

**Le muse  
inquiete**

**La Biennale  
di Venezia  
di fronte  
alla storia**



La Biennale di Venezia

Archivio Storico  
della Biennale  
di Venezia

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**The  
Disquieted  
Muses**

**When  
La Biennale  
di Venezia  
meets history**



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FIG. 53 – (pagina precedente/previous page)  
Café Müller di/by Pina Bausch, 1985

FIG. 54 – Kontakthof di/by Pina Bausch, 1985

FIG. 55 – Ma è davvero tanto triste quel sentimento chiamato tango? La Repubblica, 7 giugno/June 1985, Leonetta Bentivoglio

FIG. 56 – 'Sulla montagna...' Grida dalla memoria di Pina Bausch, Il Manifesto, 1 giugno/June 1985, Gianni Manzella



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## 01 Carmelo Bene. La ricerca impossibile

FIG. 06 → 17

FIG. 06 → 17  
ITA Carmelo Bene è nominato Direttore Artistico della Biennale Teatro nel 1988 e sceglie come titolo programmatico del suo mandato "La ricerca impossibile". Ovvero il teatro senza spettacolo": non si tratta di sancire l'inutilità della ricerca teatrale o di celebrarne la morte, quanto, al contrario, di ripensarla al di fuori delle regole della rappresentazione o delle coercizioni imposte dai meccanismi produttivi. Lo spettacolo, in quanto risultato formalizzato della ricerca, non può, in sintesi, essere altro che un prodotto di Stato, laddove è la convenzione economico-organizzativa dell'apparato statale a stabilirne i criteri e a dettare i tempi e le modalità di genesi creativa. Oggi è singolare constatare come, al di là delle note diatribi economiche con La Biennale, la direzione di Carmelo Bene è stata, nei fatti e con paradossale coerenza, un autentico 'teatro senza spettacolo'. Gli allestimenti previsti, *Tamerlano il Grande* di Christopher Marlowe, pensato in varie sezioni ciascuna affidata a un gruppo o a un attore differente, e *Bafometto* di Pierre Klossowski, non vedranno mai la luce, restando confinati in quello che è probabilmente il primo intento dell'artista: la creazione di un laboratorio pressoché senza fine. Ne sono testimonianza, oggi, i saggi relativi a quell'autentica fucina di artisti e studiosi che Carmelo Bene aveva convocato al fine di indagare, principalmente, uno dei punti cardine del suo percorso, la "Macchina Attoriale", dove l'attore rinuncia di fatto alla propria identità divenendo macchina inorganica grazie anche agli apparati di amplificazione sonora, sublimando la propria voce in un ritmo musicale del tutto in antitesi all'andamento tradizionale della prosa. Seguendo questa direzione, la proposta di Carmelo Bene si sviluppa come una ricerca autenticamente protesa a sondare l'impossibile, qui definito dal termine "barbarico", il tentativo di toccare la barbarie dell'origine del teatro come gioco che prescinde dal significato o dal linguaggio codificato. Bene, a seguito di numerosi scontri con La Biennale, si dimette nel febbraio del 1990, aprendo un periodo di crisi e incomprensioni che mettono in seria discussione i principi fondativi della Biennale Teatro. Eppure, a distan-

za di anni, anche con un certo stupore, è forse interessante prendere atto di come la non-Biennale dell'artista sia diventata in qualche modo memorabile, e, parafrasando ciò che Carmelo Bene era solito dire a proposito di se stesso, presentissima nella sua assenza. FB

## 02 James Lee Byars, "Holy Ghost", 1975

FIG. 01, 18 → 28

James Lee Byars (1932-1997) è un artista americano specializzato in sculture, installazioni e performance dalla forte carica concettuale e mistica. Nel 1972 è invitato da Harald Szeemann alla Documenta 5 a Kassel dove per tutto il tempo del vernissage si posiziona sulla soglia del Museo Fridericianum dando le spalle al pubblico, un piede dentro e un piede fuori dall'esposizione. In questa occasione stringe amicizia con Szeemann tanto che nel 1975 il curatore lo invita a Venezia per inaugurare, con una sua performance, la mostra *Le macchine celibi*. Sabato 6 settembre alle ore 16.30 in Piazza San Marco viene srotolato un immenso telo bianco dalla forma umana lungo 60 metri e largo 40. L'artista con un cilindro nero e vestito completamente d'oro dirige i lavori di posizionamento della grande sagoma, che il pubblico entusiasta man mano solleva e trasporta per qualche minuto. Alla fine, Lee Byars avvolge tutto il materiale in un sacco nero che viene portato con una barca ai Magazzini del Sale e riposto all'ingresso della mostra *Le macchine celibi*. Il titolo provocatorio dell'happening è *James Lee Byars does the holy ghost* che rimanda a significati religiosi forse ispirati al luogo prescelto della performance. Se l'evento è accolto in maniera festosa dal pubblico accorso in Piazza San Marco, le recensioni sui giornali sono molto sarcastiche definendo l'opera pupazzo, lenzuolo, fantasma. ca

re femminili nude, abbandonate in pose lascive. L'opera è così controversa che il Patriarca di Venezia Giuseppe Sarto (futuro papa Pio X) si rifiuta di visitare la Biennale e scrive a Riccardo Selvatico, fondatore e animatore della Biennale e già sindaco di Venezia, per proibire l'esposizione. Il quadro viene comunque presentato e, tra le polemiche, si aggiudica anche il premio del pubblico, mentre Selvatico perde le elezioni comunali contro una coalizione clericale-moderata, sostenuta dalla curia veneziana. L'opera verrà poi acquistata da una compagnia di investimento allo scopo di portarla in tournée in America, ma il quadro finirà distrutto, bruciato in un incidente. ca

## 03B Jeff Koons, "Jeff e Ilona (Made in Heaven)", 1990

FIG. 02, 31, 32

Jeff Koons partecipa ad Aperto 90, la sezione di arte giovane della 44. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte alle Corderie dell'Arsenale, curata da Renato Barilli, Bernard Blistène, Jacob Wenzel, Stuart Morgan, e Linda Shearer. In questa occasione Koons presenta *Made in Heaven*, una serie di quadri e una scultura che celebrano la sua relazione romantica con Cicciolina, attrice porno ungherese e all'epoca parlamentare del Governo italiano. I quadri fanno scandalo per il contenuto esplicitamente sessuale delle composizioni; la stampa italiana si scatena con appelli alla decenza e alla moralità, mentre su *Vogue America* Karl Lagerfeld immortalala la coppia a letto, in amorosi abbracci all'Hotel Danieli. Le opere restano in mostra nonostante le richieste di censura, ma alcuni quadri vengono vandalizzati il 3 settembre 1990. ca

## 03C Gran Fury, "Untitled (Pope Piece)", 1990

FIG. 36, 37

Alla stessa edizione di 'Aperto' dello scandalo provocato dalle opere di Jeff Koons, un'altra installazione americana suscita le ire della Chiesa. Si tratta dell'opera di Gran Fury, un collettivo newyorkese di artisti e attivisti dei diritti dei malati di AIDS. Negli spazi delle Corderie il gruppo presenta due grandi poster: uno con l'immagine di Giovanni Paolo II accanto a un testo che denun-

## 03A Giacomo Grosso, "Il supremo convegno", 1895

FIG. 03, 29 → 30

Alla prima edizione della Biennale Arte del 1895 esplode uno scandalo attorno a uno dei quadri di Giacomo Grosso. Il quadro rappresenta una bara nella quale giace il cadavere di un uomo sul quale si avventano cinque figu-

## 02 James Lee Byars, "Holy Ghost", 1975

FIG. 01, 18 → 28

James Lee Byars (1932-1997) was an American artist specialised in sculpture, installations and performances filled with conceptual, mystical power. In 1972 he was invited by Harald Szeemann to Documenta 5 in Kassel, where he stood on the threshold of the Fridericianum Museum for the entire vernissage, his back turned to visitors, with one foot inside the exhibition and one foot outside of it. He and Szeemann struck up a friendship, and in 1975 the curator invited him to present a performance to inaugurate *The Bachelor Machines* in Venice. At 4.30 pm on Saturday, 6 September, an immense human-shaped piece of white canvas, sixty metres long and forty metres wide, was unrolled in Piazza San Marco. Wearing a black top hat and dressed entirely in gold, the artist directed the effort to position this huge cutout, which viewers enthusiastically lifted up bit by bit and moved around for several minutes. In the end, Lee Byars gathered all the material into a black bag that was carried by boat to the Magazzini del Sale and returned to the entrance of *The Bachelor Machines*. This performance's provocative title was *James Lee Byars Does the Holy Ghost*, suggesting religious connotations perhaps inspired by the chosen location in front of the basilica. Whilst the event was welcomed and enjoyed by those in Piazza San Marco, the newspaper reviews were extremely sarcastic, calling the work a "doll", "sheet" or "ghost". vp

## 03A Giacomo Grosso, "The Final Tryst", 1895

FIG. 03, 29, 30

At the first edition of Biennale Arte in 1895, a scandal erupted around one of Giacomo Grosso's paintings. The work depicted a man in a coffin, with five nude female figures draping themselves over the dead body in lascivious poses. It caused such an uproar that the Patriarch of Venice, Giuseppe Sarto (the future Pope Pius X), refused to visit the exhibition and wrote to the Biennale's founder, Mayor Riccardo Selvatico, telling him it had to be removed. The painting was exhibited nonetheless, and in amidst all the controversy it even won the public prize, though Selvatico lost

the city elections to a moderate Catholic coalition supported by the Venetian curia. An investment company then bought the painting with the intention of taking it on tour around America, but it ended up being accidentally destroyed in a fire. ca

## 03B Jeff Koons, "Made in Heaven", 1990

FIG. 02, 31, 32

Jeff Koons took part in Aperto 90, the young art section of the 44th International Art Exhibition at the Corderie, curated by Renato Barilli, Bernard Blistène, Jacob Wenzel, Stuart Morgan, and Linda Shearer. On this occasion Koons presented *Made in Heaven*, a series of paintings and a sculpture celebrating his romantic relationship with Cicciolina, a Hungarian-born porn actress who was then in the Italian Parliament. The painting's explicitly sexual content scandalised the Italian press, which attacked it in the name of decency and morality; meanwhile, Karl Lagerfeld immortalised the couple in an amorous embrace at Hotel Danieli for *Vogue America*. The work remained on view despite demands that it be removed, but some of the paintings were vandalised on 3 September 1990. ca

## 03C Gran Fury, "Untitled (Pope Piece)", 1990

FIG. 36, 37

At the very same edition of Aperto where Jeff Koons' work caused such a stir, another American installation brought an angry response from the church. It was a work by Gran Fury, a New York collective of artists and activists campaigning for the rights of AIDS victims. In the Corderie spaces the group presented two large posters, one with a picture of John Paul II alongside a text denouncing the Catholic Church's attitude to the AIDS epidemic, the other a phallus surrounded by slogans encouraging the use of condoms. After protests and open condemnation by the Vatican and the general public, the artistic director of the Visual Arts department, Giovanni Carandente, considered removing the work, but ultimately stayed true to the integrity of La Biennale and the principles of free expression that have always inspired it. ca

## 03D Gino De Dominicis, "Second Solution of Immortality: The Universe Is Immobile", 1972

FIG. 33 → 35

Gino De Dominicis was one most prolific young Italian artists of the time, and his work was exhibited in various editions of Biennale Arte. The first occasion was in 1972, at the 36th International Art Exhibition, when Renato Barilli invited him to take part in the exhibition *Opera o comportamento* (Work or Behaviour) which the Bologna-based critic was curating with Francesco Arcangeli. The piece presented by De Dominicis caused an enormous stir. It was a installation comprised of various conceptual works created in previous years: *Cubo invisibile* (Invisible Cube, 1967), *Palla di gomma* (caduta da 2 metri) nell'attimo immediatamente precedente il rimbalzo (Rubber ball [dropped from a height of 2 meters] in the moment just before bouncing, 1968-69) e *Attesa di un casuale movimento molecolare generale in una sola direzione, tale da generare un movimento spontaneo della pietra* (Waiting for a random, general molecular movement in one direction to generate a spontaneous movement of the stone, 1969) which had already been shown at Fabio Sargentini's L'Attico gallery in 1969. On 9 June, for the opening, De Dominicis added another element to this work: Paolo Rosa, a young man with Down syndrome, who sat there in a corner contemplating the works laid out in front of him. Although this tableau vivant remained on view only for a few hours – the young man was soon replaced by a little girl sitting in the same seat with the same caption ("Second Solution of Immortality") – it triggered extremely indignant reactions from critics and intellectuals, including Pier Paolo Pasolini and even Eugenio Montale, who mentioned the event in his Nobel acceptance speech. The outrage made it all the way to Parliament, and charges were brought against De Dominicis for "abduction of an incapacitated person". ca

## 03E Scandals, controversies and censorship at the Film Festival

FIG. 05, 38 → 45

The postwar history of the Venice International Film Festival is punctuated by controversies and attempts at cen-

sorship; it points to an evolution, over the years, in the way viewers, society and institutions reacted to films considered offensive to public decency and religion, or which irritated political leaders. The most glaring example of this was Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film *La battaglia di Algeri* (The Battle of Algiers), which won a Golden Lion. The French delegation walked out of the theatre and left the Lido, deeming the film an attack on its government's colonial policies. Georges Sadoul, one of the leading film historians of the time, wrote: "France just lost the Battle of Algiers for the second time". Another serious episode of interference was when Clare Boothe Luce, the US ambassador, succeeded in having Richard Brooks' film *Blackboard Jungle* taken off the programme on the grounds that it was "degenerate" and gave a counterproductive image of the United States. This interference had considerable support back home: director Joseph Mankiewicz sympathised with the ambassador, writing that European festivals were a platform for the intellectual arrogance of those who denigrated American institutions and society. Ottavio Croze, the festival director, did as he was told and replaced the film with Curtis Bernhardt's *Interrupted Melody*. In 1956, *Calle Mayor* by Juan Antonio Bardem, an opponent of the Spanish regime, prompted the intervention of General Franco himself, but this time the new artistic director, Floris Luigi Ammannati, stood his ground and the movie was screened. ca

Other controversies accompanied films such as Luigi Zampa's *La romana* (1954), Louis Malle's *Les Amants* (1958), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1961) and Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962). In 1962 Joseph Losey's *Eva* was withdrawn by the producers, after the festival had already announced it would be in the competition, and 1963 brought a standoff between Motion Picture Associated, which wanted Robert Rossen's *Lilith* to be in the running, and Luigi Chiarini, who successfully kept it out. In 1966 the scandalous film was Mai Zetterling's *Nattlek*: Cardinal Urbani, Patriarch of Venice, attacked it as "contrary to sound moral principles", resulting in a screening where only journalists were admitted. Accusations of offending religious sensibilities were levied at Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971), which the cleric Father Claudio Sorgi defined "intol-

erably blasphemous in every way", and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), which sparked protests in front of the Palazzo del Cinema and legal charges against La Biennale. gg

## 04A Nicolás García Uriburu, "Actions in Nature", 1968

FIG. 52

Argentine artist Nicolás García Uriburu came to Venice in June 1968 just as major student protests were erupting around the opening of the 34th International Art Exhibition, to which Uriburu had not been officially invited. At 8 am on 19 June, Uriburu convinced a gondolier to take him out along the Grand Canal into which he poured thirty kilos of a non-toxic fluorescent substance that turned the water bright green for many hours. This surreal spectacle left the city frightened and confused, but news soon spread that it was just another action by a contemporary artist who wanted to raise awareness of environmental issues. Uriburu's work with images documenting this gesture was then officially exhibited at Biennale Arte 2017, showing him to be a pioneer of environmental art. ca

## 04B Mass Moving, "Biological Liberation of 10,000 Butterflies in Piazza San Marco, Venice", 1972

FIG. 04, 46 → 48

The Belgian Mass Moving Project collective installed a large white sculpture in the shape of a giant cocoon at Piazza San Marco, containing 10,000 pupae of live white butterflies. On 11 June 1972 the cloth that had covered the sculpture until the day of the opening was removed and the hatched butterflies invaded the square and the rest of the city; this prompted furious reactions from animal rights activists and local groups, who pointed out the risk of damage to the lagoon ecosystem. ca

## 04C Antonio Paradiso, "Bull and Mechanical Cow," 1978

FIG. 49 → 51

For Biennale Arte 1978, which focused on the relationship between art and nature, Antonio Paradiso installed

an enclosure containing a mechanical cow – a device generally used for artificial insemination on cattle farms – in the space in front of the Belgian pavilion. The artist then brought a massive living bull named Pinco to the Giardini; Pinco's resulting encounter with the mechanical cow prompted considerable perplexity and shock, not to mention disapproval from the pope. ca

## 05 Pina Bausch in Venice, 1985

FIG. 53 → 56

Pina Bausch (1940-2009) is a legendary name in contemporary dance. This Polish-German dancer trained at the Folkwangschule in Essen under the direction of Kurt Jooss, an anti-Nazi choreographer best known for his parable *The Green Table*, in which the rulers of the world gamble with the fates of nations on the battlefield. In 1960 Bausch began studying at Juilliard in New York City, where she met many eminent figures in American dance. On her return to Germany she joined Jooss' Volkswang-Ballett and successfully turned her hand to choreography, ultimately directing her own Tanztheater group at Schauspielhaus in Wuppertal from 1973 to 1974. Her direction was criticised by ballet lovers, however, since traditionalists disliked the prosaic realism of her touching pieces, which were meant to be experienced empathically rather than understood intellectually. But she triumphed at the Festival Mondial du Théâtre de Nancy in 1977 and earned the admiration of Federico Fellini, who asked her to play the Countess in his 1983 film *E la nave va*. In 1985 Franco Quadri's Biennale Teatro dedicated a solo event to the choreographer and director, with eight amazing works: *Frühlingeoper* (1975), *Die sieben Todsünden* (1976), *Blaubart* (1977), *Café Müller* (1978), *Kontakthof* (1978), 1980, *ein Stück von Pina Bausch und Bandoneon* (1980), and *Auf dem Gebirge* (1984). Her dancer-actors – people, not characters, with a tragicomic malaise that anyone can relate to – became the vectors for an enduring, pervasive "Bauschian infiltration" of Italian and European dance. EGV