003 whose mane of coarse flowing hair obscures her cowering body. These two works established a tension well suited to the theme of Delays and revolutions.

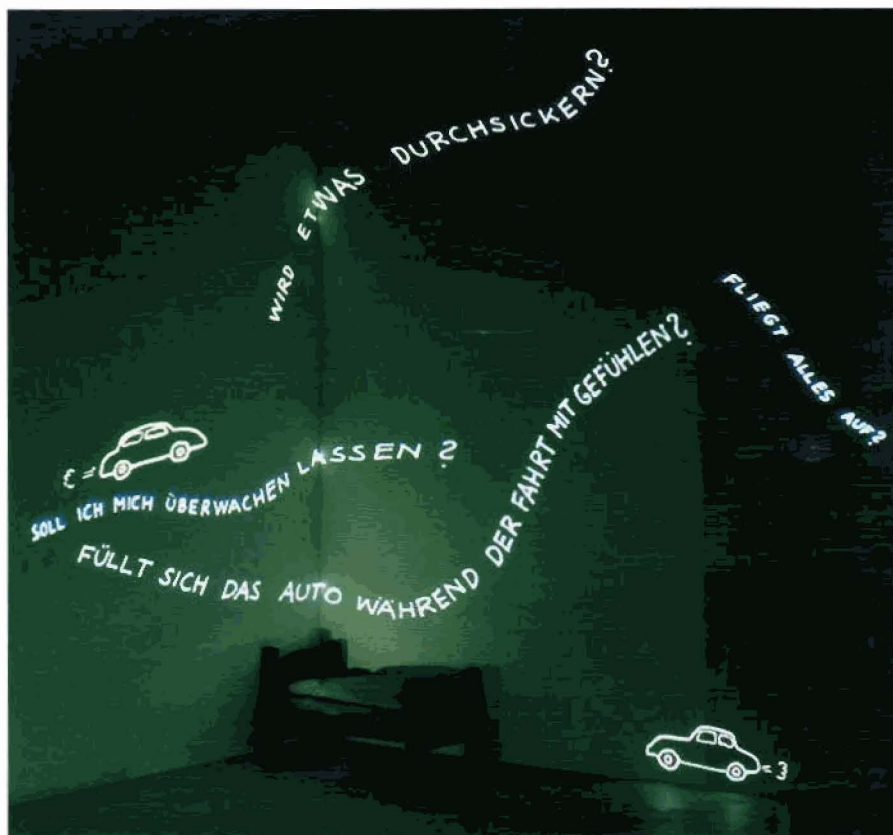
In a room close by, Rudolf Stingel [Italy] tempted the audience with a blank enclosure made of aluminium foil on panels made from industrial insulation. On day one of the *vernissage* some of the press accidentally marked the pristine surface, and gradually the marks became names, names became graffiti, and two days later the walls were peppered with all manner of representation. Further into the Pavilion the blackened room of Peter Fischli and David Weiss [Switzerland] established a discourse with the viewer through some twenty to thirty time-sequenced slide projectors, each with a short section of text in a multitude of languages and fonts. Statements and questions such as



Rivane Neuenschwander [Brazil], *Globos*, 2003, installation of balls, automotive paint and adhesive in Delays and revolutions. (Something for the vexillologist)

Patricia Piccinini [Australia], *Leather Landscape*, 2003, silicone, acrylic, leather, human hair, clothing, timber (detail). Photo Claudio Franzini.





Peter Fischli & David Weiss (Switzerland), light installation in *Delays and revolutions*. The artists won the Golden Lion for the best work exhibited in the International Exhibition 'in recognition of their long and coherent collaboration, their modesty, clarity and artistic quality, for raising questions that help us to understand one another, and for having created a work that captures the true nature of dreams and conflicts'.

'I am getting a soft head', 'Should I take drugs?', 'Why is everything so radiant?', 'Why doesn't she call?', and 'What is the name of this forest?' confront the audience, then the message grows fainter and disappears to be replaced by some equally perplexing statement, in a different text or language. We get a sense, as in the Neuenschwander piece, that there are some things that still divide us.

The reverse was true for the stunning work of Matthew Barney [USA], *Drawing restraint 8: Natal cleft*. A collection of hand crafted glass showcases containing exquisite drawings of human corporeality: the act of penetration, masturbation, fluid discharge. The fragility of the line disappears into a yellow pigmented wash and other gooey mediums (I don't care to contemplate). Barney has also introduced some protein mediums that are growing (daily) with a mustard coloured fungus, quite beautiful, almost sublime.

From the sublime to the ... Sarah Lucas [UK] presents *All we are saying, is give pizza a chance*, an installation comprised of an antique motor bike and a bomb-like form on wheels, covered with decoupage made up of pizza advertisements. A large suspended egg form, representing scenes from global conflicts and news images carries the words 'Fuck the egg-man' and 'The world opens up' – a strange take on Beatle-mania.

The Venice Biennale is historically an event of nations, with its Giardini precinct given over to national pavilions. Exceptional works were not as evident this time as in pre-

pïnk

Irene Barberis

#4 *Plastique: pïnk*

Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra. 11 July - 9 August 2003

#5 *Plastique: specula*

Span Galleries, Melbourne. 28 August - 13 September 2003

#2 *Plastique: breath*. Four corners; Artists Commune, Cattle Depot, Contemporary Arts Space Hong Kong 2002/ Hong Kong, New York, Melbourne, Beijing.

vious years. The Icelandic installation by Rúri provided a sophisticated archive of endangered waters, including the white waters of Krappi, Nedstifoss, Gilseydir. Fifty-two bodies of water were documented with photography and sound, and accessed through vertical drawer panels. Michal Rovner's video installation in the Israeli Pavilion was impressive, with many dark figures moving in and out of the frame, creating geometric and organic forms.

The Australian Pavilion was one of the most prominent and well patronised national presentations. Patricia Piccinini produced a suite of works that coherently draws together some of the dominant threads of her work from the last few years. When Linda Michael, the curator of the show, first drafted up the application for the Biennale some eighteen months ago, she had no idea of what new work by Piccinini might follow, nor of the impact that the work would have. Piccinini has had a number of major shows over the last couple of years, and has still produced three new works for the Biennale. Entering the Pavilion one is greeted by a row of automotive helmets, brilliantly coloured with visors and padding. On close inspection these helmets are seriously customised for members of a family who care about safety, and who are certainly derivations of us: the craniums have human elements but are either pointed and distended or even double hemispheric. Are they more advanced life forms, or some human mutation from a genetic experiment?

Piccinini created this journey back in the mid 1990s with her *LUMP* innovations. At the time, the concept of ordering a life form was so wacky we embraced it as if it were a computer game. Post Dolly the cloned sheep we have entered a 'brave new world' and Piccinini is now a central figure in the visual imaginings of this phenomenon. She speaks not as a scholar of bio-ethics or GM but as a well-read devotee. Her research brings us much closer to the reality (just around the corner) of the pragmatics of our relentless quest to improve and explore. How can we access the ramifications of this new era? And can we leave it up to the government or the judiciary to assist us in comprehending what lies ahead?

As I walked through the various Biennale venues and saw many clones of the *We are family* show bag, I was constantly hearing 'Gee did you see the Australian Pavilion? Wasn't it amazing and so freaky?' The freak show did draw many, but judging by how long audiences spent in the Pavilion they were far more informed on leaving the space than when they arrived.

The works on display in the Phillip Cox-



Berlinde de Bruyckere [Belgium], Hanne, 2003, in Delays and revolutions.

papercuts

Monash University Museum of Art Exhibition

ARTISTS
Damiano Bertoli
Eugene Carchesio
Kate Cotching
Thomas Deverall
Natasha Frisch
Megan Keating
Louise Paramor
Sangeeta Sandrasegar
Sandra Selig
Simone Slee
Andrea Tu

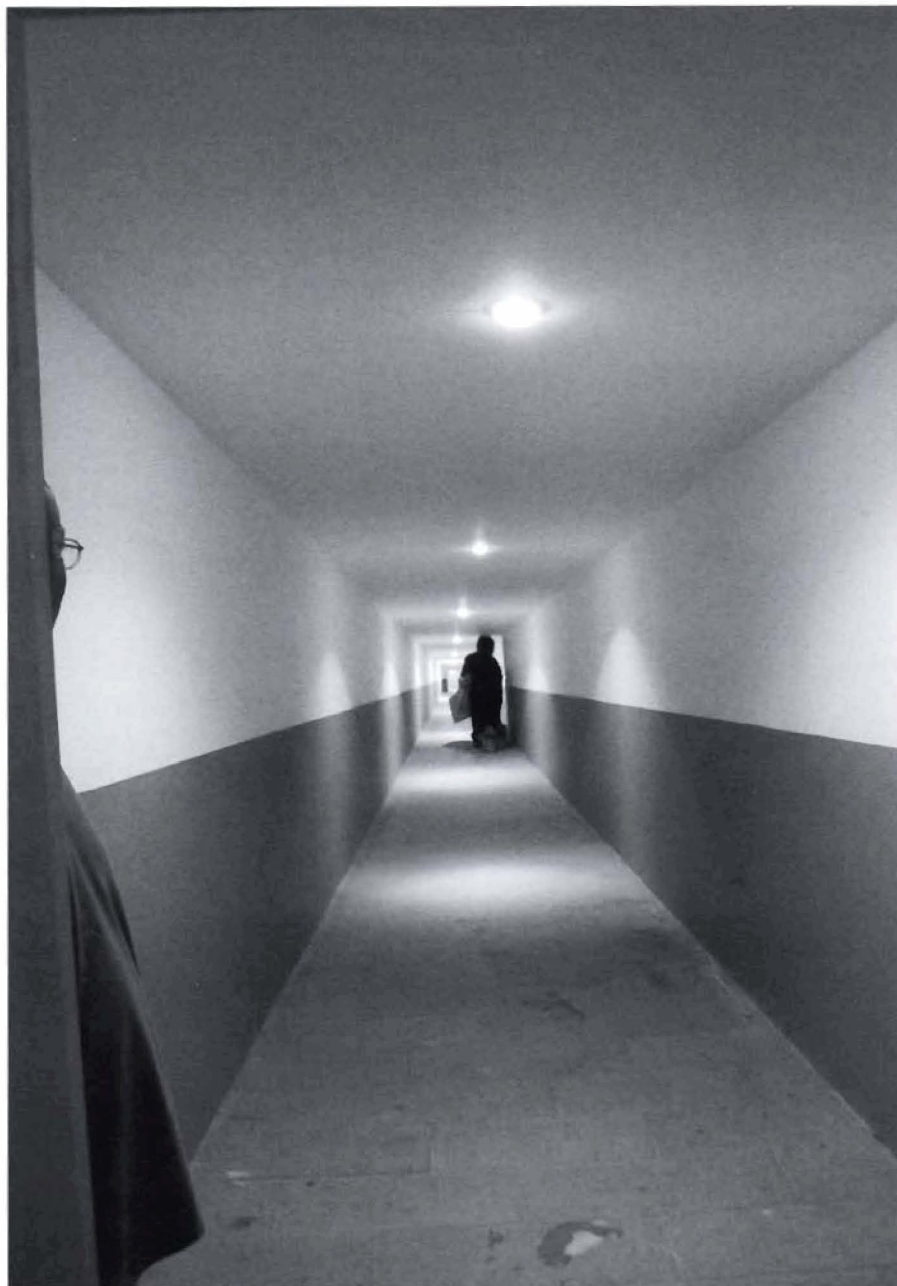
CURATORS
Natasha Bullock and Katarina Paseta

VENUE
Faculty Gallery, Faculty of Art and Design
Art and Design Building,
Monash University, Caulfield Campus
900 Dandenong Rd, Caulfield East
Mon to Fri 9am - 5pm, Sat 1 - 5pm

EXHIBITION DATES
Thursday 10 July - Thursday 7 August 2003

MUMA Monash University Museum of Art
Ground floor, Building 55
off Wellington Road, Clayton VIC 3800
tel: 03 9905 4217 fax: 03 9905 4345
muma@adm.monash.edu.au
www.monash.edu/aumuma
Tues to Fri 10am-5pm Sat 2-5pm
FREE ENTRY

MONASH
UNIVERSITY



Monika Sosnowska [Poland], *Untitled (corridor)*, environment in *Clandestine*.

designed Pavilion, or, as Linda and Patricia call it, the 'holiday house', are thoughtfully displayed, with *Still life with stem cells* on the upper level, and a new digital video work, *Plasmid region*, in the rear of the building. Downstairs in a blaze of natural light the less subtle works take over. *Game boys advanced* have lost some of their impact for me as I have seen them on numerous occasions, but for a new international audience this would not be the case. *The young family* 2002-03 is

also familiar to an Australian audience, but the work continues to remind us of our corporeal selves, and how close we are to the sow and the piglet. Genetic experimentation with the swine genus is perhaps too close, and species hybridity is a path to be trod with caution. Piccinini's familial instincts are uncanny, and the latest work in the theme is *Leather landscape*, a palatial auto-trimmed settee inhabited by a family of hybrid human/meerkats, observed by a toddler. The

figures, modelled and cast by Sam Jinks under the direction of Piccinini, are appealing, and the white leather 'landscape' is beautifully understated, yet sensual in form, with its insets, bulges, gussets and perforated sections giving it the status of a fetish.

The Venice Biennale has an important place in Australia's history of international representation. We were invited to exhibit in Venice as far back as 1924, but have only been represented in the Pavilions on fifteen occasions. For some artists, representation at Venice has propelled their international careers, yet for others the pressures involved with such an event have drained momentum from their practice. This syndrome seems unlikely to affect Patricia Piccinini, who seems destined for more international success. *We are family* is off to Tokyo following the Biennale. Piccinini's attitude is considered; she recognises her strengths, and readily seeks and acknowledges the advice and assistance she receives from her expert collaborators, principally Peter Hennessey (her partner), and Sam Jinks.

As the Biennale opens, and the July deadline for Art Monthly draws near, with much haste we and the other thousands of journalists storm the Arsenale. This massive venue, previously used to build ships and make rope, was still being set up on the first day of the *vernissage*, with machinery moving in and out of hordes of photographers, writers and film crews. The space is exceptional – a building with age, grace and enormous potential.

Francesco Bonami's army of curators were each allocated a space in the Arsenale, so there are a number of discrete thematic shows. *Clandestine* introduces the viewer to the Deleuzian concept that art pushes language to new limits. There was great interest in Doron Solomons' [Israel] *Father* 2002, a video installation traversing the relationship between a father of Middle Eastern origin and his young daughter. As my tolerance for screen-based visual art is somewhat strained, I *endured* the fourteen minute DVD in a blackened room, standing in forty degree heat with twenty others. The film was intentionally dark in humour, but the numerous references to death and dying in *Clandestine* created, to my mind, a dangerous conceptual environment for mixing certain metaphors. A more engaging work for me was *Untitled (Corridor)* by Monika Sosnowska [Poland]; her work creates an artifice where what appears to be a nondescript forty metre hospital hall reduces in size and proportion within three steps of entering the space.

Clandestine gives way to *Fault lines: Contemporary African art and shifting landscapes*. I was impressed with the photography of

CAPITAL QUEER FILM FESTIVAL 2003 CALLS FOR ENTRIES INTO THE SHORT FILM COMPETITION

The "Capital Queer Film Festival 2003" begins on 14 November for two weeks as part of the ACT Pride Festival 'SpringOut'. Film Festival events are being held at ScreenSound Australia and the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery.

First Prize is AUD \$800 with an audience favourite award of AUD \$200.

For more information about the festival, an entry form and the conditions for the short film competition, please email capitalqueerfilm@hotmail.com

Zarina Bhimji [Uganda], reminiscent of Jeff Wall's work, and the elegant small paintings by Laylah Ali [USA]. The next section goes under the banner *Individual systems*, and includes works such as Roman Opalka's [Poland] *Self Portraits* and Yuri Leiderman's [Russia] *Electrons' names-2 (Eskimo-Wagnerian)*, with the collectives IRWIN [Slovenia] and Art Language [UK] providing dense works within a calm ambience. The spatial contrast could not have been more extreme with *Zone of urgency* curated by Hou Hanru which has a 'full-on' carnival atmosphere. Works here looked as if they had been trashed during a wild party, exhibits bumped up against each other, severed from their cultural moorings. Massive paintings by Yan Pei-Ming [China] and Yan Lei and Fu Jie [China] gave my eyes some relief.

The space is more sombre with *The structure of survival*, curated by Carlos Basualdo. Here works explore political resistance in developing countries, and are reminiscent of last year's Documenta. Works by Gego and Antonio Ole [Angola] were particularly strong, and brilliantly presented in the space. Catherine David, Curator of Documenta X, has curated *Contemporary Arab representations*, work which also crosses into the political terrain of Documenta XI.

The final two shows in the Arsenale were *The everyday altered*, a quasi *arte povera* theme, where everyday objects or situations are explored in a transformative process, and *Utopia station*. My favourite works are the waste receptacles by Atelier van Lieshout; many of these pseudo toilets look like designs for the evolving figures of Patricia Piccinini, as they emphasise the ergonomic qualities of our bodies in a quest for greater efficiency and comfort in our most corporeal of bodily functions.

The other major component of the Biennale is the *Pittura/Painting: From Rauschenberg to Murakami 1964-2003*, curated by Francesco Bonami, who chose this survey of painting to contextualise the visual arts of the twenty-first century.

The opportunity to revisit works by Philip Guston, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Frances Bacon as well as Damien Hirst, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Anselm Kiefer etc is exciting, but where is Emily Kngwarrey?

From an Australian perspective what is missing from the Biennale is the representation of Australian art outside our own Pavilion: there is not a single Australian artist in any of the Biennale shows. Bonami stated that he had travelled to numerous countries 'to explore the dynamic pulse of emerging

international artists', but we have been cast as not exotic, not avant garde, not formalist, not international. In terms of artists who made a significant contribution to the discourse of painting, Imants Tillers should be in this show. His work would be an impressive alternative to that of David Salle.

The art of Patricia Piccinini has made a significant contribution to Australia's international reputation at the Venice Biennale, and the Australia Council, trade delegations and the numerous involved curators and arts administrators are to be commended for their efforts. Perhaps after this Australia will gain greater exposure in the 51st Venice Biennale.

Notes

1 Francesco Bonami, *Dreams and Conflicts - The Dictatorship of the Viewer, 50th Venice Biennale, exhibition catalogue*

The Venice Biennale opened on 15 June and runs until 2 November.

Stephen Naylor is an Art Theory Lecturer at Monash University and La Trobe University Mildura.

ARTNOTES VENICE

Louise Tegart

The Family in Venice

With a head start on many of the other pavilions in the Venice Biennale, the installation at the Australian Pavilion began in late May and was ready to receive visitors when the Biennale opened to the public on the 15 June. The domestic nature of the Pavilion's architecture has been utilised by artist Patricia Piccinini for her installation *We are family*. Featuring a range of sculptural works that explore ongoing concerns of the artist in relation to science and medical research, the exhibition has already had a favourable response from local Biennale representatives and is receiving wide media coverage in Europe.

Keep on trekkin'

In their second representation at the Venice Biennale, Berlin based New Zealand artist Michael Stevenson will treat Italians to a taste of New Zealand not sampled in the recent TV coverage of the America's Cup. In an eccentric combination that reveals New Zealand's relationship to the rest of the world, objects including a Trekka overland truck and a wall of butter boxes will be displayed amongst eighteenth century paintings and sculpture in a church that has not been open to the public for many years. Before the opening Stevenson was already answering knocks on the door from curious Catholic worshippers intrigued to see lights on late at night in the church.

Swallow with ice

In the winter next year a unique cultural event, *The snow show*, will take place in Lapland. Internationally recognised artists including Yoko Ono, Kiki Smith, Rachel Whiteread, Sol LeWitt and Australia's own Ricky Swallow will collaborate with architects to design installations using snow and ice as their primary materials. Currently on show in the sweltering summer heat *The snow show: Venice*, an exhibition of the drawings, photographs, models, and interviews with the participants, focuses on the collaborative process and its effect on the individual creators. *The snow show: Venice* will be on view at UNESCO's Palazzo Zorzi until 25 July. The results of the participants work will not be available for another few months: the final designs will be realised in snow and ice in March next year in the arctic setting of Kemi and Rovaniemi, in Finnish Lapland. *The snow show* is curated by New York independent curator Lance Fung together with the director of the Kemi Art Museum, Unto Käyhkö and the Director of the Rovaniemi Art Museum, Hilka Liikkanen.

The Nile meets the Grand Canal

While waiting for the Venice Biennale to begin art loving Venetians have been kept happy with a number of blockbuster exhibitions including *The Pharaohs*, a spectacular show of more than 300 exhibits from thirty-four museums and private collections on display at the Palazzo Grassi. Telling the story of the ancient civilisation of the Nile through its representative figure of the Pharaoh, the show includes a portrait gallery and sections dedicated to themes such as manifestations of political and religious power, and families and domestic intimacy. Among the exhibits, some shown in Europe for the first time, are the colossal statue of Tutankhamun on loan from the Cairo museum and the decorations of the Merenptah Palace from the Philadelphia Museum.

Life is a Cabaret

Another highly popular exhibition was *Dada in Zurich: Cabaret Voltaire 1916-1920* on display at the Swiss Cultural Hall in the Palazzo Trevisan in June. Some forty works including paintings, works on paper, lithographs and collages by artists such as Jean Arp, Man Ray and Hans Richter recounted the adventure of one of the most stimulating art movements of the twentieth century. The exhibition also had fascinating documentary items such as letters, photographs and books on display that examine the decisive influence this movement had on modern art.

Is bigger better?

The canals and piazzas of Venice have been overtaken by voluptuous female, male and animal figures by the Colombian artist Fernando Botero. Over twenty monumental bronze sculptures produced from 1987 are set in outdoor spaces around the city and along the Grand Canal and are accompanied by an exhibition of recent paintings at the Doge's Palace in St Mark's Square. Reaction to the work has been varied with art aficionado's walking past with their noses in the air while tourists take photographs of their children posed on every sculpture.

Grand opening

Recently reopened after twenty years is the Baroque mansion Ca' Pesaro housing the Galleria d'Arte Moderna and the Museo d'Arte Orientale. The modern art collection includes works purchased from previous Venice Biennales and is one of the largest collections of modern art in Italy. The Asian art museum features important collections of Edo period art from Japan, and Chinese porcelain. The building itself is considered one of the most important on the Grand Canal, designed by late Baroque architect Longhen, who is said to have died worrying about the cost.