

La Biennale di Venezia
57th International Art Exhibition

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VIVA ARTE VIVA

In a world full of conflicts and jolts, in which humanism is being seriously jeopardized, art is the most precious part of the human being. It is the ideal place for reflection, individual expression, freedom and fundamental questions. Art is the favourite place for dreams and utopias, relationships with other human beings, with nature and cosmos, as well as with a spiritual dimension. Here, art is the ultimate rampart, a garden to be cultivated beyond trends and particular interests. It also represents an alternative to individualism and indifference. It builds us and edifies us. It is a “yes” to life, although sometimes a “but” lies behind. More than ever, the role, the voice and the responsibility of the artist are crucial in the framework of contemporary debates.

Viva Arte Viva is also an exclamation, an expression of the passion for art and for the state of the artist. **Viva Arte Viva** is a Biennale designed with the artists, by the artists and for the artists. It deals with the forms they propose, the questions they pose, the practices they develop and the forms of life they choose.

Art and artists are themselves at the core of the Exhibition that debuts with a question about their practices, the way they create art, between idleness and action, between *otium* and *negotium*. The roman *otium*, originated from the Greek *scholé*, constitutes a privileged moment, which nowadays is improperly translated as *idleness*, conferring it a pejorative nuance, or by the term *leisure*, which in English is not far from *entertainment*. The word *otium*, opposite to the world of business and *negotium* which the artist does not escape, entails instead that free time of inaction and availability, of laborious idleness and mind work, of serenity and action, where indeed the work of art is born.

Starting from the wandering thoughts of the artist, his workshop, his terrestrial and spiritual nourishment, his material and mental workplace, the Exhibition organically evolves in a sequence of pavilions, rooms and *stanze*, offering the spectator an experience, i.e. a journey, from the interiority to the infinity.

These pavilions or **Trans-pavilions**, which gather artists of all generations and origins, sinuously follow one another like chapters of a book. From the “Pavilion of artists and books” to the “Pavilion of time and infinity”, a dozen universes tell a conversational and sometimes paradoxical story, concerning the complexity of the world and the variety of positions and practices. The Exhibition also aims to be an experience, representing an extroversion movement towards the other, towards a common place and towards the most indefinable dimensions, opening the pathways to a neo-humanism.

Viva Arte Viva also wants to instil a positive and prospective energy focused on young artists, while rediscovering those who passed away too early or those who are unknown to the public despite the importance of their works. Discoveries and rediscoveries will display the works belonging to different generations of artists, while exploring specific cultural areas such as Latin America, Asia and The Middle East and paying particular attention to Europe up to its eastern boundaries and to Russia.

Side subjects and events will be based on the same idea of putting artists at the core of the Exhibition. The catalogue of the Exhibition will be entirely focused on the artists who are invited to present visual and textual documents concerning their practices and their own universe.

Viva Arte Viva will put artists at the forefront and will give them the opportunity to express themselves. Every week, during the six months of the Exhibition, the artist and his public will participate to an *Open Table (Tavola Aperta)* where they can have lunch together and where they can dialogue and talk about the artist's practice. These events will take place in front of the Central Pavilion in the Giardini and in the Sale d'Armi inside the Arsenale.

There will also be a place dedicated to the **Artist's Practices Project**, concerning a series of short videos made by the artists in order to illustrate their universe and their way of working. Every day, during the weeks before the opening of the Exhibition, a video will be posted on the Biennale official website, giving the opportunity to uncover the artists even before the Exhibition.

These two projects will be open to the whole Biennale artists. During the rest of the week, all national pavilions are invited to participate to the *Open Table (Tavola Aperta)* as well as to feed the database with videos of the artists about their practices.

Thanks to this participation, **Viva Arte Viva** aims to reinforce the cohesion between the Biennale and the artists.

Finally, there is the project **Unpacking My Library**, inspired by Walter Benjamin's essay published in 1931, where the artists of **Viva Arte Viva** can make a list of their favourite books. It is an occasion to get acquainted with them and a source of inspiration for the public (Walter Benjamin, *Unpacking My Library: a Talk about Book Collecting*, followed by the list of texts read and collected by the author). It will be visible both in the Exhibition and in the catalogue.

Christine Macel