

A walk through Libertà with Gryanne Stunnenberg.

- with love, the curator.

First of all, everything I say can be considered gossip and this text will be full of my personal opinions. It is even possible that some of the locations or artists have different ideas as the ones I am about to express. This text is not here to explain all the ins and outs of the locations, artists and artworks. It is a curator attempt to bring parts of my invisible glue to the surface. Please keep in mind that everything is related to everything else.

The entire idea to create a three-day pop-up art event in Venice derives from an opinion; Venice is connected to the mainland by a bridge called 'Freedom', but leaves not enough freedom to its residents nor to their artistic needs and outbursts. Space can be bought or rented. The financial competition between the average wages of the locals and the visitors to this city is an unfair one. Take into consideration that artists earn less money with their profession in general and the many restrictions as to possibilities in public space and one will easily come to the conclusion that Venice doesn't have a very fruitful climate for contemporary artists. Yet the city seems to explode of exhibitions, their number so large that it is even hard to set foot in all of them. Making and running exhibitions in Venice is a true business and I'm happy to be surrounded by that because that is a great source and form of collective wealth! There are some art communities that sometimes meet up to enjoy spending some time together, but they seem to be somewhat hidden. This city was missing something dynamic to operate in the middle of everything. Something outside of the structures assigned to art. Something that is with and for the locals. Art as part of the community and to create community.

Libertà 2019 counted 20 international artists, spread out over 12 locations, plus an online contribution. The exhibition had 'Comune di Venezia' as a binding theme. Many of the artists were present at the opening and also during the up-and-running days. Some artists brought their works themselves, other works were transported by others and delivered as post, some works were contributed through the internet. The locations were local businesses (private spaces with a public feel) and residents participated by lending us their washing lines.

The artists were invited or selected after an open call. Some of the works already existed and were selected for their relation to the theme. Many of the works were made specifically for this exhibition.

As soon as I would know the details about a participating artwork, I started to scout and look for a suitable location, being assisted by Lara Reuter. After receiving confirmation from the space, I set up a communication line between the owner of the location and the artist(s). The artists made sure that the works were there, the locations made sure that the assigned space was ready, with me in the triangle of the communication. Everybody took care of their own expenses. Gallergry had no budget. Some advertisement was made on Facebook and the website www.gallergry.com were contributions of me as a private person. We were all volunteers and patrons at the same time.

Madalena Corrêa Mendes helped me in organizing the opening event, which was a bacaro tour (hopping from bar to bar) with many of the artists present, many of them giving a very informal and brief introduction to their work. This was an inspiring gathering and was perceived as a successful formula by all participants, where the visitors and artists looked for common languages (English, Italian, Dutch,

Portuguese and German at times, visual art itself and gestures). This way of finding international connections amongst artists led to the offer of several of them to help one another within their own country and circuit. Many of the locations (6 out of 8) expressed their wish to collaborate more frequently with Gallergrgy in setting-up art presentations in this form.

Please let me walk you through the exhibition.

I WE EXHIBIT

WE EXHIBIT is a company specialized in planning, organizing and setting-up exhibitions. They operate in Venice, including setting-up National Pavilions inside the Biennale, but their work field expands throughout the region. They are true experts. And they are nice. So nice that they lend us the keys to their office to host a part of Libertà.

Once inside the first work to the left is an installation by Cosima Montavoci. Cosima is Venetian and she studied at the Rietveld art academy in Amsterdam, but she decided to move back to her hometown. She has a very enthusiastic and electric personality. Her search for trash in her beloved hometown is a mission she takes on with that attitude. However, in the making process of her art, she takes time to step back, rethink and make conscious decisions. There is a high level of concentration in the selection of the found trash, with which she makes compositions. These compositions are in their turn also undergoing a selection process. The installation 'Trash Project – studio visit' (Contemporary Fairy Tales) shows us a part of her visual research, physical search, and a still-in-the-studio-stage of an on-going art project (start and end point are out of the grasp of Libertà, but the studio set-up of this installation is created for this event). The trash clearly tells stories and narratives are easily made. We see things we recognize and perhaps can relate to. The items look happy and are balanced in composition. That is the fun part of the work. What a tragedy though that these are the stories we leave behind in the calle and the canals.

Next to this installation we see two dancers in those calle and crossing those canals. 'Site Specific Project' Dance (video) is made by Marika Meoli who travels the world to perform on stages in elegant theaters, including La Fenice. The dance 'E' vietato il gioco della palla' (it's forbidden to play soccer) is a very tactile experience to the surfaces of the city, pointing out one of the many restrictions that it has. The dancers touch one another and the city, more or less embracing and caressing the bricks, pavements, and bridges.

In the center of the space, placed on the floor, we encounter a work without title by the painter Oscar Contreras Rojas, which he made for Libertà. Oscar had been doing Free Walking Tours in Venice, where he also studied at the art academy. That line of work is tricky in Venice, another restriction. With the experience and financial means gained through that, he was able to move to Florence and study for his official tour guide license. When his true profession is: painting. This piece has a lot of similarities with the art pieces we can find in the churches (and Venice has a lot of churches). His version is very contemporary. It is a self-standing painting painted on a piece of furniture on two sides. The depictions are relating to the past as well, but he left out details, giving us a blurry feel but with enough body to recognize an Armageddon-lagoon scenario on the one side and an almost Inferno-kind of landscape on the other. In this

work I see Venice, her lagoon and the high-water problems it is still facing. Furthermore I see project MOSE (not to be confused with Moses) in its separated elements. Therefore I decided to present this work on the floor. This painting with sculptural value is placed next to a sculpture.

The sculpture 'Ritorno da Domani' (light blue) is made out of Murano glass and is a work by Shane Guffogg in close collaboration with a Murano glass master. Shane is a painter who captures flowing lines on the canvas which seem to be involved in a conversation with each other, with the creator and with the viewer. These lines have space in between them. The sculpture could be seen as that space. To me, it is almost like a breath, the pause between words. This sculpture is blown. Furthermore, it is the outcome of a conversation, a connection in between two creators, one on Murano and one in L.A. Placed in this setting, surrounded by the other works, there is a strong relationship to water as well. Or, better put, the flow of blown air over water.

II Hotel Al Sole

Hotel Al Sole is a truly beautiful historic palazzo (the early 1400s) with a canal in the front and it has a big courtyard. The hotel bar at one time in the past used to be the studio of a sculpture artist working in marble. Very particular about this space is the well inside of it, that is connected to the canals and therefore to the lagoon. The water level rises and falls with the tides.

Above the well we see the first work hanging from the wooden beam of the architectural construction, right next to the column that enters the well. The installation of Ria Geerdink 'The drop that contained the sea' (created for Libertà) is hanging right above the well. We can imagine that if it were a bit longer than its 210cm, it would enter that well and maybe the tide would make the lagoon-water touch this seemingly fragile work. We can imagine that if there would be something wrong with the hanging mechanism, the paper would fall in the water. A fragile balance. Attached to this rice paper we can see around 2500 fused glass drops glistening, forming patterns of boats. To me, the connection people seek out by traveling over water in relation to the lagoon-water that made Venice and is now breaking it (and the fragile balance in between those) is vital to mention. Venice became great because of travel and transport over water, the salt in that water and the fishes. Nowadays the cruise ships and the high-tide which makes salty water touch and destroy the bricks that are the city, are amongst her greatest threats.

The travel of people, the coming and going of humans, is also something we see coming back in the second work in this space, that of Madalena Corrêa Mendes. Making connections is a reoccurring theme in her work. For her internship at the Peggy Guggenheim, she arrived in Venice. Instead of one term (like many of her colleagues), she stayed for a second. This means she got to experience firsthand one of the beautiful facts about living in Venice; people come and most of them go. People move here like the tides, to the rhythm of the seasons. Some come back, some don't. Her work in this space 'From Venice, with Madalena' was never made to be an installation or even to be exhibited. We are looking at gifts that she gave to her friends from the Guggenheim. The lines in red thread represent portraits of each individual friend, with a personal note added to it. The works are stitched over a printout of a prominently present work inside the garden of the Peggy Guggenheim. –Changing place, changing time, changing thoughts, changing future, a work by Maurizio Nannucci. Madalena asked her friends if she could have them back to reunited them just

this once to take part in the Libertà exhibition. Not all of them came back, but most of them did. And after the exhibition, they will leave again to return to their homes. Venice is a city of reunions.

III Estro

Estro is the place to find exquisite wines. To me, one can explore Italy through wines. This elongated country has a very large diversity in conditions that influence the grapes and that is why Italy has a very large offer. Here you can also eat very well. And they have recently added the space on the opposite corner as a storage space, which has a beautiful bow window with mirrors on its sides.

Maarten van Aken's paintings focus on architecture, light, and humans (usually not visibly present). Reflections became a topic that we see coming back more frequently lately. The reflecting bow window is the stage for two of his new works. 'Libertà I' (made for this exhibition) depicts the reflection of me, raising my arm to take a photo of my own reflection in my front door in Mestre, which is on the mainland of Venice. According to Maarten, I seem to be taking on the pose of the statue of Liberty, conquering the city of Venice. Next to that is 'The Pop-up Store', a work that Maarten made for a series about empty shops in the city center of Hengelo. (Nice side-note, I personally compare Mestre to Hengelo.) This work is showing a pop-up store, which is in direct dialogue with the pop-up exhibition. Where Venice seems to be overrun by people from time to time, Hengelo can't find enough of them. They both struggle with space in their own way. Inside Estro we find the third and last work 'Libertà II', made next to 'Libertà I' for Libertà, which shows the view from my bathroom in Mestre with blended into the image the reflection seen in the bathroom window. Usually, Maarten exclusively paints what he has actually seen and he stays away from photos as a source. I consider it quite likely that this last work will change upon his return to the studio in Hengelo and having seen this actual view in Mestre.

IV Camuffo

Camuffo is one of the few shops left in Venice that is truly for the people that live here and are changing their bathrooms. It is my true hope that the few places like these that are left, will remain. They are rare reminders of people living here.

In their shop windows, surrounded by all kinds of things one might need in a bathroom, we find two photos by Sofie Kokas that breath in the same style of composition. One depicts Florian, the oldest coffee house in continuous operation in Italy, and the second oldest in the World. It is a very classy place on Piazza San Marco. The other depicts a toilet on Poveglia, a supposedly haunted island with a very long and interesting history. This picture was taken during a birthday on which I was present as well. The two works are in contrast, or perhaps they are not at all, perhaps they show the same, the parallel. This echoes in the compositional build-up, that seem to be frameworks of black and white.

Sofie is professionally related to Venice as an art historian and she has worked to assist other artists as well (including Erwin Wurm). But when I saw her face light up when she told me about the new camera she had ordered, I lit up as well. Like the open Florian.

V L'archivio

L'archivio is a very welcoming bar, located next to the Archivio di Stato di Venezia (which (amongst other things) preserves, protects and enhances the documentary heritage of the Republic of Venice from the first written records until its termination on 12 May 1797) and the bar is across from The Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (which (amongst other things) contains the famous Titian painting 'Assumption of the Virgin'). The bar is connected to these locations by a bridge.

Onno Dirks gives Venice another bridge with the work 'Moving'. Two polaroids, blurry from movement, show bridges, which Onno connects by drawing a bridge between them with graphite. There are some shapes that could be humans on this structure, but mostly there seems to be a lot of space and room for making connections. Something that Onno wishes the people in Venice. The exhibition title Libertà is based on the connecting bridge Ponte della Libertà. Venice has already created more space, but perhaps it is still learning how to relate itself to it. Standing in front of 'Moving', to our left we see people moving over the bridge outside.

VI Orange Venezia

Orange Venezia is a bar located on Campo Santa Margarita, a part of town very popular amongst its students. This bar has a large terrace, is spacious inside, has a wonderful big garden in the back and a rooftop terrace.

The rooftop gave space to 120 people in total spread out over these three days, every evening at 21.30. The surface of the neighbor's wall formed the carrier of the projection, presented by Collettivo Confluenze. More people enjoyed the show, from the garden and the campo the work 'Intertidal. Barene.' (Screendance) was clearly visible. The film shows us the salty marshes, a part of the lagoon that is almost impossible to reach and has a very fragile existence. We don't know how much longer they will be here, for it is likely that soon the lagoon-landscape will have been replaced by a sea-landscape. The bodily movements, chosen outfits and carefully composed music (more like a sound-landscape) are in tune and show the vibrant riches that this rare part of nature has to offer, taking over a part of the built environment in the dark. Paloma Leyton had already been playing with the idea to create a work in this direction, but she didn't get to the production of it yet. Libertà was the accelerator to launch the project and look for collaborators. During the production, the team slowly grew, as did this exhibition as a whole. One drop in the water sets a lot more in motion.

VII Casin dei Nobili (Showroom)

Casin dei Nobili is a place that shows an important Venetian tradition: the artistic creation of masks. Venice is full of masks, most of them made out of plastic and imported. There are only a few maskmakers left. This paper-mâché artisan form of art is closely related to the history of the Venetian Republic and the masks are

still in use during Carnevale. Casin dei Nobili has to my great admiration not lost any bit of craftsmanship and creativity.

The courtyard has three windows facing the calle next to the historical (illegal) casino of the noblemen. The whole in the roof/floor was a spyhole to check who would stand in front of the entrance. Two of the windows of the mask showroom are filled with the works of Sun Hee Moon. In 'Self-portrait' Sun is wearing two things that are in close relationship to this location. The first is a lace collar. Lace is, as are masks, another historical artisan Venetian tradition. The second is the set of earbuds. This portrait is also occurring in her work 'Game of cards', a painting of women playing cards. Like a professional poker player, Sun is wearing earbuds. The other painting shown here is 'Sleeping mask', another type of mask. It is worn by a woman but over her hair. She is wide awake. An extra set of eyes on the mask join the other set in looking back at us.

VIII La Toletta

La Toletta is a bookshop that has a very large offer and has especially a great collection in art books. It is a popular place. Students, locals, and tourists visit it.

Their outside showcases usually contain books, but during Libertà the books were accompanied by artworks.

Simone Bortolotti participated in Libertà with 5 works that are of a specific series. 'Paesaggio 24.18' + 'Paesaggio 25.18' + 'Paesaggio 27.18' + 'Paesaggio 28.18' + 'Paesaggio 29.18' are contemplations on the Redentore church (on the island Giudecca) and the changing light. Light and it's changing qualities have been a massive inspiration for Venetian art and was one of the clearest marks for the Venetian Renaissance style. However, the works of Simone have a very different color pallet. They seem to show more of the humidity and diffuse light that comes with it, sticking close to blue, white, gray and green as we see coming back in stronger variations in the rest of his oeuvre.

My works that participate in Libertà are presented in this same location, in the next showcase. For Libertà 8 photos from the series 'This is not art, it's pressing a button' are selected. They are the 8 about architecture and the sky that are made in Venice and Mestre. In this series, they seem to have more in common than generally expected. Color blocks and lines form the grid to our world. If we zoom out, take a step back and divide that what 'happens to be there' in color blocks and lines, perhaps we can create more space for our internal architecture. That too might have more in common than generally expected.

IX OUTSIDE

Bert de Geyter had the idea to work with flags, something he had worked with before. In a brainstorm, we came to the idea to have flags hanging from washing lines. So Bert made the flags, carriers 'Waiting for a purpose, a story to happen, your scars, a flag to share' and an artist friend of his who had a show in Venice around the same time brought them here. My assistant Lara and I looked for volunteering locals that would

hang them outside from their washing lines. All of these encounters were beautiful and meaningful. Paolo, Elisa, Mr. and Mrs. Bertoldi, Anna and Chiara each adopted a flag. Some flags didn't make it to the finishing line in one piece, but some of the flags were preserved and will find their way back to Bert, who will continue working on this art project in Ghent. The flags almost had an undercover presence, infiltrating the city almost unnoticed. Yet, their sound was clearly present. Bert was never here. He never set foot on these bits of land. He confiscated parts of this city just the same. And right in time, I must add. It seems that the city of Venice will soon have a new law, making it illegal to hang out your laundry crossing a calle. Apparently, somebody didn't like to look at someone's underwear. A true loss for this city, as many people seem to perceive the same laundry as forms of art.

X ONLINE

Christine Bax is an artist that doesn't paint but writes. Some would think to call her a writer. This means that her art contribution is a work of art in words. She is giving us a portrait of the city of Venice, a place she feels very at home in. In her description, she is walking through the Libertà exhibition, as we did now. Except, you will see her visit. A visit in the mind's eye, for the exhibition didn't exist when she made this piece and she was unfortunately also not in Venice during Libertà.

You can read her work here: <https://gallergrj.com/liberta-christine-bax/>

I am looking back to a wonderful time, a smooth event, meaningful encounters, and an exciting adventure.

Next year I hope you can join me in looking back in the same way to Libertà 2020.