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An Understanding of Gender
in the 2005 and 2022 Venice Art Biennale editions

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Matteo Bertelé

Assisten Supervisor

Ch.ma Prof.ssa Federica Maria Giovanna Timeto

Graduand Chiara Ascari

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Abstract

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This dissertation critically examines the concept of gender in the context of the Venice Art Biennale editions of 2005 and 2022, with a specific focus on Rosa Martinez, Maria De Corral, and Cecilia Alemani's curatorships, as well as selected artists' practices. Notable artists included in the study are Barbara Kruger, Joana Vasconcelos, Guerrilla Girls (2005 edition), and Katharina Fritsch, Cecilia Vicuña, Simone Leigh, and Yuki Kihara (2022 edition).

Through an analysis of these two Venice Biennale editions, the study aims to shed light on the evolving understanding of gender within the art world and its impact on curatorial and artistic production and representation. By exploring significant occurrences in 2005 and 2022, the research seeks to examine the multifaceted explicability of gender performativity and its power in shaping artistic discourse challenging socio-cultural stereotypes.

Furthermore, it calls for a raise in awareness toward art institution role in defining hierarchical dynamics and narrative discourses, and it advocates for a proactive approach in creating spaces that activate interaction and respect diversity.

Overall, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender in contemporary art productions and provides insights that can inform the development of more inclusive and engaged practices within the Venice Biennale and other art institutions.

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I hereby declare my intent to share my thoughts and writings on these themes and concepts, motivated by my own encounters and immersion in a *diverse* community in which this categorisation can only have a very positive meaning. While it is possible that *my* community may not appreciate being labelled in this manner, or even resist any form of definition, I dedicate this thesis to them and to the spaces where we come together, fostering connections.

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Introduction

The relationship between art and gender has been a subject of critical inquiry and exploration for decades. In recent years, the discourse surrounding this relationship has intensified, particularly in the context of international art exhibitions in the Global North such as the Venice Biennale¹. The 2000s mark a significant turning point in the exploration of gender-related themes within artistic practices, artists and curators specifically using the platform of the Venice Biennale to engage with and challenge established norms and notions of representation, identity, and equality.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to analyse how the conceptual relationship between art and gender manifested within the 2005 and 2022 Venice Biennale editions. The studied period highlights the exceptional nature of the two venues. The former was remarkable as it marked the inaugural appointment of women curators, while the latter unequivocally emphasised the significant role of women in both historical and contemporary artistic production. This was demonstrated through the prominent display of artworks predominantly created by individuals who do not identify as men, thus challenging the longstanding male-dominated participation trends observed since the establishment of the Venice Biennale.

By examining the theoretical frameworks throughout history and literature, curatorial strategies and artistic practices employed in 2005 and 2022, this study seeks to elucidate the ways in which curators and artists have engaged with and expanded upon discussions surrounding gender identity. It investigates the limited recognition of women artists and their claim to a rightful place in the art and cultural domain contrasting gender subordination dynamics. Additionally, it analyses the impact of socio-philosophical theories and political ideologies on artistic themes and connected concepts, which have provided support for curatorial and artists production.

¹The conceptual partition between Global North (Europe, North America, and the developed part of Asia) and Global South (Africa, Latin America, and the developing parts of Asia) deals with the Westernisation theory included in R. Horner, S. Schindler, D. Haberly, Y. Aoyama, *Globalisation, uneven development and the North-South 'big switch'*, in "Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society", 22, January 2018, vol. 11, pp. 17-33.

Furthermore, it aims to underline the necessity to critically re-consider cultural spaces where to re-discuss dominant narratives. This study illuminates the most relevant underpinnings to apprehend how gender binary subaltern dynamics have influenced the art world and vice versa by handling historical and recent literature. This enquiry surveyed the potential adverse implications of thinking and behaving considering gender binary and its implementing inequalities and unsustainability.

Considering this perspective, this research employs a multidisciplinary approach that combines archival research, theoretical framework, and art historical analysis. The primary investigation material consists of theoretical texts that provide the conceptual framework for understanding the curatorial and artistic practices under survey. Through a comparative analysis of theoretical discourses, curators' strategies, artists' artworks and parallel projects, the 2005 and 2022 Venice Biennale editions are analysed, accompanied by critical texts, exhibition catalogues, and reviews.

This dissertation facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between art and gender in the 2000s within the context of the Venice Biennale. Chapter 1 provides an overview of feminist, queer, xenofeminist, and posthuman literature and their relevance to the study of gender, particularly in relation to the performative aspects influenced by language habitus. This chapter investigates the continuous expansion of the Venice Biennale in increasing the number of participating nations, artists, and exhibition spaces. Chapter 2 and 3 examines the context of the Venice Biennale respectively in 2005 and 2022, exploring the institutional framework and socio-political backgrounds. Moreover, they delve into curatorial, artists' practices, artworks and projects that shaped the exhibitions. Both the 2nd and the 3rd Chapters highlight the author-chosen key exhibition matters, artistic interventions, and subversive strategies related to gender. The content intersects with the reviewed literature and attempts to explore the potential extension of the established boundaries of contemporary artistic practices, emphasising how certain works and projects can hold a deeper significance and serve as catalysts for positive social value, which should be widely shared and disseminated. Finally, Chapter 4 confronts 2005 and 2022 curators and artists' work implications and significance, broadening the theoretical

frameworks. It presents the conclusions drawn from the research, summarising key findings, contributions, and avenues for further exploration within the field.

Through this comprehensive examination, this dissertation aims to deepen the awareness of inclusivity and learning to relate to diversity. It pursues to broader conversations on equality and sustainability on a professional-socio-political-ecological scale that need to be potentially explored and achieved not only while regarding the arts.

1. Literature Review and Research Approach

This research is intended for pedagogical use and is based on the concept of gender from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. To examine gender representation in the 2005 and 2022 Venice Biennale editions², the opening passage of the 1st Chapter delves into the pivotal texts, with a particular focus on literature that explores the relationship between feminism and art. While there exists a vast corpus of literature on this topic, this review begins by examining two different gender definitions and a historical text before broadening its scope to include more fluid categorisations and recent concept developments which provides insights into the research comprehensive knowledge. Subsequently, the study emphasises the role of the Venice Biennale in promoting inclusivity at a national and international levels thanks to the participating artists and their works. In the final section, the study discusses the methodology rationale used to choose two distinct editions of the Venice Biennale, specifically the 51st in 2005 and 59th in 2022, as case studies to evaluate and validate the thesis. The two venues are then separately analysed in the 2nd and 3rd Chapters.

1.1 Gender, Art, and Activism

In usage notes, the term gender is explained by Oxford Online Lexicon as:

It is possible to define gender as interchangeable with “sex,” indicating that the term can be used when differentiating male creatures from female ones biologically. However, the concept of gender, a word primarily applied to human beings, has additional connotations having to do with general behaviour, social interactions, and most importantly, one’s fundamental sense of self. People increasingly recognise that a complex spectrum between male and female exists not only mentally, psychologically, and behaviourally, but also anatomically — there have always been intersex people³.

² As detailed later in the explanation, the examination was conducted with a specific focus on the gender categories of men and women.

³ Oxford Online Lexicon, *Gender*; <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/gender> [last access on 12 May 2023].

The explanation of this term is labelled as a concept and reveals intertwined aspects. These facets include the formerly intrinsic relationship with objective biological differentiation of male and the female conditions, its potential empathetic-relational level; and the distant possibility of applying the term to non-human categories as well. Instead, while considering another attempted definition, on the 20th of January 2023, the World Health Organisation (WHO) included gender in its *Health topics* and gave a wider, more evaluated and adaptable definition, according to which:

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. [...] Rigid gender norms also negatively affect people [...]⁴.

The definition is subsequently broadened to incorporate the social aspect as the primary constitutive characteristic of gender. Consequently, the objectivity of biological data is deferred, highlighting the variable pluriesistence of genders.

Taking these definitions – two of many – into account, several conclusions can be drawn. Seeking to avoid a trial-and-error approach to choose which one is better, sociology Professor Maria Antonietta Trasforini's reflections were elected to formerly and wordily analyse what gender means. According to her, gender requires a repositioning of one's perspective to question disciplinary tools and knowledge. Gender pervasively affects social relations over time and space, thus the outcomes have tightly woven to construct social entities with the deceptive characteristic of natural forms⁵. On the basis of these clarifications and without any deterministic considerations, gender is examined here in its interplay with many other dimensions, especially history, art, curators and artists' experiences.

First of all, there is the historical coincidence matter, whereby gender discourse and its chronological evolution is analysed. Utilising standpoint epistemology to trace this

⁴ World Health Organisation, *Health Topics. Gender*; https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1 [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁵ M. A. Trasforini, *Le domande giuste. A proposito di artiste*, in *NUOVA INFORMAZIONE BIBLIOGRAFICA*, VI, 2, 2009, p. 2. Maria Antonietta Trasforini is not the only one to affirm the social construction of gender, as referenced later.

argument development, Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is the starting point of this research and a seminal piece in feminist literature. De Beauvoir writes during an era when gender roles were profoundly imbalanced and argues that men have oppressed women by portraying them as subaltern. Her text also revolves around identifying the origin of this gendered domination-subordination dynamic⁶. She asserts that being a woman is a character and that one is not born, but rather becomes. She also depicts womanhood as a process shaped by society. De Beauvoir stated regarding woman's social positioning:

Her condition has remained the same through superficial changes, and it is this condition that demines what is called the "character" of woman: she "reveals in immanence", she is contrary, she is contemptibly utilitarian, she is false, theatrical, self-seeking, and so on. There is an element of truth in all this. But we must only note that the varieties of behaviour reported are not dictated to woman by her hormones nor predetermined in the structure of the female brain: they are shaped as in mould by her situation⁷.

By the time she wrote, her ground-breaking recognition that societal forces influence the process gender understanding challenged the 1950s prevailing view that womanhood was a natural phenomenon. This conception of gender roles led toward the feminist political ideologies and movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to achieve gender equality in various arenas, including common rights and education⁸. Feminist theories and political associations significantly influenced art history. For instance, the scholar Linda Nochlin's essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, a cornerstone of feminist approach in art history, examines the institutional and societal barriers that have historically prevented women artists from achieving recognition and success. She argues that it is not a lack of talent or ability that has held women back, but rather a patriarchal system that has systematically excluded them

⁶ S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New York: Vintage Books, 2011.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 566.

⁸ Juliet Mitchell explains the causes of the foundation of the *Women's Liberation Movement* in her book *Woman's Estate* (1966). This essay examines student movements, relations with the hippy movement and ideology and interrelationships with Black Power. Mitchell places feminism and socialism in the same state of being, coming to the conclusion that a stable harmonic model is still lacking in order to be able to enunciate a valid revolutionary strategy for women.

from positions of power and influence⁹. Nochlin's feminist essay challenged the dominant narrative of art history paving the way for further inquiry into the intersection of gender, race, and class in art production and perception. Indeed, during the late 1970s and 1980s, several artists started using feminist theories in their works to address issues of gender identity and stereotypes. As assumed by the artist, critic, and curator Lea Vergine in *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia*, the categorisation of an artwork as feminist is determined by its ability to challenge and disrupt certain codes and conventions, and how it confronts ideologies of femininity. However, thanks to this disruptive value, the feminist artwork risks being subordinated to others, and therefore side-lined or recognised as inferior¹⁰. The marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream discourse of feminist art is examined by art historian Griselda Pollock. Her written contributions intersect feminism, art, and psychoanalysis and regard the representation of femininity in art history. In Pollock's opinion, patriarchal lenses have constructed the historical representation of femininity in art, perpetuating a dichotomy between active masculine and passive feminine roles¹¹. Nevertheless, artists interested in pointing out this unequal contrast have continued to explore and challenge physical and conceptual limits of art practices revealing patriarchal culture subaltern implications¹². At that time, it was clear that the societal gaze to interpret the world was rooted in male domination, implying that the adjective *feminine* was something weaker, passive or to be avoided, and consequently discriminated¹³. In the 1990s, within the academic sphere, feminism and feminist theories have gradually made way for disciplines which encompass social inclusivity, such as women and gender studies. This progress reflected the recognition of the interconnectedness of gender with other socio-cultural categories such as race, class and sexuality. Specifically, gender studies aim to examine and challenge societal norms, power dynamics, and inequalities related to gender, while also exploring the

⁹ L. Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, in "ARTnews" 69, 9, 1971, pp. 22-39.

¹⁰ L. Vergine, *L'altra metà dell'avanguardia. 1910-1940*, Milan: Mazzotta Editore, 1980, p. 11.

¹¹ G. Pollock, *Femininity, feminism and histories of art*, London: Routledge, 1988, pp. 50-90.

¹² In this book, Raffaella Perna specifically refers to Italian feminism in its historical and political context. However, the author argues that this aspect can also be expanded to encompass the broader Western perspective, as it encompasses multiple feminisms. R. Perna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo in Italia negli anni '70*, Milan: Postmedia books, 2013, p. 57.

¹³ C. De Zegher, *The inside is the outside: the relations the (feminine) space*, in *Women artists at the millenium*, edited by C. Amstrong and C. De Zegher, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006, p. 216.

experiences and contributions of individuals who have historically been marginalised or excluded based on their gender identity, physical features and style expression. This interdisciplinary field encompasses a range of theoretical frameworks and methodologies, fostering critical analysis and promoting social parity while respecting diversity. By expanding beyond the boundaries of feminism, gender studies offer a more inclusive and nuanced approach, embracing lesbian, gay, trans, and racial concerns and leading to innovative research methodologies and literature¹⁴. In this concern, possibly the most ground-breaking text that was published in those years was Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*¹⁵. Throughout this text, Butler argued that language contains a binarism that is connected to a fundamentally phallogocentric society, and thus, feminism needs to theorise gender without referencing the "natural female body or the concept of women itself"¹⁶. They also accomplished that gender is performative, asserting that identities are not pre-existing but rather an expression that can be brought into action¹⁷. Their work has provided a platform for artists to explore the fluidity of gender and create works that are both challenging and thought-provoking. As Butler posits, "Gender is not only a social construction, but also a contested field in which individuals must stake out their position"¹⁸. This statement has become a major topic of discussion in contemporary art. Similarly to Butler's questioning regarding the binomial relationship between sex and gender, Donna Haraway, a biologist and renowned author, attempts to envisage a post-gendered world by examining the dichotomy between humans and machines within Western philosophy and re-evaluating technology in society. Haraway contends that what is considered cultural has shifted due to the breakdown of three fundamental boundaries: those between humans and animals, between humans and machines, and between physical and non-

¹⁴ Specifically, gender studies emerged in the 1970s, but it is claimed to have developed mainly in the following decades. Women's studies, which is mostly concerned with the study of gender differences between men and women, has also been more successful after the discipline was established. In this regard, it is interesting to note the difficulty that many at-the-time neo disciplines have in achieving academic parity with others.

¹⁵ In this text, reference is made to Judith Butler using the personal pronoun *they*.

¹⁶ J. Butler, *Questioni di Genere. Il femminismo e la sovversione dell'identità*, Urbino: Editori Laterza, pp. 59-60, 116-128, 131.

¹⁷ The idea of gender performativity is reiterated in the interview between Roberta Scorrane and Judith Butler in R. Scorrane, *Rethinking the World*, in *Il Corriere Della Sera*. Sette, 5 May 2023, pp.34-36. In this interview, the American philosopher reaffirms how the identity acquired by sex at birth seems to take something away from others.

¹⁸ J. Butler, *Questioni di Genere*. cit., pp.7-10 and YouTube, *Who's afraid of Gender*; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvIHKNvb6rI> [last access on 13 May 2023].

physical¹⁹. According to Haraway, the human body is defined as a surface of intersection of multiple and mutable codes of information, ranging from the genetic code to that of computer science. The focus of investigation lies in the shift from a biologically irrational evolution to an evolution contaminated by genetic engineering, neuroscience, and nanotechnologies – a deliberate and conscious evolution rather than a random one. In this evolving landscape, the concept of the body extends infinitely, surpassing its own boundaries and the terms of a border war, where relations of production and reproduction are at stake. Haraway advocates for the blurring of boundaries, for the transgression of borders powerful fusions, and dangerous possibilities where affinities, rather than differences, emerge. Opposing dichotomies such as mind/body, animal/human, organism/machine, man/woman, public/private, primitive/civilized, and nature/culture are all called into question. It is from this standpoint that mechanisms are activated to escape the traps of identity²⁰. Haraway's philosophy of Cybernetic Feminism endeavours to explore the intricate interplay among gender, culture, technology, and power dynamics within the contemporary global context. By deconstructing traditional power dynamics and oppressive systems, Cybernetic Feminism aims to restoring balance. Haraway advocates for a transfer of perspective, viewing it as a guerrilla strategy to break free from the confines of repetition and escape the confines of stereotyped and fixed identities. This transfer offers a new vantage point and an opportunity for a fresh outlook. It can be perceived as a heightened level of conceptualisation, a distinct sensation that stimulates new possibilities. The transfer amalgamates various fields of knowledge, including neuro-physics, genetic biology, linguistics, biotechnology, cyborg engineering, the language of emotions, art, and interpersonal histories encouraging plurality and differentiated forms of social organisation.

The political application of these theories, ideologies, practices, or modes of thought is an inevitable consequence. In this context, the intersection of body and technology

¹⁹ Archive.org, *Manifestly Haraway*;
<https://ia803104.us.archive.org/7/items/manifestlyharawaythecyborgmanifestothecompanionspeciesmanifestorepublicanesimogeopolitico/MANIFESTLY%20HARAWAY%2C%20THE%20CYBORG%20MANIFESTO%2C%20THE%20COMPANION%20SPECIES%20MANIFESTO%2C%20REPUBLICANESIMO%20GEOPOLITICO.pdf> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁰ Uoa.gr, *A Cyborg Manifesto*;
http://users.uoa.gr/~cdokou/HarawayCyborgManifesto.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2DgiKvkKTTzNowzsf2VCmlaRvld_A_niIbaycW567nIYemir-06vR0fY [last access on 16 May 2023].

represents an advanced stage of this transition, wherein a radical restructuring of systems, including those of production, is recognised. In this framework, rethinking the subject entails reconsidering its corporeal roots: the body is not merely a biological given but a field of inscription for sociocultural codes, and new identities are predominantly defined through new technologies. Therefore the intrinsic relation between identity, body, and technology is inevitable in the Global North. The Spanish author Paul B. Preciado examines the concept of gender as a technology produced and reproduced through hormones, language, and other cultural and social practices in his book *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics*²¹. Preciado argues that gender is not a stable, fixed identity, but rather a fluid and performative concept that is constantly being re-inscribed and re-negotiated through everyday actions and interactions. Influenced by feminist and queer theories, Preciado has been a prominent voice in contemporary discussions of gender and sexuality, particularly within the context of the LGBTQ+ community. Another scholar and theorist who is interested in challenging dominant norms and exploring the complexity of embodiment, subjectivity and identity is Rosi Braidotti. While on one hand, Preciado has written extensively about the ways in which gender and sexuality are socially constructed, and how individuals can resist and subvert dominant norms; on the other, Braidotti has explored the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersect and shape identity. Braidotti's *Posthuman Glossary* is particularly relevant in providing a feminist perspective on the human subject beyond its patriarchal and capitalist dimensions. Braidotti's posthumanism aims to contribute to the struggle for a post-neoliberal, post-patriarchal world, opening up new possibilities for feminist art and theory to respond to the challenges of the contemporary context²². The *Posthuman Glossary* is an anthology that helps to understand critical theories that have recently emerged, providing insightful exploration of this new development. Braidotti views posthumanism as a radical departure from the traditional humanist view of the world, where human beings are the ultimate point of reference for all cultural and political considerations. Consequently, Braidotti considers posthumanism in its potential condition to shift how individual identity, gender, and power relations are observed.

²¹ P. B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics*, New York: The Feminist Press, 2013.

²² R. Braidotti, M. Hlavajove, *Posthuman Glossary*, in "Foucault Studies", December 2019; <https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/foucault-studies/article/view/5898/6568> [last access on 16 May 2023].

Posthumanism, as a theoretical framework, challenges the anthropocentric worldview that has long dominated Western thought, by blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human. Through an analysis of posthumanism, women artists have been able to explore the implications and consequences of existing gender norms and adopt a posthuman approach to create new perspectives on their position in society. In the same vein, in an era of technological acceleration and increasing complexity, xenofeminism has been identified as a new trend in contemporary feminism. Identified by Preciado as the missing link between the radical feminism of the 1970s and the current emancipatory strategies of cyborg, trans and queer culture, xenofeminism reconfigures gender politics in a world transformed by automation, globalisation and the digital revolution²³. Helen Hester is one of the founders of this thinking and of Laboria Cuboniks, the collective that drafted the xenofeminist manifesto²⁴. In her book *Xenofemminism*, Hester develops a definition of xenofeminism by relating it to current reproductive technologies, interrogating the relationship between reproduction and futurity to focus on the possible uses of real technologies for the purpose of a future-oriented gender politics and alternative models of reproduction²⁵. Both posthuman and xenofeminism perspectives seek to reject limitations. While they share an interest in technology and view it as a tool for enhancing human abilities, xenofeminists see it as a means of challenging patriarchal structures that have long dominated society.

The exploration of gender roles and feminist movements in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the subsequent developments in gender theory in the 1990s have significantly contributed to the discourse of gender identity and representation in art and society. These contributions have challenged the historical representation of femininity in art and opened up a space for artists to explore the fluidity of gender. While feminist art and theory have focused on the gendered experience of inequality, exclusion, and power, the intensification of neoliberal policies has created the need for new forms of resistance and re-politicisation, which has opened up the possibility of exploring new

²³ Neroedition, *Helen Hester Xenofemminismo*; <https://not.neroeditions.com/helen-hester-xenofemminismo/> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁴ Laboriacuboniks, *Laboriacuboniks*; <http://laboriacuboniks.net/> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁵ H. Hester, *Xenofeminism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.

feminist perspectives²⁶. More recently, the largest museums, institutions, and foundations of contemporary art in the Western world have produced many exhibitions on queer and posthumanism²⁷. In the study of art history, this trend is worth taking into account, as it is well known that this discipline, the art exhibition analysis, and thus of artists' work, is often a means of understanding contemporary concerns.

At the end of this brief overview, the implications of which remain open, it is also important to remember the value of language as a powerful tool in shaping our perceptions of the world. Its intrinsic characteristic of being plastic-performative constructs and reinforces social and cultural norms²⁸. This means that language has the power to create new meanings, actions and interactions in the world. Concerning gender, language plays a crucial role in shaping our considerations and behaviour of what it means to be male or female and its analysis over art. The feminist theorist, writer and philosopher, Monique Wittig, in her seminal work *The Straight Mind*, shows how performativity and productivity of language have been used to shape bodies, gender, and sex. It could be said that there is an existential synchronicity between linguistic performativity and the object/subject²⁹. Thus, performativity can be understood as a form of *poiesis*, as the possibility and potentiality of words and utterances to produce actions in the world and to have an effect. Wittig emphasises the

²⁶ There follows a mention of two exhibitions considered by the author to be among the most comprehensive in the problematisation of the female figure: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA, 4 March – 16 July 2007 and *Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA, 2007. The former highlighted the impact of feminist art on the art world from 1965 to 1980, including over 120 artists and collectives from around the world. The latter examined the role of feminist art in a global context, featuring the works of over 80 women artists from over 50 countries.

²⁷ In this regard, it should be mentioned multi venues and forward-looking Jeffrey Deitch's exhibition *Post Human*, FAE, Musée D'art Contemporain, Pully/Lausanne, 14 June – 13 September 1992. The show explored technological advancement, social and aesthetic pluralism, and new frontiers of identity. The renewed interest in figuration took a conceptual rather than formal approach, influenced by conceptual, body, and performance art movements of the late '60s and '70s. These artists challenge traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and self-identity, reflecting broader societal shifts. This new figurative art represents a departure from traditional realism, as it responds to an increasingly artificial reality, potentially marking the end of Realism. This exhibition was also hosted at Castello di Rivoli – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli, 1992; Deste Foundation, House of Cyprus, Athens, 1993; Deichtorhallen Hamburg, 1993; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1993.

²⁸ It is called *plastic* because it can be moulded and shaped by its users, and *performative* because it has the ability to carry out actions such as making promises, giving orders, or creating social relationships. The plastic-performative power of language is a central concept in many fields, including linguistics, philosophy and social theory.

²⁹ M. Wittig, *The Straight Mind*, in "Feminist Issues 1", 1, 1981, pp. 5-10.

political marking of speech as action. The plastic potential of language is used by hetero-dominant thought to materialise and naturalise an oppressive and classist sexual difference. The hierarchical association of pairs of terms produces a normative *One/Other* dichotomy. This creates a reality that favours the former, which is identified as singular, rational and positive, and discredit the latter. Opposite pairs of terms such as *man/woman* and *masculine/feminine* also function in this way. Grammatically, in gender marking, functional and exclusionary subjectivities are formed, making the feminine disappear, and Wittig argues that language “projects bundles of reality onto the social body, trampling and shaping it violently [...]”³⁰. The scholar emphasises how and to what extent language is inherently heterosexist because it assumes and reinforces the binary opposition between male and female. This binarism not only excludes non-aligning identities, but also reinforces traditional gender roles and norms that are deeply embedded in our social and cultural structure. Wittig argues that the only way to challenge binarism is through a radical rethinking of language itself, one that recognises the arbitrary nature of gender and refuses to accept it as a natural or essential aspect of identity. She considers gender as a social construct that is created and reinforced through language. Wittig argues:

Il linguaggio non è che la realtà della società - quella realtà che il linguaggio stesso forgia e plasma con violenza. Gli stessi corpi degli attori sociali sono modellati da linguaggi astratti (così come da quello meno astratti). Ciò accade a conferma della plasticità del reale al linguaggio³¹.

By coincidence, it can be noted that both De Beauvoir and Wittig use the same verb “to mould” in the quotations reported (reference footnote number 5). The significance of this suggests the concept of performativity. Butler examines this once again in their book *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Using the example of an obstetrician declaring “It's a girl” during childbirth, Butler argues that this act could

³⁰ M. Wittig, *La marcatura di genere* (1985), in *Il Pensiero Eterosessuale*, translated by F. Zappino, Ombre Corte, Verona 2019, p. 99.

³¹ It follows the English translation by the author: “Language is nothing but the reality of society - a reality that language itself forges and shapes with violence. The bodies of social actors themselves are moulded by abstract languages (as well as by less abstract ones). This happens to confirm the malleability of the real to language.” From M. Wittig, *Sul contratto sociale* (1989), in *Il Pensiero Eterosessuale*, translated by F. Zappino, Ombre Corte, Verona 2019, p. 65.

be interpreted as performative because it reflects on the body of the declared baby girl, inducing her to perform a set of norms designed to initiate a process of feminisation³². Building on Butler's ideas, other scholars have explored the links between language performativity and gender. Haraway is also involved in arguing that both sex and gender are outcomes of technoscientific processes of representation and that the idea of these being a biological reality is, in fact, incorrect³³. Haraway carefully dissects the implications of using language to describe women and men³⁴. The language used in discussions of *woman/man* can be seen as a material resource that can be used to shape perceptions of the world. Through choice of language, Haraway claims that *woman* is a category and reinforces essentialist and patriarchal assumptions about gender. By contrast, the term *female* refers to the biological and material aspects of sex and reproduction. She also emphasises that these two aspects are both socially and culturally constructed. In making this argument, Haraway demonstrates the importance of understanding the implications of words. For instance, then, Preciado's queer theories also challenge fixed notions of gender and sexuality. In the aforementioned *Testo Junkie*, Preciado analyses the violence of medical performative practices and identifies them as technology for producing somatic fictions. Masculine and feminine are terms without empirical content, beyond the technologies that produce them³⁵. This limited understanding is enforced through the use of language and discourses that create a sense of normality around traditional gender roles and norms. Another important contribution on power of language in shaping our understanding of femininity is Andrea Long Chu's *Femine*. Chu argues that femininity is a set of behaviours and practices that are performed and constructed through language. She contends that the only way to challenge the restrictive nature of femininity is through a radical reimagining of language itself. Some key themes and

³² J. Butler, *Corpi che contano. I limiti discorsivi del "Sesso"* (1993), translated by S. Capelli, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1996.

³³ D. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, New York: Routledge, 1990; D. Haraway, *Manifesto Cyborg. Donne, tecnologie e biopolitiche del corpo* (1991), translation by L. Borghi, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1995.

³⁴ Different references are here taken into consideration: D. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991; D. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016; D. Haraway, *Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene*. e-flux journal, 75, 2016, pp. 1-18; D. Haraway, *Chthulucene. Sopravvivere su un pianeta infetto*, NERO edition, 2020.

³⁵ J. E. Muñoz, *Testo tossico. Sesso, droghe e biopolitiche nell'era farmacopornografica*, (2008), translated by Di E. Rafanelli Roma: Fandango Libri, 2015. Pp. 71-91.

intersections can be identified between performativity of language, gender, queerness, posthumanism, and activism concerning identity are complex and multifaceted. However, these are closely linked, as language is a primary means of constructing and reinforcing identities and norms. The performativity of language can also be subverted and used to challenge dominant cultural norms and create *alternative* identities. The concept of posthumanism also intersects as it provides a framework for exploring alternative forms of gender identity and expression beyond the gender binary. Through the use of language and performance, it is possible to create a sense of community and challenge oppressive structures. In José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics*, marginalised groups use performance to resist dominant cultural norms and create alternative identities. For example, Muñoz assumes that queer people of colour use performance to create their own subcultures and identities and use language to perform them³⁶. Building on the work of scholars such as Witting, Butler, Haraway, Preciado, Muñoz and many other scholars have explored how language and performance as tools for social change. Central to this discussion is the idea that language and culture are not neutral nor objective, but are instead shaped by social and political forces. Queerness, which disrupts binary categories, allows individuals to challenge the dominant cultural norms that constrain and limit their identities. Similarly and not in antinomy, posthumanism challenges the traditional humanist idea that human beings are the centre of the universe by recognising the interdependence and interconnectedness of all forms of life. By valuing all forms of life, activism concerning gender identity seeks to challenge systemic inequalities and discrimination. Through various forms of activism, including protests, advocacy, and education, activists work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society that values diversity. By understanding the ways in which culture and its language shape socio-political norms, by challenging these forces that construct and reinforce gender, and by performing activism and resistance,

³⁶ J. E. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Chicago University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp 4-5; 7-8; 27-29; 109-110. In these pages, Muñoz discusses the concept of *disidentification* and how it relates to the performance of identities that challenge dominant cultural norms. Then, Muñoz discusses the role of drag performance in challenging gender and racial norms, and argues that drag performers use language and other forms of cultural expression to create new possibilities for identity and belonging. Muñoz also discusses the ways in which language and other forms of cultural expression are used by queer of color performers to resist dominant cultural norms and create new possibilities for identity and belonging.

individuals can create a more equitable society that values diversity and inclusivity. The main problem that artists may face in using their body as a political tool and stumble into censorship and backlash from those in power or even legal repercussions for their work. Artists can also use their bodies to challenge and disrupt traditional gender binaries and roles, by performing gender. For example, men artist may use their body to perform femininity or women artists may use their body to perform masculinity. This can highlight the fluidity and instability of gender categories and expose the ways in which gender is socially constructed and enforced. Within the artistic sphere, a profound shift occurs as the personal transforms into the political by boldly integrating private taboos associated with femininity, including menstruation and domestic work, into the manifest content of the artwork. This transformation is frequently facilitated through the prevalent practice of self-awareness, which serves as a means of artistic preparation. The dimension of struggle is mediated through body identities. And since the body is in-being, in-time and in-space, the potential of resistance expands as its action is related to the multitude of aspects it faces in everyday life. Following the academic and feminist activist Lynne Segal's quotation in *The Art of Feminism* exhibition catalogue there are artists that explore resistance in domestic or neighbourhood environments³⁷. In those cases, the personal dimension is political and gives greater meaning to everyday actions enhancing capacity for resistance. There, resistance is performative and can take many different forms, such as activism. In its performativity – protests, lobbying, campaigning, and direct action – activism aims to bring about social or political change. Activism concerning gender identity is a specific type of activism that focuses on issues related to gender identity and expression, such as advocating for the rights of non-binary, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Art and artists can use their actions to bring a political message to their audience by using verbal, aesthetic, and body languages to raise awareness playing a significant role in promoting change.

³⁷ L. Gosling, H. Robinson, A. Tobin, *The personal feminist. Making the personal political*, in *The Art of Feminism. Images that Shaped the Fight for Equality, 1857-2022*, revised edition, edited by H. Reckitt, London: Tate Publishing, 2022, pp. 236-256, here p. 237.

This literature review can be summarised by a quote from Francesca Alfano Miglietti's (FAM) book *Identità mutanti*, forwardly published in 1997. It reads:

Il limite dei sistemi tradizionali in cui l'arte viene distribuita e "isolata" è quello di non intendere l'ubiquità linguistica. La possibilità di assumere identità multiple, di determinare un linguaggio che non impone descrizioni ma che favorisce le connessioni. La sfida per le nuove frontiere della comunicazione, in un universo artistico della mutazione, si è spostata su nuovi incroci possibili che innestano immagini, tecnologie, culture etniche, chirurgia estetica, manifesti teorici, che si inseriscono nel processo di mondializzazione come momento di progettualità polifoniche, di meticcaggi di teorie e linguaggi, come costruzione di connessioni aliene che creano situazioni plurali e nuove contaminazioni che ibridano gli infiniti linguaggi possibili in una dissolvenza comunicativa in cui prende forma la differenza. Un'arte che ha bisogno di nuovi luoghi di distribuzione, diffusione, contagio, un'arte che agisce negli scenari della mutazione come un VIRUS : un codice che diventa attivo dopo un certo periodo o in una particolare situazione, che si inserisce in un sistema, in un "corpo culturale", in una data situazione, ne modifica e ne altera il funzionamento. L'anacronismo – ormai è evidente – è nella separazione, è nel voler difendere e proteggere i territori linguistici delle contaminazioni. Assolutamente necessaria invece è la creazione di un cosmo nomade tra universi di segni in espansione, in cui poter inglobare le metamorfosi di corpi, di linguaggi e di atmosfere³⁸.

³⁸ It follows the English translation by the author: "The limitation of traditional systems in which art is distributed and "isolated" is the failure to comprehend linguistic ubiquity. The possibility of assuming multiple identities, of establishing a language that does not impose descriptions but facilitates connections. The challenge for the new frontiers of communication in a mutating artistic universe has shifted towards new possible intersections that graft together images, technologies, ethnic cultures, aesthetic surgery, theoretical manifestos, integrating into the process of globalization as moments of polyphonic design, hybridizing theories and languages, constructing alien connections that generate plural situations and new contaminations, blending the infinite possible languages in a communicative dissolution that gives shape to difference. An art that requires new places of distribution, diffusion, and contagion, an art that operates within mutating scenarios like a VIRUS: a code that becomes active after a certain period or in a particular situation, inserting itself into a system, a 'cultural body,' a specific situation, modifying and altering its functioning. The anachronism - now evident - lies in separation, in the desire to defend and protect linguistic territories from contaminations. Conversely, the creation of a nomadic cosmos between expanding universes of signs is absolutely necessary, where the metamorphoses of bodies, languages, and atmospheres can be encompassed". Although somewhat lengthy, the value of this quotation was considered by the author to be of essential importance in order to continue to highlight the far-sightedness of Miglietti's mentioned thought and writing, thus of a woman writer. F. A. Miglietti, *Identità mutanti. Dalla piega alla piaga: esseri delle contaminazioni contemporanee*, Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1997, pp. 14-15.

1.2 Inclusiveness at Venice Biennale

From its inception, the Venice Biennale has been at the forefront of promoting novel artistic tendencies and convening interdisciplinary exhibitions in contemporary arts, through a unique approach³⁹. The history of the Venice Biennale traced back to 1895 when the initial International Art Exhibition was launched, which spanned the entire 20th century until the 59th edition was held in 2022. Its story is documented and promoted at the Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC)⁴⁰. Despite its enduring existence, certain elements have remained consistent throughout the years of exhibition production, and these can be described as the fundamental pillars that define the essence of the Venice Biennale: firstly, exhibitions by National Pavilions, each with its own curator and project; secondly, the International Exhibition, curated by a Biennale-appointed artistic director; and thirdly, Collateral Events, which are approved by the Biennale curator⁴¹. The Venice Art Biennale is widely recognised as the world leader in contemporary art exhibitions, with the number of participating countries growing from 59 in 1999 to 90 in 2019⁴². The organisation has strengthened its relationship with the local community through educational activities and guided visits. These activities have been supported by the city of Venice, and a cooperation with universities and research institutes has been established. In the three years from 2012-2014, the Venice Biennale collaborated with 227 universities, 79 Italian and 148 international⁴³. This has become more systematic and continuous through the international project *Biennale College* and *Biennale Sessions*. Both provide opportunities and activities for research and production to the younger generations and

³⁹ In 2023, at present, according to the legal nomenclature, the Venice Biennale is a cultural foundation based in Venice, entitled *La Biennale di Venezia Foundation*. In this thesis, it was chosen to refer to *La Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia* as the *Venice Biennale* for ease of reading. As for the editions of the *International Art Exhibition*, then *Venice Art Biennale* wording is used, also preceded by the year, when necessary. These choices have been made not only after a careful comparison of sources, websites and official documents, but also to give coherence to the thesis.

⁴⁰ ASAC promotes exhibitions and events collaborating with different departments of Venice Biennale. La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/asac> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁴¹ La Biennale organizes exhibitions and research across its diverse departments: Arts (1895), Architecture (1980), Cinema (1932), Dance (1999), Music (1930), and Theatre (1934). From: *La Biennale di Venezia, Storia 1895-2022*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/storia> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁴² La Biennale di Venezia, *The Organisation*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/la-biennale-di-venezias> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁴³ Ibid.

students within the organisation of the Institution. Reviewing the editions of the 2000s, the Venice Biennale cultural and socio-economic impact is amplified by the increasing visibility, thus involvement of national pavilions, events, activities and visitors. From 2001 to 2022, the Venice Biennale hosted eleven International Art Exhibitions featuring renowned artists and diverse themes. The 49th exhibition, directed by Harald Szeemann, showcased the range of artists and their works under the title *Plateau of Humankind*. Francesco Bonami directed the 50th exhibition, titled *Dreams and Conflicts - The Viewer's Dictatorship*, as a polyphonic display of voices and ideas, featuring various national pavilions and collateral events. The 51st Art Biennale, curated by Spanish women Maria De Corral and Rosa Martínez, drew over 915,000 visitors with international exhibitions and 70 national pavilions. The 52nd Art Biennale directed by American art critic Robert Storr, was the most visited art show in Italy that year and featured the participation of 76 national pavilions and 34 collateral events, under the theme *Think with the Senses - Feel with the Mind. Art in the Present Tense*. The 53rd Art Biennale, titled *Fare Mondi // Making Worlds*, was directed by Daniel Birnbaum. It connected more than 90 artists from around the world in a single exhibition, featuring new works in all languages, and attracted 375,702 visitors, breaking the 2007 record with an 18% increase. The 54th Art Biennale, titled *ILLUMInations* and curated by Swiss art historian and critic Bice Curiger, was held in 2011 and saw a new record of visitors, surpassing 440,000, with 83 artists, 89 countries represented, and 37 collateral events. The 55th Art Biennale, curated by Massimiliano Gioni and titled *The Encyclopedic Palace*, was held in 2013, attracted over 475,000 visitors, and featured 160 artists from 38 countries, as well as the participation of the Vatican City for the first time. Moreover, the 56th Art Biennale, curated by Okwui Enwezor, was titled *All the World's Futures* and held in 2015, attracting over 501,000 visitors and featuring 136 artists, 89 of which were first-time presenters. The 58th Art Biennale *May You Live in Interesting Times* was curated by Ralph Rugoff and featured the works of 78 artists from around the world and presented 90 national participations, the highest, including for the first time Algeria, Ghana, Madagascar, Pakistan. Finally, the 59th Art Biennale broke several records in terms of inclusiveness: 180 first-time Biennial participants, more than 1500 artworks, 7 first-time national participants –

Republic of Cameroon, Namibia, Nepal, Sultanate of Oman and Uganda – more than 800,000 tickets sold, and 4,062 average daily visitors⁴⁴.

It is clear from these numbers that the activity of the Venice Biennale has been spreading in a penetrating way nationally and internationally. However, criticisms have been raised over time drawing attention to the ways in which the Venice Biennale has infiltrated in shaping culture. The act of critiquing cultural institutions such as the Venice Biennale emerged in the late 1960s as a means of challenging the legitimacy of certain art institutions and their role in the production and distribution of art⁴⁵. In their book *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, art historians Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson highlight a number of artists who have sought to critique and subvert the institutional norms of the art world⁴⁶. In this publication, the performance artist Andrea Fraser argues that the term *institutional critique* initially referred to the act of critiquing institutions, but it has since been narrowed down to refer specifically to established sites for art presentation⁴⁷. The artists and their art are often seen as opposing the institution, which is seen as co-opting and commodifying once-radical practices that were originally outside of institutional structures. However, she argues that institutional critique has always been a part of the institution of art and can only function within it⁴⁸. Sometimes, according to Fraser, when debates on the transformation of art institutions are used to assign political value to certain conditions, they often fail to account the underlying power dynamics that persist despite changing circumstances. In fact, such arguments can end up legitimising the reproduction of

⁴⁴ Data from 2001 to 2017 editions sourced from La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale Arte. Storia*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/storia-della-biennale-arte> [last access on 13 May 2023]; Data regarding the 2019 edition sourced from Kooness, *What to see and Where to go at the 58th Venice Biennale...*; <https://www.kooness.com/posts/magazine/the-58th-venice-biennale> [last access on 13 May 2023]; Data regarding the 2022 edition sourced from La Biennale di Venezia, *The 59th International Art Exhibition in Numbers*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/59th-international-art-exhibition-numbers> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁴⁵ TATE, *Art Term. Institutional Critique*; <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/i/institutional-critique> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁴⁶ B. Stimson, *what was institutional critique?*, in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, edited by Alberro, Alexander, and Blake Stimson, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009, pp. 24-32.

⁴⁷ W. Vogel, *Andrea Fraser*, in “e-flux journal”, 24, January 2023; <https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/514858/andrea-fraser> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁴⁸ A. Fraser, *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique*, in “Artforum”, September 2005; <https://www.artforum.com/print/200507/from-the-critique-of-institutions-to-an-institution-of-critique-9407> [last access on 13 May 2023].

these power dynamics⁴⁹. In this respect, it is interesting to study the Venice Biennale history, given its great ability to define the parameters of the contemporary art world. This can define the degree to which the institution is subject to external dynamics and, in turn, determines them. Many artists who have exhibited at the Venice Biennale have gone on to become household names in the international art world.

In the 2000s, some of the most renowned artists who participated in the Venice Biennale have achieved significant success in contemporary art world and have been able to take advantage of the unique Venetian platform⁵⁰. This reflects the role of the Venice Biennale in guaranteeing the success of these artists. Such recognition also acts as a form of validation for the artists and their work, helping to boost the market for those artists' work⁵¹. This is due to the proliferation of art fairs, biennial, and other international events, serving as platforms for artists to showcase their work and make connections with collectors and curators⁵². The artistic director of Kunst Merano Arte, Christiane Rekade examines the relationship between the Venice Biennale and the contemporary art market in the 2000s, in her article *The Venice Biennale: A Site for the Negotiation of Contemporary Art*. Rekade notes that some critics have accused the Venice Biennale of becoming too commercialised, with galleries and dealers using the event as a platform for promoting their artists. Rekade also notes that the Venice Biennale has been criticised for perpetuating Western-centric narratives and for failing to address issues of inequality and social justice. Some critics similarly argue that the Venice Biennale is an elitist event that is disconnected from the concerns of ordinary people, and that it primarily serves the interests of wealthy collectors and corporations⁵³. In this sense, inclusivity as a parameter of study is not only addressed at a geopolitical and economical level, but regards social equity as well, thus gender.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ F. Poli, *Il Sistema dell'arte contemporanea*, Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2011, pp. 139-144, here 141.

⁵¹ H. Belting, P. Weibel, and A. Buddensieg, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013.

⁵² G. Adam, *Trading places*, in "Financial Times", 6, June 2009;

<https://ghostarchive.org/archive/goEMt> [last access on 13 May 2023]. F. Poli, *Il Sistema dell'arte contemporanea*, cit. p. 144.

⁵³ Christiane Rekade provides a critical survey of the Venice Biennale impact on the market and vice versa. Rekade looks at the role of the Venice Biennale in promoting and shaping contemporary art trends, as well as the ways in which the art market has influenced the Biennale's programming and structure. C. Rekade, *The Venice Biennale: A Site for the Negotiation of Contemporary Art*, in *Museum and Archive on the Move: Changing Cultural Institutions in the Digital Era*, edited by Oliver Grau, Wendy Coones, and Viola Rühse, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 217-231.

Marsha Meskimmon's article *Women and the Venice Biennale: Toward Gender Equity* offers a critical overview of the representation of women artists in the Venice Biennale over the course of more than a century. Then, Meskimmon's analysis focuses particularly on the 2000s, a time when many critics and scholars were calling attention to the persistent gender disparities in the art world⁵⁴. Meskimmon notes that while the Venice Biennale has historically been dominated by male artists, there have been efforts in recent years to address this imbalance. However, Meskimmon argues that this policy alone is not enough to achieve gender equality, and that more needs to be done to address the systemic barriers that continue to limit women's participation in the art world. She notes that while women artists have made significant gains in recent years, they still face obstacles in terms of representation, institutional support, and economic opportunity. In this regard, in Anna Mostardi's Master Degree final thesis, *The difference in valuating women and men artists. From general to specific cases within auction sales*, an in-depth analysis of the representation of women artists in the Venice Biennale over a 14-year period demonstrates the presence of women at the Venice Biennale has shown an improvement. In the 58th edition in 2019, titled *May You Live in Interesting Times* and curated by Ralph Rugoff, the percentage of female artists rose to 53%, with 42 women out of a total of 79 artists. Furthermore, out of the 43 national pavilions that featured a single artist, 26 chose female artists. In the 2017 edition, *Viva Arte Viva*, curated by Christine Marcel, female artist participation was around 35%, which was two percentage points lower than the 2015 edition, where female artist participation was around 37%. Mostardi's analysis sheds light on the enduring gender disparities within the realm of art. Her findings emphasise the need for continuous efforts to address gender inequality in the art world and its market⁵⁵. This resonates with the exploration of curatorial activism in Joasia Krysa, Taru Elfing, and Nina Möntmann's book, which emphasizes the ethical implications of curatorial practices and their potential to challenge power structures and promote inclusivity. They explore the ethical implications of current curatorial models and their ability to successfully engage with audiences, and offer insights into the implications and

⁵⁴ M. Meskimmon, *Women and the Venice Biennale: Toward Gender Equity*, in "Art Journal", 72, 2, 2013, pp. 42-61.

⁵⁵ A. Mostardi, *The difference in valuating women and men artists. From general to specific cases within auction sales*, "master thesis". Ca' Foscari, 2020-2021, pp. 70-73.

potential of curatorial activism to challenge existing power structures and promote social justice, inclusivity, and balance. Thus, gender has begun to be recognised as a significant factor in curatorial approach. In order to better challenge social norms and conventions, many artists' work involves performance. In her article *Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism*, Jeanie Forte argues that specifically women's performance art has been a powerful tool for political activism and feminist artistic expression. She notes that women's performance art emerged as a response to the marginalisation of women artists in the male-dominated art world and that it has often been closely aligned with feminist politics and activism. Forte also explores the relationship between women's performance art and postmodernism, arguing that while postmodernism has often been criticised for its detachment and irony, women's performance art has provided a space for emotional expression and political engagement:

[...] through women's performance art, the body speaks both as a sign and as an intervention into language; and it is further possible for the female body to be used in such a way as to foreground the *genderisation* of culture and the repressive system of representation. [...] Women's performance actively intervenes into the process of constructing the viewing subject through the disruption of the male gaze⁵⁶.

This quote highlights to the observation that women's performance art has the purpose to explore the heterogeneous female sexuality by problematising – often using their body – women subordination to men, hence their disparity. The breakthrough of feminist performance art has provided a powerful and provocative tool for discussing gender issues. A number of prominent performance artists were invited Venice Biennale editions⁵⁷. As affirmed by Barbara Casavecchia, these artists gave visibility

⁵⁶ J. Forte, *Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism*, in *Theatre Journal*, May 1988, 40, 2, pp. 217-235, here 227-228.

⁵⁷ In recognition of the expressive potential of performance, the Venice Biennale has given it more space in its annual programme. Given the occasional format of this artistic practice, performance art became an integral part of the Venice Biennale's public programme *Meetings on Art*. Since 2019, this initiative aimed to explore the various forms of performance and the "politics that help form who we are", looking at gender, human body, ecological devastation, and national identity. This is how Aaron Cesar, who organised the performance programme with 2019 artistic director Ralph Rugoff, describes it. During the 2019 edition, thirty performances took place, eight during the opening week. Twenty-

to performance art and tackled on the patriarchal dominance of the art world through the display of emotion and physicality and provided an insightful exploration of the relationship between politics and identity, often acting collectively⁵⁸.

Over the years, the Venice Biennale has gained recognition as a world leader in contemporary art exhibitions, with increasing participation from countries worldwide. It has been praised for its educational activities, cooperation with universities, and opportunities for research and production. Furthermore, in the organisational aspects the representation of women artists in the Biennale has been a subject of scrutiny, and efforts have been made to balance gender differences and social sustainability⁵⁹. The challenges persist, and ongoing efforts are needed to achieve these social aims.

1.3 Methodology

The above literature review was redacted to provide a structural basis for organising the data collected during a six-month archival research internship. This enabled the author to identify a perspective path towards which the art world has progressively shifted its understanding of gender. In this subchapter, the archival research rationale is explained and its results are partially presented leading to the thesis questions: *is there a real increase in the legitimacy of gender inclusivity at the Venice Biennale? And how did the Venice Biennale, curators and artists contribute to growing social sustainability awareness?*

three artists were involved. The full program of Meeting on Art also included talks, readings and other events. G. Harris, *Performance Art comes to Venice Biennale*, in “Financial Times”, 3, May 2019; <https://www.ft.com/content/bcff0a1a-682b-11e9-b809-6f0d2f5705f6> [last access on 13 May 2023].

⁵⁸ B. Casavecchia, *Performing Identity in Venice*, in *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, edited by Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith, 175-184. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, pp. 175-184.

⁵⁹ The term social sustainability involves the recognition and the management of the positive and negative impacts businesses of any kind have on people. According to United Nations, building strong relationships with stakeholders, including employees, customers, and local communities, is crucial. It is important for companies to proactively manage their effects on employees, workers in the value chain, customers, and local communities. Social sustainability efforts encompass various groups, including labour, women’s empowerment, gender equality, children, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and poverty-alleviating approaches. Education and health are examples of issues related to these rights holders. The author referred to UN Global Compact, *Social Sustainability*; <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/social> [last access on 17 June 2023].

The archival research was part of *Biennale College Internship* program in 2022, when it was conducted⁶⁰. It was carried out in Italian by the author and the colleague Yuri Campus at Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC). It was coordinated by the project manager Camila Seibezzi and examined the production of women artists who participated at the Venice Art Biennale from 1978 to 2019. The chronological starting point was chosen by ASAC Organisational Manager, the lawyer Debora Rossi and selected staff as a reference to the exhibition *Materialisation of Language*, curated by Mirella Bentivoglio in 1978. Bentivoglio's show was the first all-female exhibition to be included in the Venice Biennale programme⁶¹. Instead, the year of the last edition was selected as the one of completion. During the research, physical artworks, posters, media productions and photo collections were consulted. The information accessed also consists of various books, video lectures, exhibition catalogues, journals and newspaper articles, both in printed and online form. Specific press releases were obtained through the websites of institutions, museums and foundations. The findings and data collected allowed this thesis to highlight the delicate circumstances of the unequal representation of non-male artists. Furthermore, it gave the possibility to identify when the most visible transformations took place through the different editions of the Venice Biennale and ask if and how the situation has changed.

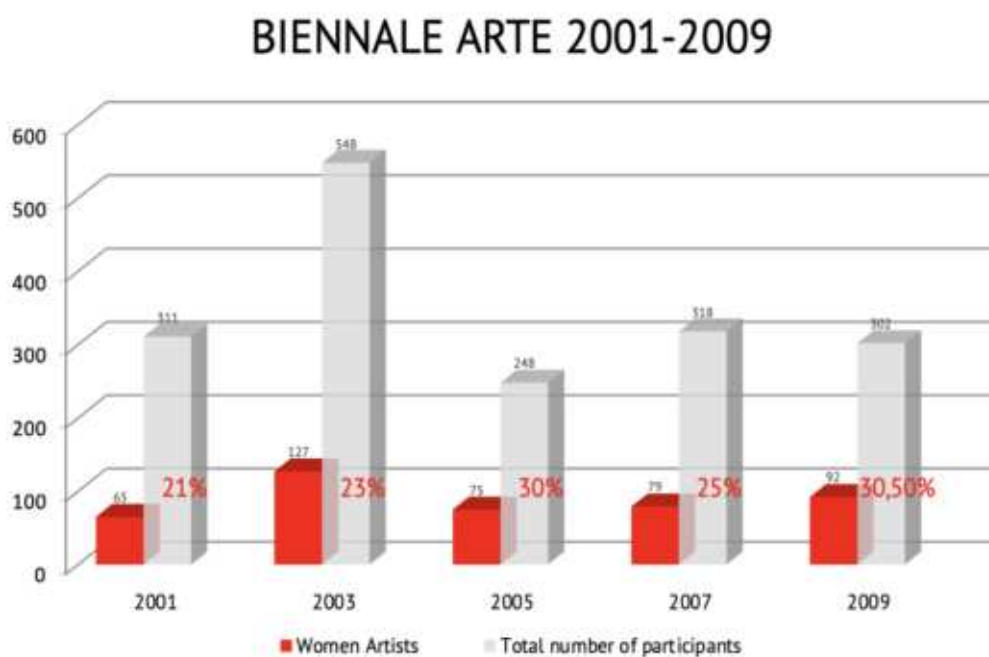
In this regard, the presentation of the data below focuses on the editions of the 2000s in terms of the results found and their relevance to the contextualisation of the proposed study. It also explains why the edition of 2005 and 2022 were chosen.

In the first place, the total number of artists participating in each edition was counted and compared to the number of female artists present in the same exhibition. Histograms were created to visually represent the massive disparity between man and woman participants for each of the 11 editions is analysed (Ill. 1, Ill. 2). Their artworks were selected according to the main thematic trends of artistic production discussed at the press conference of the 2022 Venice Biennale: the representation of the metamorphosis of the body, the relationship between the individual and technologies,

⁶⁰La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale College Internship*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/biennale-college-internship-2023> [last access on 13 May 2023].

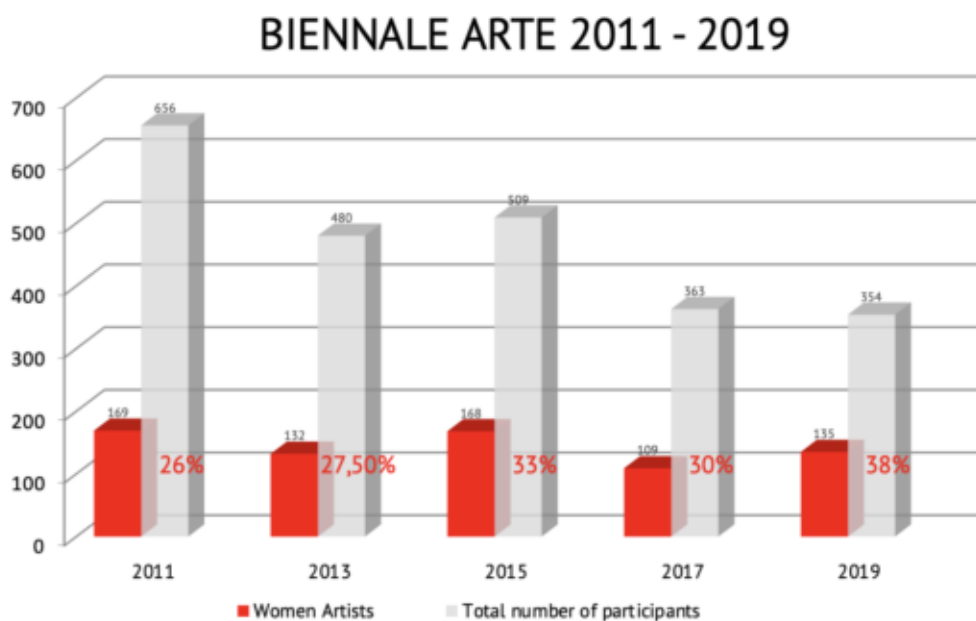
⁶¹ La Biennale di Venezia, *Ristampata la Storica Pubblicazione del 1978, Materializzazione del Linguaggio*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/ristampata-la-storica-pubblicazione-del-1978-materializzazione-del-linguaggio> [last access on 13 May 2023].

and the links between the body and the earth⁶². Strongly linked to the concept of identity and gender, these considerations were chosen as the three research selection guidelines to identify how biological, social and environmental aspects have influenced women's artistic production.



Ill. 1: Graph drawn up by the author on the basis of the collected statistics from 2001 to 2009 Venice Art Biennale editions. This graph was shown during the presentation of the results agreed on 14 July 2022 at the ASAC library.

⁶² Youtube, Biennale Arte 2022 – Press Conference; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjmpY0bR2bo> [last access on 13 May 2023]; La Biennale di Venezia, Dichiarazione di Cecilia Alemani; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/dichiarazione-di-cecilia-alemani> [last access on 13 May 2023].



III. 2: Graph drawn up by the author on the basis of the collected statistics from 2011 to 2019 Venice Art Biennale editions. This graph was shown during the presentation of the results agreed on 14 July 2022 at the ASAC library.

Together with the archive collections, women's artworks were sorted by using ASAC Dati digital system, ASAC, and the Venice Biennale database for the consultation of archived material. ASAC Dati allows to interactively research subjects such as biographic, administrative, historical, scientific, and technical reports related to the Venice Biennale. For the purpose of this thesis, research was conducted by accessing archive material and information through years of research ANNALI, then sections SEZIONI, artists ARTISTI and awards PREMI, in order to source as much information as possible, given the annalistic focus of the research (III.3).



Ill. 3: ASAC Dati webpage screenshot - sections examined by the author during the archive research are highlighted with red circular marks.

Following the ICCD methodology⁶³, records have been created, registering titles, names of the artists, and years of participation in the Venice Art Biennale, both in the Central Exhibition and in individual National Pavilions. Simultaneously, all the data collected was organised in two newly created databases in Excel, one per decade.

The gathered information concerned: the year taken into consideration; the exhibition title of the Venice Art Biennial edition; women artists' names and their total number; all the names of the participating artists; their total number; and the resulting woman participant percentage in comparison with the overall sum of artists. The applied

⁶³ ICCD stands for *Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione*, in English *Central Institute for Catalogue and Documentation*. According to the Ministry of Culture in Italy, there are compulsory and absolute fields to be filled in while cataloguing. Those must always be present in order to consider the records formally correct. The compilation is considered fundamental to study the object inquired. In this thesis, the data collected reaches the level of detail defined as *Precatalogue level* (usually abbreviated to P.) since optional research elements are also filled in providing references to an essential bibliography only. The other levels are: the minimum *Inventory level* (abbreviated as I.), the highest *Catalogue level* (abbreviated as C.). The approach and outcome also and often depend on the intrinsic characteristics of the object of study and its information potential.

research protocol was aimed at determining an overall view on which bias was predominant. The data organised in the Excel database was connected with hyperlinks to ASAC Dati and other websites to facilitate updates and further research, as this dissertation. The calculation of how many women artists and how many men artists took part in the 2000s editions were investigated by the author and record: in 2001, 21% women, 79% men; in 2003, 23% women, 77% men; in 2005, 30% women, 70% men; in 2007, 25% women, 75% men; in 2009: 30,5% women, 69,5% men; in 2011, 26% women, 74% men; in 2013, 27,5% women, 73,5% men; in 2015, 33% women 67% men; in 2017, 30% women, 70% men; in 2019, 38% women, 62% men; in 2022, 80% women and 20% men.⁶⁴ The years prior to the last edition recorded a weighted average of 28,4% women artist participation. Therefore, the 80% participation of women artist in the 2022 edition is considered as a clear indicator of change which reinforces the need to describe the key events, figures and practices that led to this change. The 2022 edition artistic Director Cecilia Alemani stated:

The greatest risk? That they define it as the Biennale of women. But then, what does that mean? For 125 years you never called it the Biennale of men!⁶⁵

At this point, the research focuses mainly on the 2005 Venice Art Biennale (12 June – 6 November), which for the first time had two women as artistic directors. This was an unprecedented and highly significant event, given the decisive importance of their roles in the overall organisation. This edition is compared to the 2022 Venice Art Biennale (20 May – 26 November), in view of its records that have reversed the trend observed up to that point⁶⁶. The two Venice Art Biennale editions were, thus, curated by three different people, implying three different approaches and exhibition making. It seemed that the curators, Maria De Corral, Rosa Martines and Cecilia Alemani

⁶⁴ The statistics are recorded in Ill. 1 and Ill. 2. Guerrilla Girls also examined female artist participation statistics until 2007 in Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls' Art Museum Activity Book*, Dublin: Printed Matter, Inc., 2017, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁵ La Biennale di Venezia, *Statement by Cecilia Alemani Curator of the 59th International Exhibition*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022/statement-cecilia-alemani> [last access on 16 May 2023].

⁶⁶ More information on the records are given in Chapter 3 and in La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale Arte 2022*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/il-latte-dei-sogni> [last access on 15 May 2021]; La Biennale di Venezia, *brochure arte 2022*, <https://static.labiennale.org/files/arte/Documenti/brochure-arte-2022-e.pdf> [last access on 16 May 2023].

respectively, had a common goal: to identify the changes, problems and strengths of a rapidly changing system and cultural landscape through the representation of international contemporary art production. The central exhibitions, entitled respectively, *The Experience of Art. Always a Little Further* in 2005 and *The Milk of Dreams* in 2022, have been regarded by the author as containers for a plurality of voices, thus a fertile ground for gathering an understanding of our time and women's re-evaluated statements and gender equality. The central exhibition structures are studied and compared, since capable of overcoming borders, widening geographies, and standing for multiculturalism and gender inclusiveness. The two exhibitions exhibit marked differences in their starting points. These differences have influenced the selected exhibition formats. In the 2005 edition, the central exhibition was split into two parts, with two separate titles. In contrast, the 2022 edition feature five historical capsule-shows within the central exhibition itself.

After analysing the 2005 and 2022 edition central exhibitions in their respective chapters – the 2nd and the 3rd – studying the artistic directions and curatorial approaches, the analysis turns to the artists and their works: Golden Lions for Lifetime Achievement, Barbara Kruger (2005), Katharina Fritsch and Cecilia Vicuña (2022); Joana Vasconcelos and Simone Leigh's works detected as female identity emblem; Guerrilla Girls and Yuki Kihara's artistic practice marked by activism. Yuki Kihara is the only artist that did not take part in the central exhibition, but exhibited in a National Pavilion. Anyway, this choice was made due to Kihara project relevance to the discourse. In the analysis chapters the artists' works are explored as examples of social practices in which meaning is constructed at a collective level. In this view, all the curators and the artists have been introduced with a short biography in order to better contextualise their work.

Anomalies in the data recording are encountered, which are then assessed as a whole through a research sub-procedure and interpreted for their appropriateness in conjectural terms. Difficulties are also encountered in providing appropriate and politically neutral information. Collecting the literature, complexity, interdisciplinarity, and multifaceted perspectives contribute to enriching the discourse

and providing the author with a deeper understanding of the topics of gender and inclusion within a specific cultural setting. Similarly to the archival research, the methodology chosen for the two analysis chapters bears tangential limitations, because the topic is still under examination by academic critique, thus it is not a concluded discourse. With this in mind, this study stands as a possible point of view in a discourse in the making and for this reason, the undertaken case studies could not be considered neither the standards nor the exceptions that confirm the rule. Therefore, these choices are related to the central dissertation purpose: to reach awareness concerning the gender binary issues, social sustainability and to demonstrate the necessity of rediscussing the social role of art within its institutions.

2. Venice Art Biennale 2005

The two questions, that are constantly asked in connection with the Biennale or biennial exhibitions and events like Documenta are: “Do such large exhibition still make sense?” and “Is art still topical?” The first question is way to answer. It depends solely on who organise them. The answer to the second could be “Art is a language, and whoever takes the time to read it will always find it topical”⁶⁷.

This quote serves as the opening statement for the introduction to the 2001 Venice Biennale, emphasising the significance of expansive exhibitions like the Biennale itself. These exhibitions play a vital role in showcasing a wide range of artistic practices, exploring critical themes, and engaging diverse global audiences. The success of these exhibitions lies not only in their ability to foster meaningful dialogues but also in their capacity to facilitate connections within the art world. The interpretation and reception of art are inherently subjective, influenced by cultural, social, and political contexts. What may be considered topical or relevant in art can vary greatly among individuals and communities. It is crucial to recognise that the topicality of art is fluid and subject to ongoing dialogue and interpretation. While acknowledging the role of organizers and the potential for art to address current issues, it is important to consider the broader dynamics and complexities that shape the relevance and topicality of large-scale exhibitions. Harald Szeemann, the artistic director of the mentioned Biennale edition, further expands on this notion by defining the exhibition’s title not as a specific theme, but rather as a dimension that stimulates and broadens the spectrum of considerations. In doing so, the exhibition becomes a platform for presenting diverse human existences and experiences. By embracing this multifaceted approach, the Biennale seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities of human existence through the diverse artworks on display.

⁶⁷ H. Szeeman, *The timeless, grand narration of human existence in its time*, in *Platea dell'umanità - Plateau of Humankind - Plateau der Menschheit - Plateau de l'humanité*, catalogue (Venezia 49. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 10 June – 4 November), edited by H. Szeemann and C. Liveriero Lavelli, Milan: Electa, 2001, p. VXII.

By examining Szeemann's statement and its implications, one can gain insights into the curatorial intentions behind the 2001 Venice Biennale and its aspiration to transcend conventional themes. This critical examination allows for a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of large-scale exhibitions and their potential to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding contemporary art⁶⁸. Therefore, emphasising the importance of this pluralism from the very title is quite significant⁶⁹. Pluralism also characterised the 2003 edition, curated by Francesco Bonami and titled *Dreams and Conflicts - The Viewer's Dictatorship*, organising three additional exhibitions, *Delays and Revolutions*, *Clandestine* and *Pittura/Painting*, to engage the visitors in a dialogue, thus creating a more stimulating encounter with the artworks. Bonami writes in his exhibition catalogue introduction:

In a world mired in unresolved issues and frustrated by shattered dreams, what is the significance of art and the function of exhibitions like the Venice Biennale? These are entirely legitimate questions. Our attempt to answer them is the very subject of the exhibitions and art itself. If art is considered irrelevant, as is often the case, in relation to war, violence, and discrimination, then I strongly embrace the notion of creative irrelevance to challenge the absurdity of war, violence, and discrimination. I advocate for the production of dreams to contain the madness of conflicts. An exhibition like the Biennale, a structure devoid of power compared to the political and economic hegemonies of the world, gains power in its function as a symbolic ground for possible solutions. [...] The Biennale thus symbolizes the modern world with its contradictions and its progressive fragmentation into more and more nations and identities. [...] The Great Exhibition of the twentieth century must ensure that within its structure, multiplicity, diversity, and contradictions coexist. It must reflect the new complexity of reality, contemporary visions, and emotions⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. XVIII.

⁶⁹ Notably, Joseph Beuys's work, *The End of the 20th Century*, was displayed, receiving recognition for its continuous exploration of the concept of freedom. Alongside Beuys, artists such as Cy Twombly, Richard Serra, Niele Toroni, and Ron Mueck contributed to a diverse representation of artistic expressions, revitalising myths, redefining monumentality, and exploring the human figure.

⁷⁰ F. Bonami, *I Have a Dream*, in *Dreams and Conflicts - The Viewer's Dictatorship*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 50. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 15 June–20 November 2003), edited by F. Bonami, Venezia: Marsilio, 2003.

Bonami emphasises the power of exhibitions like the Biennale to symbolically address societal contradictions and the fragmentation of the modern world. It calls for the coexistence of multiplicity, diversity, and contradictions within the structure of exhibitions to reflect the complexity of contemporary reality, visions, and emotions. Bonami expresses a strong belief in the transformative potential of art and exhibitions, particularly in challenging societal issues and embracing the complexities of the contemporary world. He also emphasises the need for exhibitions to reflect and engage with diverse perspectives and contradictions, thus diversity.

Given 2001 and 2003 curators' intentions, it is evident that the 2005 Venice Biennale and its novelties were undeniably a logical and appropriate outcome. Therefore, the 2005 exhibition was enriched by the presence of international artworks, numerous national participations and several accompanying events. From this point of view, the 2005 edition marked a significant milestone, celebrating its 110-year history and its designation as a Foundation⁷¹.

At that moment, the institution faced a double challenge: to organise an exhibition of quality and to redefine its role in the new millennium, when new art forms and media, such as video and computer, allowed art to transcend the boundaries of traditional museum settings and embrace open spaces⁷². Given this transformative environment, the Venice Biennale embarked on a project aimed at reaffirming its central and proactive position within the international and Italian cultural and artistic landscape.

⁷¹ Venice Biennale has undergone several reforms. The first one took place in 1973 when it was transformed into the Ente Autonomo dello Stato (Autonomous State Entity), equipped with a new statute that replaced the fascist-era one adopted in 1938. In February 1998, a reform decree was published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, privatizing the Biennale and transforming it into a *Società di cultura* (Cultural Society). The most recent reform dates back to 2004, which led to the Biennale becoming a *Fondazione* (Foundation), eighteen months before the opening of the 2005 venue. *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, *DECRETO LEGISLATIVO 8 gennaio 2004, n. 1*; https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2004-01-14&atto.codiceRedazionale=004G0010&elenco30giorni=false [last access on 24 May 2023].

⁷² The installations by artists that have transcended the conventional notion of artistic exhibition in the previous two editions of the 2000s are diverse. Artistic expression has also found a place within global arenas that encompass marketing and mass cultural entertainment, presenting a different spatial dimension altogether. It is worth recalling here the examples that, according to the author, deserve mentioning. In this regard, Maurizio Cattelan's *Hollywood*, 2001, steel, iron, concrete, measuring 22x180m, Palermo. To mention: S. Portinari, Nico Stringa (eds.), *Storia della Biennale di Venezia*, Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari-Digital Publishing, 2019; https://edizionicafoscarini.unive.it/media/pdf/books/978-88-6969-367-0/978-88-6969-367-0_uOnZet3.pdf [last access on 24 May 2023].

Consequently, it promptly addressed the lack of dedicated space for Italian artists and established the national pavilion. This was chosen to be located in Arsenale, specifically in the awe-inspiring Tese delle Vergini, rectifying this deficiency. Additionally, thanks to an initiative by the DARC (General Directorate for Architecture and Contemporary Art) of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, the Venice Pavilion exhibition showcased the awardees of the competition for emerging Italian artists⁷³. To face the difficult challenges, Maria De Corral and Rosa Martinez were entrusted with the direction of the 2005 Venice Biennale edition. Their exhibitions – at the Giardini Maria de Corral’s *The Experience of Art* and in Arsenale Rosa Martinez’s *Always a Little Further* – were complementary yet distinct in their physical arrangements and theoretical conceptions. The separate exhibition paths in the Giardini and Arsenale locations effectively showcased a deep understanding of the influence of feminism and explored themes such as the redefinition of the body, the appropriation of political power, the use of irony as a tool to challenge it, and the evocation of nostalgia for the past⁷⁴. That year awarded Golden Lions further exemplified a commitment to acknowledging feminist perspectives. Notably, these prestigious awards were exclusively granted to female artists, with the exception of Thomas Schütte’s Golden Lion for his outstanding participation at the

⁷³ In collaboration with the Ministry for Cultural Activities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Venice Biennale planned international activities to disseminate Italian cultural voice worldwide, including those in China in 2006 during Italy’s cultural exchange year with that nation. Before venturing abroad, the Foundation tested the exportation of exhibitions for the first time in 2004. The initiative, called *Sensi Contemporanei*, covered seven regions in southern Italy. It allowed the Biennale to participate in the developmental policies of these areas, acting as an intermediary with the primary cultural institutions in southern Italy. It is important to acknowledge that Venice Biennale is institutionally geared toward the entire contemporary arts domain, consequently, the 2005 Venice Biennale commence alongside the 3rd International Festival of Contemporary Dance, directed by Ismael Ivo, in conjunction with the Fondazione Teatro La Fenice. The various events took place in performance spaces at the Arsenale, as well as other theatres and throughout Venice. This initiative reaffirms the bond between the Biennale and the city. The artists exhibited were Carolina Antich, Manfredi Beninati, Loris Cecchini, Lara Favaretto. The exhibition was curated by Pio Baldi, Monica Pignatti Morano e Paolo Colombo. P.Daverio, J. Blanchaert, *13 x 17: 1000 artisti per un'indagine eccentrica sull'arte in Italia*, Milan: Rizzoli, 2007; D. Croff, *Sempre un po' più lontano. L'esperienza dell'arte*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 51. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 12 June-6 November 2005), edited by R. Martinez, M. De Corral, Venezia: Marsilio, 2005; Beni Culturali, *Comunicato. Venezia: 51° BINNALE INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE*; <https://www.beniculturali.it/comunicato/venezia-510-biennale-internazionale-d-arte> [last access on 24 May 2023].

⁷⁴ A. Cigala, *Nel respiro dell'opera. Viaggio dentro la 51. Biennale di Venezia*, in “La Critica”, August 2005; <https://www.lacritica.net/cigala4.htm> [last access on 4 June 2023].

International Exhibition⁷⁵. Additionally, the timing of the event holds significance in women's rights history, thus in assessing the impact of feminist messages, as it coincided with the campaign on assisted reproduction Italian referendum conducted during the opening days⁷⁶.

Distinguished artists emerged as prominent figures in the exhibition and within the gender discourse. The London drag queen Leigh Bowery curated a captivating glam rock fashion show characterised by a unique fusion of punk and baroque elements, creating a visually stunning display of garments⁷⁷. Then, young Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo's video *Himenoplastia* was of great impact. Inheriting the performative tradition from artists like Ana Mendieta and Marina Abramovic, her controversial performance dares to express the unspeakable, in the horrifying violation of her own intimacy, as shown in the detailed video projection of her hymenoplasty operation⁷⁸. Moreover, the colour red, evoking bodily carnality and fertility, menstrual flows and nurturing wombs, floods the French Pavilion, which Annette Messager

⁷⁵ The 2005 award recipients encompassed a range of notable figures, with Barbara Kruger receiving recognition for lifetime achievement. The French pavilion, featuring Annette Messager, was honored for its outstanding national representation, while Thomas Schütte was acknowledged as the best participant in the International Exhibition. Additionally, Regina José Galindo stood out as the recipient of the award for best young artist.

⁷⁶ On June 12, 2005, Law 40/2004 on medically assisted reproduction underwent four abrogative referendums, which failed to reach the quorum. Subsequent rulings by the Constitutional Court have modified certain provisions that the law had established for the protection of the dignity of the conceived and human procreation itself. The Science & Life committee, which later became an association, mobilized 15 years ago to defend the law. We have therefore sought brief assessments from scientists, philosophers, bioethicists, and jurists who have succeeded in its presidency regarding the current significance of the law. In the following referred article it is possible to read the law Professor Alberto Gambino's quote. It says: "The fact that Law 40 remains a current legislation and provides particular guarantees for certain aspects of the most vulnerable human life is demonstrated by the fact that, to date, the only existing legal provision in Italy in contrast to the aberrant practice of so-called "surrogacy" is contained precisely in an article of Law 40. Article 12 sanctions, albeit mildly, anyone who carries out, organizes, or advertises maternity surrogacy. This should make detractors of Law 40 reflect on whether it is merely a coincidence or the consequence of an intrinsic coherence within Law 40 itself, which, despite some flaws, aims to reduce physical and psychological harm to individuals involved in artificial fertilization practices, starting with the conceived". In E. Negrotti, *Procreazione. Legge 40, provetta, vita umana: cosa resta 15 anni dopo il referendum*, in "L'Avvenire", 18, June 2020; <https://www.avvenire.it/vita/pagine/legge-40-provetta-vita-umana-cosa-resta-15-anni-dopo-il-referendum> [last access on 4 June 2023].

⁷⁷ M. C. Bastante, *biennale di Venezia Fashion Biennale*, in "exibart", 26, July 2005; <https://www.exibart.com/biennale-2005/biennale-di-venezias-fashion-biennale/> [last access on 4 June 2023].

⁷⁸ A. Cigala, cit.

transforms into a scarlet Casino, reminiscent of both a circus and a grand uterus, engulfing Pinocchio⁷⁹ and inviting us to participate in his initiatory journey⁸⁰.

Taking into consideration these examples and the ones described in the following subchapters, the 2005 edition explored artistic trends spanning the recent past to the near future, seeking answers and presenting themselves not merely as comprehensive repositories of information or passive vessels of the present, but as laboratories for the interpretation and dissemination of knowledge⁸¹. The Venice Biennale, therefore, served as not merely a frame but as a focused lens through which to envision the future. The two exhibitions attracted 265,000 people, goaling together with the collateral events a total attendance of over 915,000 visitors⁸². This demonstrated not only the Venice Biennale growing appeal and resonance but also its adaptability and commitment to pushing boundaries and engaging audiences in thought-provoking artistic experiences, reaffirming itself as a leading force capable of providing guidance and making discerning choices, just as it did a century and ten years before⁸³.

2.1 Rosa Martínez's Always a Little Further and Maria De Corral's The Experience of Art

Rosa Martínez (Soria, 1958) is an internationally renowned curator, writer, and art collections consultant, based in Barcelona where she earned her Art History degree in

⁷⁹ Pinocchio is fictional character half-formed creature, a puppet longing to become a real boy.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ D. Croff, *Sempre un po' più lontano*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 51. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 12 June-6 November 2005), edited by R. Martinez, M. De Corral, Venezia: Marsilio, 2005.

⁸² La Biennale di Venezia, *Storia. Gli anni recenti*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/storia/gli-anni-recenti>, [last access on 16 May 2023].

⁸³ A resounding signal that determined the aim to restore a distinctive identity to the visual arts, recognising that this field is presently undergoing a phase of introspection, is the organisation of a Symposium in December 2005, organised by Robert Storr, the appointed director of the 2007 exhibition. The symposium convened leading experts to deliberate on various themes that define the transformative processes within the art system, encompassing new values, tools, organisational methods, and market influences. Furthermore, it will examine the identities and evolutions of the numerous Biennales that, akin to the Venetian counterpart, constitute a substantial component of the contemporary international exhibition system. La Biennale di Venezia, *Storia della Biennale Arte*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/storia-della-biennale-arte#:~:text=Dal%2012%20giugno%20al%206,aperto%20al%20pubblico%20la%2051> [last access on 24 May 2023].

1979⁸⁴. Throughout a span of almost two decades, from 1988 to 2007, she held prestigious positions as director at various international biennials and museums⁸⁵.

Her extensive body of work includes curating both solo and group shows, further solidifying her influential role in the contemporary art world. For instance, in 2001, she curated *Trans Sexual Express. A Classic for the Third Millennium* in Barcelona (26 June - 30 September)⁸⁶ where a group of artists was invited to go beyond the numerous body-focused exhibitions of the 1990s. In the artists' point of views, the body served as the battleground where issues of sex, sexuality, gender, race, class, the global and the local, the centre and the margins intersected. Subjectivity, the pursuit of equality, and solidarity were articulated to reflect on the social constructs that confine identities and to celebrate openness towards diversity⁸⁷. Remaking her interest on similar research topics, more recently, in 2017, Martinez curated *Intimacy is Political*, at MetQUITO Centro Cultural Metropolitano, Ecuador. The exhibition title updated the slogan "The Personal is Political", used by American Feminist in the 1970s, highlighting how ideological structures operate within intimate spaces, shaping models of sexuality, gender identities, language usage, and power dynamics. *Intimacy is political* challenged the construction of contemporary subjectivities and explores how power is distributed in relation to sex, gender, social class, ethnicity, and advocates for political equality⁸⁸. The exhibition exemplifies how Martinez

⁸⁴ Rosa Martinez, *Rosa Martinez*; <http://www.rosamartinez.com/new/rosa-martinez/> [last access on 26 May 2023].

⁸⁵ These include Manifesta in Rotterdam, Istanbul Biennale, SITE Santa Fe, Busan Biennale in Korea, Moscow Biennale, and São Paulo Biennale. Then, from 2004 to 2007, she collaborated with Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Guggenheim Bilbao Museum and Palazzo Fortuny Museum in Venice.

⁸⁶ T. Ruiz, *Trans sexual express Barcelona 2001: a classic for the third millennium*, in "Shift", 26 August 2001; https://www.shift.jp.org/en/archives/2001/08/trans_sexual_express_barcelona_2001.html [last access on 16 May 2023].

⁸⁷ DRAC Cultura, *Memòria del Departament de Cultura 2001*; <https://drac.cultura.gencat.cat/bitstream/handle/20.500.12368/15279/2001.pdf?sequence=1> [last access on 26 May 2023].

⁸⁸ There were 17 artists and collectives hailing from diverse regions, including Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Spain, USA, Guatemala, Mexico, South Africa, and the former Yugoslavia. The former argued that women are assigned a role of subordination from birth, which has historically confined them to dependent and secondary positions in relation to men. The latter examined how women were excluded from visual creation through barriers such as limited access to drawing academies and the assignment of domestic and reproductive labour. *Universes in Univers, Intimacy is Political - Sex, Gender, Language, Power*; <https://universes.art/en/specials/intimidat-es-politica/rosa-martinez/> [last access on 26 May 2023].

specifically conceives the structures that perpetuate inequality and demonstrate how art can serve as a form of protest, healing, and individual and collective transformation. In addition to all these achievements, Rosa Martinez is also an academic, writer and journalist for a number of specialist publications. In one of her articles, she talked about her long-standing relationship with the Venice Biennale. Martinez has been attending the international exhibition since she was a child, and this long-standing relationship has successfully led to a great knowledge which assured her artistic director of the Spanish pavilion in the 2003 edition⁸⁹. In that occasion, the pavilion was dedicated to Santiago Sierra (Madrid, 1966). Sierra and Martinez converged in the Spanish Pavilion installation, titled *Wall enclosing a space*, many of the artist's principles of his artistic poetics, namely obstruction, linguistic provocation, and contemplation of labour as a form of punishment⁹⁰. Sierra follows the footsteps of artists who, particularly since the 1970s, have questioned established artistic languages, revived an awareness of art's political role, and infiltrated the entire social sphere, thereby deconstructing the power dynamics within art institutions. The work itself draws attention to the mediation technologies and limited access imposed by borders, visible or invisible, which confine individuals within distinct geographical, social, or ideological territories. The wall built on the main entrance to the pavilion served as a dividing line, polarising Biennial spectators on opposite sides of an imagined stage, embodying physical and political tensions reminiscent of the enigmatic realms defined by contemporary exclusions. Within the Pavilion, only accessible to Spanish passport holders after being checked by a guard, remnants of construction work were presented and disorder, thus, abandonment were evoked, inviting to contemplate the ruins in liminal spaces. In this piece, Sierra underlined the act of omission and by concealing the word *España* on the Pavilion facade he

⁸⁹ R. Martinez, *Cominciamo a immaginare e a costruire a Venezia il laboratorio del futuro*, in "Il Giornale dell'Arte", 21 febbraio 2023; <https://www.ilgiornaledellarte.com/articoli/rosa-mart-nez-cominciamo-a-immaginare-e-a-costruire-a-venezia-il-laboratorio-del-futuro-/141526.html> [last access on 26 May 2023].

⁹⁰ No useful correspondence between the curator and the artist was found in the Biennale archive that could determine the level of involvement and contribution in the conception and final production of the mentioned installation. Therefore, the information obtained is the result of a personal deduction from the interview between Martinez and Sierra reported in the catalogue of the Spanish Pavilion. R. Martinez, *La Mercancia y la Muerte. Merchandise and Death*, in *Spain Pavilion*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 50. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 15 June–20 November 2003), edited by R. Martinez, C. Medina, Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 2003, pp. 153, 163-169, 175.

temporarily truncated its manifold historical and symbolic connotations, thereby foreshadowing the potential emergence of contentious emotional responses, ideological interpretations, and aesthetic evaluations⁹¹. Sierra's intervention involved linguistic exclusion and physical barriers. It symbolised a border that separates territories and reflects Spain's role in immigration control. The pavilion became a space exclusively for Spaniards, highlighting the country's strict immigration policies. Sierra's intention was to provoke reflection on gallery norms and the concept of national identity. The excluded individuals, who cannot access the exhibition, become the true protagonists of the artwork, experiencing the contradictions and frustrations of exclusion. The admitted individuals, on the other hand, often fail to grasp the artwork's message and visit the space without fully understanding its significance. Art was here seen as a tool, a veritable weapon, employed by the artist to expose the economic and social mechanisms exploited by the political system of contemporary society⁹². In addition to this project, the performance titled *Hooded woman seated facing the wall* occurred inside the physical confines of the Spanish Pavilion on 1 May 2003, devoid of an audience⁹³. For an hour, a woman, adorned with a black hood, remained seated, motionless and silent⁹⁴. This was aimed to critique societal control and exploitation, one the driving force behind Sierra's artistic practice⁹⁵. In these concerns, Sierra's work reinforces Foster's observation that there seems to be no

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Sierra pursued his Fine Arts education in Madrid and became associated with various art collectives. His experience as a guest student at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg proved pivotal, as it exposed him to avant-garde aesthetic discourses and ignited his fascination with the serial arrangement of industrial containers, which he encountered while exploring the harbour area of Hamburg. It was during this time that he first encountered the phenomenon of immigrants and displaced foreigners. The themes of serialization, borders, and displacement—whether physical, political, or social—have since remained prominent in Sierra's work, intensifying when he relocated to Mexico City in 1995. Reflecting on his arrival in Mexico, he recalls the context of economic crisis and the desperate struggles for survival among people scouring garbage bins for food. The violence engendered by the free market in Latin America, though distant and mediated within the European Community, was undeniably evident. Contingent in this case is the simultaneous restriction of entry by the Spanish jurisdiction to those from outside the European Union.

⁹³ The utilisation of people as “sculptural material” is recurrent in Sierra's works.

⁹⁴R. Martinez, *50th Venice Biennial-spanish pavilion-Italy, 2003*, in “Rosa Martinez”, 15 June 2003; “<http://www.rosamartinez.com/new/50-exposicion-internacional-bienal-de-venecia-pabellon-espanol/> [last access on 16 May 2023].

⁹⁵ L. Lo Pinto, *biennale 2003 – padiglione spagna Santiago Sierra Venezia, Giardini*, in “exibart”, 3, July 2003; <https://www.exibart.com/biennale-2003/biennale-2003-padiglione-spagna-santiago-sierra-venezia-giardini/#:~:text=L'artista%20spagnolo%2C%20che%20da,permettendo%20a%20nessuno%20di%20entrare> [last access on 4 July 2023].

escape from the inexorable pull toward the homogenisation of the world and the economic alienation of individuals.

The intricate discourse surrounding the influence of financial power, specifically within the realm of cultural production and institutions such as the Venice Biennale, is a topic that Martinez has also explored when tasked with curating the comprehensive central exhibition in Arsenale in 2005. In that occasion, economic circumstances exerted an impact on her curatorial approach. This aspect is explicitly underscored in the exhibition's introduction within the catalogue⁹⁶. *Always a Little Further* presented a remarkable opportunity for Martinez to scrutinise the concept of internationality and reconfigure the landscapes of social and economic difference. However, the endeavour to create a transitory global agora must confront the existence of a new cultural and technological dominance. Within this context, Martinez's exhibition strived to engender innovative modes of connection between artists, disciplines, and the public. It drew inspiration from the literary works chronicling the adventures of Corto Maltese, a fictitious character brought to life by the Venetian author and illustrator Hugo Pratt. Maltese aligns seamlessly with the tradition of the voyager serving as a paradigm for the cultivation of culture through the medium of the novel⁹⁷. The exhibition, therefore, endeavoured to circumvent the compendium of heroic narratives ingrained in Western culture. These narratives often depict a daring adventurer, typically a man, overcoming obstacles in the pursuit of an ideal or to satisfy a thirst for power and control. In times when tourism industry deftly capitalises on these very fantasies, *Always a Little Further* curatorial approach entailed experiencing the romantic illusion of constructing a transient universe, exercising the authority and striving to generate significance by critically rearranging messages⁹⁸. Martinez aimed to generate cognitive possibilities, present narratives, and cultivate alternative modes of perception, all while confronting and adapting to the limitations imposed by political, economic, and administrative factors. In this context, an art exhibition becomes comparable to a product launched into the market competing with similar

⁹⁶ R. Martinez, *Sempre un po' più lontano*, in *L'esperienza dell'arte. Sempre un po' più lontano*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 51. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 12 June-6 November 2005), edited by R. Martinez, M. De Corral, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2005.

⁹⁷ A theme eloquently examined by Bakhtin in *The Dialogical Imagination*, elucidating how literary fiction enhances our understanding of reality.

⁹⁸ R. Martinez, *Sempre un po' più lontano*, cit.

offerings. As art has become a powerful tool for promoting cities and enhancing their global status, the notions of usefulness and economic advantage have gained increasing importance in the realm of exhibitions and the art world as a whole. In the arena of political economy, these concepts intertwine in a complex game, where the exercise of power remains a decisive factor. According to Martinez, the concept of proximity encompasses a contextual connection that recognizes the democratic value found in the equal relationships among nearby entities, rejecting the hierarchical divisions often seen in Western societies. In Venice, artists from diverse backgrounds and generations come together, undergoing a process of deterritorialization. They gather temporarily and create – as for islands – small archipelagos. This conception emphasises the notion of barriers reduction as for Martinez body perception in *Trans Sexual Express*, her curatorial project with Sierra in 2003 and later as her thoughts on gender identity construction in *Intimacy is Political*. The barriers within this exhibition space reflect an ideological response to the importance of revaluating the humanistic exploration of communal existence. It goes beyond the confines of traditional individual exhibition spaces by encouraging dialogues with the existing architecture and neighbouring artists. This response also aligns with the close interplay between economics and ideology in the development of conceptual frameworks. Consequently, the idealistic notion of the curator as a frontier-expanding agent confronts the realities that compel to assume the role of boundary setters, countering the voraciousness of the market and erased⁹⁹. By interweaving romanticism and enlightenment, ideology and economics, ardour and exhaustion, Martinez aspired for this exhibition to awaken an awareness of the imperative to persist in contemplation, creation, and resistance. As Martinez stated:

[...] this path may lead us to confront disillusionment, but it may also engender the realization that, regardless of the outcomes, as feminist author Susan B. Anthony penned, ‘failure is impossible’¹⁰⁰.

In the 9,000 square meters of Corderie and Artiglierie in the Arsenale, Martínez showed works of 49 artists. She reluctantly concluded that she had no choice but to

⁹⁹ R. Martinez, *Sempre un po' più lontano*, cit.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

preserve the linear arrangement of the area while incorporating the awe-inspiring ambiance of the ancient stonework. Many of the works were specially made for the exhibition, and some created on the open-air exhibition grounds next to the long halls. But simultaneously, Martinez deeply regretted not having had more time for research and was not entirely satisfied, especially where it concerned including artists from other regions (meaning outside of Europe and North America)¹⁰¹.

This comment by Martinez regarding the organization and setup of her central exhibition section should be considered in relation to the design of the other section curated by De Corral. It is interesting to mention De Corral's professional background prior to her experience at the Venice Biennale in order to understand the full contribution of her curatorial approach and the message conveyed throughout the entire edition of the 2005. Maria De Corral (Madrid, 1940) is a Spanish art critic and curator. Maria De Corral studied art history at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the Complutense University in Madrid. During the 1970s, De Corral made significant contributions to the art scene as she took on a pioneering role at Galería Grupo 15. As the director of the gallery, she played a pivotal role in introducing acclaimed international artists, including Jasper Johns and Sol Lewitt, to the Spanish art scene. Through her leadership and guidance, these renowned artists were given a platform to showcase their works and establish a presence in Spain. De Corral's work at Galería Grupo 15 not only expanded the horizons of the Spanish art community but also fostered cultural exchange by bringing influential artistic voices from around the world to the country¹⁰². Throughout the following two decades, De Corral's influence steadily expanded, coinciding with a period when art and culture flourished in Spain. She actively collaborated on a multitude of exhibitions and projects, leaving a lasting impact on the art landscape. Notably, De Corral played a significant role in the establishment and development of the ARCO art fair, a prominent platform that showcases contemporary art. Her involvement in shaping this renowned event further solidified her position as a key figure in the Spanish art world, contributing to the

¹⁰¹ Universes in Universe, *Always a Little Further*; <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien51/eng/arsenale/index.htm> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹⁰² Artsituacion, *Ms. Maria Corral*; <https://www.artsituacions.com/it/comite/maria-corrall/> [last access on 26 May 2023].

growth and recognition of contemporary artists both domestically and internationally¹⁰³. The enduring significance of De Corral's connection with ARCO is exemplified through their collaborative project, *Imaginando otros futuros*, which was undertaken in celebration of ARCO's 35th anniversary in 2015¹⁰⁴. This initiative, a joint effort involving De Corral's daughter Lorenza de Corral, Catalina Lozano, and Aaron Moulton, aimed to encapsulate the history of ARCO by inviting 35 galleries to participate. Each gallery showcased artists from diverse age groups, highlighting the importance of nurturing future generations of artistic talent. According to De Corral, ARCO played a pivotal role in establishing Spain's international presence and recognition following the country's transition to democracy¹⁰⁵. In the early days, Madrid had only a handful of galleries, but the fair has since evolved to feature renowned international galleries, thus providing Spanish audiences and influential institutions, including universities, with increased access to contemporary art. Notably, the growing presence of Latin American galleries and artists at ARCO has been instrumental, contributing a distinct and vibrant creative perspective from Latin America that sets it apart from Europe and North America. De Corral's curatorial approach, focused on bridging generational and geographical divides, has left an indelible mark on her endeavours. Another noteworthy example, coinciding with ARCO's anniversary, was the organization of a separate exhibition titled *Art Situations*. This exhibition facilitated a captivating and purely creative dialogue between young Italian artists and five Spanish artists, garnering a resounding response

¹⁰³ ARCOmadrid, created by IFEMA in 1982, is a renowned art fair featuring over 200 galleries from 30 countries. It presents modern and contemporary artworks, attracts a global audience, and offers curated sections for diverse generations and media. It is a platform to discover fresh and undiscovered pieces in the art market. Artfairmag, *ARCOmadrid*;

<https://www.artfairmag.com/arcomadrid/#:~:text=First%20held%20in%201982%2C%20the.encourage%20fresh%20thinking%20and%20innovation> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹⁰⁴ The 35th anniversary of Arco featured a diverse range of mediums, including videos exhibited in galleries such as Ruth Benzacar (Buenos Aires) and Christina Guerra (Lisbon), as well as performances like Emilio Rojas's *Colonial Color Palette* at the Jose de la Fuente Spanish gallery. Various intriguing sculptures and photographs were also presented. C. Marin, *Arco Madrid*.

L'intervista con Maria de Corral, in "Artribune", 25 February 2015; <https://www.artribune.com/attualita/2016/02/arco-madrid-lintervista-con-maria-de-corrall/> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

from the audience. The exhibition commenced at Villa Croce in Genoa before making its impact felt at MACRO in Rome, further amplifying its significance and reach¹⁰⁶. Reflecting on De Corral's notable career milestones, her appointment as the director of the Reina Sofia Museum by the Spanish Minister of Culture in December 1990 stands out. This significant role marked a turning point for the museum, as it witnessed the highly anticipated relocation of Pablo Picasso's masterpiece, *Guernica*, from *the Casón del Buen Retiro* to the Reina Sofía Museum¹⁰⁷. Under De Corral's leadership, the groundwork was laid for the museum's collection to flourish. During her tenure, De Corral championed the development of a collection with a distinct identity, diverging from the mimicry of other European national museums. Instead, she embarked on a profound exploration of Spanish art history and its sphere of influence, engaging in a meaningful dialogue with its rich heritage. This approach aimed to cultivate a collection that would authentically represent the cultural heritage of Spain. Currently, De Corral holds a position as a member of the Reina Sofia Advisory Board, continuing to contribute her expertise and insights to the museum's ongoing endeavours¹⁰⁸. Furthermore, following her tenure as the artistic director of the 51st International Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, De Corral assumed the role of the Hoffman Family Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Dallas Museum of Art. During her three-year term, she dedicated her efforts to the reorganization of the

¹⁰⁶ Visitgenoa, *Expositions. Art situations II*; <https://www.visitgenoa.it/fr/node/11981> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹⁰⁷ The renowned artwork *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso was initially exhibited in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition. It later traveled to New York for a benefit tour organized by the Spanish Refugee Committee during World War II. Picasso requested that *Guernica* and several other works remain on extended loan at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) for safekeeping. After the war, most of the works were returned to Europe, but Picasso asked that *Guernica* and its preliminary studies for the painting stay at MoMA until the restoration of democracy in Spain. When Francisco Franco's dictatorship was ruling in Spain, *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso underwent multiple location shifts. After being exhibited in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition, the painting was sent to New York in 1939 for a tour. Franco's dictatorship persisted throughout Picasso's life, preventing the artist from returning to his homeland. In 1967, Franco introduced limited liberties, leading his government to make efforts to reclaim *Guernica* in 1968. However, Picasso firmly refused, insisting that the painting would only be returned when democracy was reestablished in Spain. Despite Franco's attempts, *Guernica* remained in the custody of MoMA. The political situation in Spain began to shift after Franco's death in 1975 when King Juan Carlos I ascended to power and initiated the country's transition to democracy. Despite Franco's attempts, the painting remained in MoMA until democracy was restored in Spain. In 1981, *Guernica* was transferred to Madrid under high security and placed in the Prado Museum. The painting's relocation faced opposition from various groups, including Basque nationalists who later advocated for its transfer to the Guggenheim Bilbao Museo.

¹⁰⁸ Museo Reina Sofia, *Advisory Board*; <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/advisory-board> [last access on 26 May 2023].

museum's collections. In an interview, she was questioned about her perspective on the role of cultural institutions in housing and preserving valuable art collections. She firmly believes that these institutions bear the responsibility of engaging and educating the public, granting them access to art and fostering artistic dialogue. Recognising the dynamic nature of art practices, De Corral emphasises the necessity for institutions to adapt to contemporary challenges. She acknowledges the evolving expectations and demands of audiences, underscoring the vital importance of art institutions to maintain relevance and inclusivity. According to De Corral, museums and other cultural institutions should actively cultivate connections with diverse communities, extending their reach to new audiences and nurturing a sense of ownership and belonging. By actively engaging with various communities, these institutions can create meaningful experiences that resonate with a wide range of individuals, fostering a vibrant and inclusive cultural landscape¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, she emphasises the crucial role of curators in shaping meaningful museum experiences, advocating for curators to produce thought-provoking and innovative exhibitions that reflect the dynamic nature of contemporary artistic practices. De Corral believes that this professional figure should go beyond focusing solely on art history and instead explore new avenues that push boundaries and spark dialogue around pressing social and political issues¹¹⁰. A notable example of De Corral's curatorial vision is demonstrated in her appointment to curate *The Experience of Art* in 2005. For this exhibition, she envisioned the journey within the Giardini Central Pavilion as a comprehensive and complex history, representing an ongoing process of artistic experimentation rather than a mere accumulation of certainties. *The Experience of Art* aimed to create an inclusive space where artistic experiences, ideas, and reflections could be exchanged, even provoking contemplation and delight. The exhibition highlighted the intensity and interconnectedness of artists from different generations, focusing on shared attitudes and obsessive qualities. It sought to stimulate contemplation and joy, going beyond visual appeal to evoke profound thought¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁹ CIMAN, *Interview to María de Corral by Agustin Perez Rubio*; <https://cimam.org/news-archive/interview-to-mar%C3%ADa-de-corrall-by-agustin-perez-rubio/> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Archimagazine, *Articoli sulla Biennale 51. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte di Venezia*; <http://www.archimagazine.com/rbiennale.htm> [last access on 26 May 2023].

De Corral's curatorial approach in selecting artists was driven by her fascination with ideas that emerge from remnants, fragments, rehearsals, and sketches. Many of the chosen artists shared a common trait of envisioning alternative approaches to engaging with the world and evoking emotional responses. In an era characterised by global homogeneity, contemporary artists defy conformity to a specific style and instead strive to construct unique aesthetic universes that resonate with personal expression. Through her curatorial endeavours, De Corral seeks to challenge conventional norms, encourage critical thinking, and foster a diverse range of artistic voices within the cultural landscape. Her approach celebrates artistic exploration, provocation, and the power of imagination to redefine our perceptions of art and society¹¹². In one of her statements, De Corral expressed her observation that the art produced in the past decade lacked a dominant and singular artistic doctrine or formal style. This contradicted the prevailing concerns about the consequences of globalization and multiculturalism. Taking a critical and independent standpoint, Corral also engaged in a discourse about the significance and relevance of the artistic act in a world dominated by media, where reality often seems confined to representation. With these thoughts in mind, De Corral titled the exhibition *The Experience of Art*, aiming to heighten visitors' awareness of specific themes that artists grapple with in their daily artistic pursuits. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, she attempted to provide the utmost clarity by explicitly outlining the thematic scope. Among the overarching themes, nostalgia played a prominent role, evoking a sense of longing and loss associated with a recent and irretrievable past, expressed through metaphorical language. Moreover, the exhibition delved into the realm of emotions and psychological pressures that shape individual identities, as well as the redefinition of the body, encompassing elements such as fragmentation, dissolution, and mortality. The presence of power, domination, and violence in everyday existence was also examined, employing socio-political critique and employing humour and irony as vehicles of expression. To create an extensive archive for exploration and reappropriation, the exhibition incorporated images, films, and pre-existing narratives. Additionally, abstraction was employed as a contrasting element, offering an escape from the overwhelming proliferation of images. It existed within a realm of pictorial

¹¹² P. Behrman, *Venice Biennale 1*, in "Art Monthly (Archive : 1976-2005)", 1 July 2005 pp.22-24.

contemplation, creating a space of silence that alluded to a reality beyond the visible. In her curatorial approach, De Corral aimed to provoke contemplation, challenge established norms, and prompt dialogue about the complex and multifaceted nature of contemporary art. De Corral accentuated the need for Venice Biennale to continually reinvent itself, responding to the changing dynamics of society and engaging with the broader public. Overall, she encourages museums and curators to embrace new perspectives, challenge conventional norms, and create immersive and inclusive experiences that inspire and educate visitors. Therefore, De Corral's life is undeniably marked by an impressive array of positions, roles, and accomplishments within the art world. Furthermore, her professional trajectory is undoubtedly impressive and several awards prove her impact in the art world¹¹³.

The Experience of Art. Always a Little Further, by exploring diverse themes and employing various artistic techniques, sought to engage viewers in a profound and thought-provoking artistic experience¹¹⁴. Furthermore, manipulating and employing the image as a tool, the exhibition aimed to demarcate and define the domains of action, events, and memory. The written word was reclaimed as a conceptual reconstruction of the image. Painting, with its presence in contemporary artistic discourse, engaged in the reinterpretation of language and circumvented established parameters governing the act of painting, such as medium and brushstroke. This included its innovative manifestation through other disciplines like photography and video. The curators actively participated in the cultural and economic processes of post-industrial society, contributing to the transformation of individual and societal identities considering art as a mean to reject any form of dogmatic ideology. By addressing inquiries that emerged from the creative act and extended beyond the

¹¹³In the years, De Corral has organized a series of exhibitions world widely. These include *Painting for themselves: Picasso, Miró, Guston, de Kooning. Late Works*, Neues Museum Wesserburg, Bremen, 1996; *Los Años Ochenta* at Culturgest, Lisbon, 1998; *Helena Almeida* at Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago de Compostela 2000; *XXVI and XXVII Biennales de Pontevedra* in 2000 and 2002; *"élicité... Mostra degli alunni premiati dell'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, Paris 2003; *Joan Hernández Pijuan: Volviendo a un lugar conocido*, MACBA, Barcelona. Other institutions where she worked are located in Malmö, Bologna, Madrid, Pamplona, Texas, Vienna, Algarve, Sevilla, Moscow, and more. In *Artsituations, Ms. Maria Corral*; <https://www.artsituacions.com/it/comite/maria-corrall/> [last access on 11 May 2023].

¹¹⁴ M. De Corral, *The Experience of Art*, in "Universes in Universe", February 2005; <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien51/eng/pav-ita/text-1.htm> [last access on 19 May 2023].

boundaries of the strictly artistic realm, the intention was to elucidate shared aspects amidst diversity. This allowed viewers to discern the qualities of the unexpected and the unconventional, thereby overcoming resistance to finding pleasure in contemporary art. In this view, the 2005 Venice Biennale greeted its visitors with a powerful display at the Italian pavilion with the words *Money* and *Power* that flanked the columns and set the tone for an exhibition that delved into the intricate connection between art and commerce¹¹⁵. Beneath the surface, a thread of reminiscences weave Martinez and De Corral's manner through the exhibition, showcasing the works of artists from more than 70 nations. Compared to previous editions, the 2005 Venice Biennale reduced the number of participating artists from around 300 to approximately 90. In his opening discourse, the President of the Venice Biennale in 2005, Davide Croff, underlined the importance of an efficient and well-organised structure that provided visitors with a clear understanding of the artworks¹¹⁶. While some critics and collectors argued that the exhibition lacked novelty, several artists and their works stood out amidst the crowd. Political undertones subtly permeated the 2005 Venice Biennale, evident in various artworks and installations. Additionally, feminist messages emerged through artworks, and three of these examples are explained in the following passages.

2.2 Barbara Kruger, Joana Vasconcelos and Guerrilla Girls

The 2005 curatorial approaches are here interrelated with artistic production. The artists selected for the initial and subsequent exhibitions share common characteristics that justify their inclusion. Considering the overarching theme that underpins the overall analysis of this paper, the decision was made to first examine the awardees of the prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement award, followed by artists whose works left a strong impact on visitors at the Giardini, and later at the Arsenale due to their impressive effects and dimensions. Lastly, artists with a significant social

¹¹⁵ The Art Newspaper, *Kruger's lifetime achievement award a little less luminous*, in "The Art Newspaper", 1, June 2005; <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2005/06/01/krugers-lifetime-achievement-award-a-little-less-luminous> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹¹⁶ M. De Corral, *L'Esperienza dell'Arte*, in *L'esperienza dell'arte. Sempre un po' più lontano*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 51. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 12 June-6 November 2005), edited by R. Martinez, M. De Corral, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2005.

resonance were considered. Barbara Kruger, the esteemed winner of the top honour, was chosen for her substantial contribution, Joana Vasconcelos for the evocative nature of her work, and the Guerrilla Girls as a highly provocative group of artists and activists. The selection and comprehensive study of these individuals were greatly influenced by their association with the 2022 Biennale edition, as well as their current presence and symbolic position in the art world.

With these intentions in mind and as mentioned above, the analysis of artistic production commences with Barbara Kruger (Newar, 1945). She is an American multimedia artist known for her bold and provocative works that combine text and imagery. She is also interested in writing, poetry, and critique. The graphic designer's professional role in the early 1960s greatly influenced all her artistic production¹¹⁷. In the late 1970s, Kruger began exploring the ways in which media constructs desire and identity. Her art explores themes of consumerism, feminism, power dynamics, and identity in the context of contemporary society and it delves into universal conflicts such as dynamics of gender, racial divisions, and the various socio-cultural dissonances prevalent in Western society¹¹⁸. In her practice, stereotypes function as instruments of subjection, reducing the body to poses and gestures within a semiotic field. Kruger intercepts stereotypes through graphic-design techniques, aiming to disrupt their instant legibility and force viewers to deconstruct their messages, employing blurring fact and fiction to disrupt the perpetuation of power dynamics¹¹⁹. Over the course of several decades, Kruger's artistic methodologies have expanded to encompass a broader range of approaches, including the use of large-scale and spatialised visual practices, incorporating both still and moving images. She explores the dynamic between the viewer and the image, positioning the audience as both spectators and subjects within the frame. In her screen works, viewers embody the characters' perspectives, becoming the literal spectators in a cinematic experience. By

¹¹⁷ Guggenheim, *Artists. Barbara Kruger*; <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/barbara-kruger> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ C. Owens, *The Medusa Effect or the Spectacular Ruse*, in *Barbara Kruger. We won't play nature to you culture*, exhibition catalogue (London, Institute of Contemporary Arts 4 November – 11 December 1983, Basel, Kunsthalle 13 May – 24 June 1984) edited by Craig Owens, Jane Weinstock, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1983, pp. 5-11.

mimicking and appropriating words and images, her work prompts viewers to question their own perceptions. Her orientation is clearly feminist, as her works delve into themes aligned with the political movement. She examines how gender differences are reinforced by the media and chooses to employ similar means to counteract their influence on equal footing¹²⁰. Her emphasis lies in embracing inclusion and embracing diversity, rather than adhering to opposites, binary definitions, and conflict¹²¹.

Kruger's work may thus be described as imaginary. By creating fictions, different "yours", she puts you, the spectator, in another position. You are not yourself. But what if you are a woman? The fact that Kruger does not literally address you does not mean that you have no place here. On the contrary she constructs a masculine position for every "you" in order to show you a certain ubiquity¹²².

Kruger's impact on the art world extends beyond solo exhibitions, as she has also been featured in prominent art events and biennials¹²³. In 1982, she participated in the Venice Biennale section *APERTO 82 - Space*¹²⁴ and returned to participate once again in 2005, where she was honoured with the Golden Lion for her career lifetime achievement¹²⁵. During that occasion, Kruger presented a captivating and unpublished

¹²⁰ Guggenheim, *Collection Online. Barbara Kruger*; <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/barbara-kruger> [last access on 4 June 2023].

¹²¹ B. Kruger, *Remote Control: Power, Cultures and the world of Appearances*, cit., pp. 6-7.

¹²² J. Weinstock, *What she means to you*, in *Barbara Kruger. We won't play nature to you culture*, exhibition catalogue (London, Institute of Contemporary Arts 4 November – 11 December 1983, Basel, Kunsthalle 13 May – 24 June 1984) edited by Craig Owens, Jane Weinstock, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1983, p. 16.

¹²³ Noteworthy exhibitions featuring her work include presentations in many important institutions, such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1983, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1999, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2005; Moderna Museet, Stockholm 2008; and others. More prominent events and biennials to be mentioned are the Whitney Biennial 1983, 1985, and 1987, documenta 7 and 8 in 1982 and 1987, respectively. Information gathered from David Zwirner, *Barbara Kruger: Biography*; <https://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/barbara-kruger/biography> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹²⁴ In the 1980s, the Art Exhibition departed from unified themes and divided into sections, including *Aperto*. The concept of *Aperto* was conceived by Achille Bonito Oliva and Harald Szeemann, and it took place in the former Magazzini del Sale in Dorsoduro. This initiative aimed to provide a dedicated space for young artists and continued in subsequent editions. In 1982, Barbara Kruger was participating in *Aperto*, but in the second section entitled *Space*, while the former was referred to as *Time*. The 1982 Biennale, titled *Art as Art: Persistence of the Work*, inherited its title from Luigi Carluccio, who tragically passed away in Brazil in 1981. T. Trini, *Open 82. Second Section – Space*, in *Art as Art*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 39^o Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, Magazzini del Sale, 1982) edited by Carlo Pirovano, Venezia: Electa, p. 241.

¹²⁵ The prize, along with the other yet undisclosed golden lions, will be awarded on the 10th of June next at the Teatro alle Tese in the Arsenale of Venice, during the official ceremony. Additionally, the

installation entitled *Untitled (Façade): wall tattoo* on the façade of the Italian Pavilion at the Giardini (Ill. 4)¹²⁶. This large-scale artwork was intentionally designed to harmonise with the pavilion's architectural aesthetics, acting as a striking entrance to the exhibition *The Experience of Ary*¹²⁷. Its symbolic significance foreshadowed the immersive encounters that awaited visitors. Given the particular time and space, it became evident that this installation resonated with Kruger's broader artistic production.

Prize for Young Italian Art 2005, promoted by DARC - General Directorate for Architecture and Contemporary Art, and MAXXI - National Museum of 20th Century Arts, will also be presented. Exhibart, *Biennale di Venezia. Barbara Kruger vince il Leone d'oro alla carriera*; <https://www.exibart.com/speednews/biennale-di-venezia-barbara-kruger-vince-il-leone-doro-alla-carriera/> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹²⁶ B. Kruger, *L'esperienza dell'arte*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 51. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 12 June-6 November 2005), edited by R. Martinez, M. De Corral, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2005, p.124-126. During the winter of 1894-1895, the construction of the Exhibition Palace in the Gardens of Castello took place. The specificity of Barbara Kruger's intervention location holds significant importance due to its historical and location relevance. The pavilion project was designed by the municipal architect Enrico Trevisanato, with the neoclassical façade envisioned by the Venetian painter Marius De Maria. Initially named Pro Arte, the façade underwent architectural modifications by Guido Cirilli in 1914. The architectural transformation of the building into the Italian Pavilion, characterized by the amalgamation of warehouses without a cohesive plan, was carried out by Duilio Torres. His intervention focused on the façade, where he retained the existing curvature and introduced four columns and an attic. In addition to his contribution, Carlo Scarpa played a significant role in the project. After creating the sculpture courtyard and entrance ticket office in 1952, Scarpa took on multiple reorganizations of the internal spaces and pathways, building the Giardino delle Sculture. In 1962 and 1968, he further altered the façade, deliberately highlighting the discrepancy between the external rhetoric and the incongruous interior. Scarpa achieved this by incorporating a series of brick walls and partitions that revealed glimpses of the previous pronaos. He hid the columns on the façade behind fluted wings: a temporary work that was later removed. In Archivi degli architetti, *La Biennale di Venezia: Architettura per le mostre / Architettura in mostra*;

http://www.architetti.san.beniculturali.it/web/architetti/percorsi/scheda-percorsi?p_p_id=56_INSTANCE_4xpN&groupId=10304&articleId=19308&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&viewMode=normal&articleIdPadre=19308 [last access on 18 June 2023].

¹²⁷ The façade of the central pavilion has played a significant role in the artistic events of the Venice Biennale's history. It has witnessed protests, architectural modifications, and notable artistic interventions. Recent installations include Lara Favaretto's *Thinking Head* in 2019, which enveloped visitors in a custom-made fog, and Cosima Von Bonin's artwork *What is they bark 01-07* for the 59th edition, featuring plastic sharks, fish, and playful elements behind the columns. These interventions provoke discussions on capitalism, leisure, and the art world.



Ill.4: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Façade): wall tattoo*, 2005, digital photographic printing, print on vinyl, 51st. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Central Pavilion, photo credit Haupt & Binder.

Within the artwork, Kruger skilfully combined English and Italian words, establishing a profound connection with the globalised world. As she welcomed visitors to the 2005 Biennale, the artist conveyed admonitions or perhaps offered stark advice on navigating the complexities of the contemporary realm¹²⁸. This use of a linguistic strategy represents a distinctive aspect of Kruger's artistic practice, where her physical artworks exhibit a precise objectivity akin to advertisements embodying the perfect solution for a specific idea or logo. The consciousness evoked by her art is exemplified through distinct, well-defined lines and open, expansive spaces that invite introspection¹²⁹. Therefore, her work seamlessly blends direct and subtle language, employing strategies commonly used by commercial media.

¹²⁸ la Repubblica, *Leone d'oro a barbara kruger*; <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2005/05/25/leone-oro-barbara-kruger.html> [last access on 26 May 2023].

¹²⁹ K. Linker, *Barbara Kruger*, in "Artforum"; <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/198307/barbara-kruger-65241> [last access on 26 May 2023].

In 2022, Barbara Kruger participated once again in Venice Biennale central exhibition, *The Milk of Dreams*. This time, her installation was situated at the pinnacle of the Corderie building, meticulously designed to complement the spatial dimensions of the site. The captivating installation featured a multi-faceted composition, incorporating a dynamic three-channel video component intertwined with visually striking elements. Kruger employed commanding phrases such as “PLEASE CARE” and “PLEASE MOURN” (Ill.5)¹³⁰ drawing viewers into a confrontational encounter with the artwork. Through her distinctively disembodied mode of address, Kruger skilfully directed attention toward the visceral and bodily experiences of the viewers. This intentional strategy prompted profound reflection on one’s corporeal existence and the intricacies of bodily functions.



Ill. 5: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Beginning/Middle/End)*, 2022, digital photographic printing, print on vinyl, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

¹³⁰ M. Warner, *The Milk of Dreams*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 59. Esposizione Internazionale d’arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 23 April-27 November 2022), edited by C. Alemani, M. Papini, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2022, pp. 652-656.

Both in 2005 and 2022, by provoking contemplation of these fundamental aspects of human existence, Kruger invites for a deeper experience within the context of her artworks. She challenges the limitations of stereotypes by cautioning against rigid categorisations and binary oppositions. Kruger suggests that the inclination towards labelling and ordering is ingrained to understand what to know and how to approach knowledge. In her view, this process of arranging and organising is not solely determined by individual taste, but is also influenced by societal norms, resulting in a convergence of preferences. In this sense, taste can be seen as a social compass that reflects our position in the world, our affinities, dislikes, and what resonates with us – a combination shaped by our background and aspirations. The act of categorising, organising, and finding a sense of order in things seems to hold a certain appeal for the artist, perhaps rooted in a desire for comfort and reassurance¹³¹. Kruger's exploration of language, slogans, and the manipulation of visual narratives can be seen as a critique of the contemporary media-saturated world, where information and images are constantly disseminated and consumed. Therefore, by connecting these exhibitions and installations, one can observe the evolution of Kruger's ideas, her engagement with contemporary issues, and her ongoing commitment to challenging societal norms and power structures. While specific references and visual strategies may differ, the underlying themes and critical perspectives that define Kruger's art connect her work across different periods, allowing for a meaningful dialogue between her artworks exhibited in 2005 and 2022. The two artworks can also be connected through the implicit sense of care directed toward the viewer. Care is directed towards action, thought, and behaviour through the contemplation suggested by the words – sometimes articulated in a sentence, sometimes in simple imperative syntax. Caring is a practice rooted in feminism, as is the practice of the artist. Furthermore, the behaviour that this stimulates is one of interdependence between subjects, as in the case of both the first installation in 2005 and the one in 2022: the artist and her work rely on the viewer's engagement with the space, and vice versa. Moreover, with the same level of interdependence, feminist discourse, speeches, and texts are all absorbed by the seductive centrality of the image¹³². When it comes to feminist discourse, the

¹³¹ B. Kruger, *Remote Control: Power, Cultures and the world of Appearances*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1993, pp. 2-5.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 40-45; 226-228.

artist's targets are male chauvinism, consumerism, dynamics of self-representation, and the behavioural constraints imposed by common morality. The aim is to subvert conventions that portray women as victims of male power.

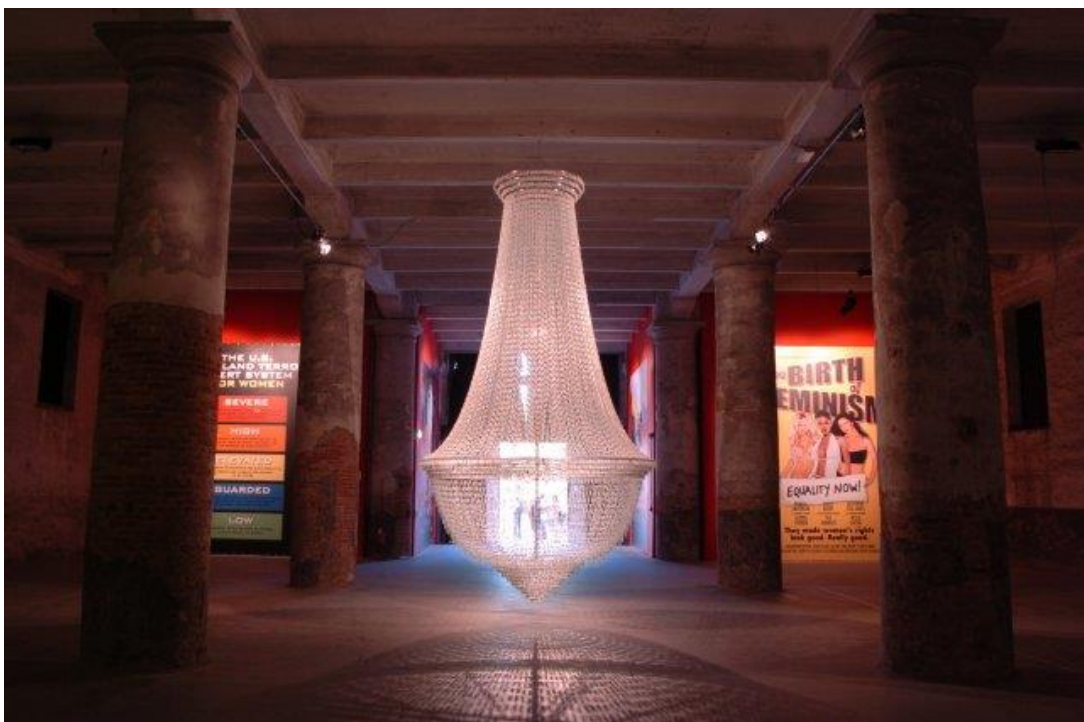
The monumental nature of Kruger's installations, which effectively communicates messages through its striking visual and spatial impact, combined with the deliberate utilisation of simple yet profound everyday words, finds a profound echo in the artistic expressions of Joana Vasconcelos (Paris, 1971). She is an artist whose primary focus lies within the realms of sculpture and installation. She holds a distinguished position among the cohort of Portuguese artists from the 1990s. The significance of her work has been further underscored by its prominent placement, just as Kruger's. Vasconcelos' piece was positioned at the entrance of the Corderie where it was showcased one of her most emblematic recent creations, *A Noiva*, 2001 (Ill.6), an opulent chandelier composed of over fourteen thousand internal absorbers, ingeniously adapted as usual crystal pendants and to fit within the spatial dimensions of the Venice Biennale of 2005¹³³. In its technique and addressed issue, this work reflects on multiple facets of the artist's vehement denunciation of phallocentrism and intriguingly manipulates common object significance¹³⁴. With the presentation of this artwork, Vasconcelos first moved towards being identified with a feminist tendency, as revealed by the curatorial framework guiding thread¹³⁵. More in detail, the artwork specifically explores various themes, including the imperatives of the macho ethos and the decoration of lavish palatial salons. It also delves into the symbolism behind the typical Catholic wedding dress. By uncovering layers of meaning embedded with common sense, the artist provides an escape from the intellectual constraints of feminism and distinguishes herself from strictly ideologically-driven practices of the art movement. *In A Noiva*, Vasconcelos incorporates various references, including a notable allusion to Duchamp's influential artwork, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her*

¹³³ Joana Vasconcelos, *BEAUTY AND RECONCILIATION IN THE ART OF JOANA VASCONCELOS*; http://www.joanavasconcelos.com/multimedia/bibliografia/2015_MaterialWorld_CSartwell_EN.pdf [last access on 30 May 2023].

¹³⁴ M. Amado, *Meeting Point or The Return of the Art of the Real*, in *Joana Vasconcelos*, exhibition catalogue (Lisbon, Museu Coleção Berardo, 1 March - 18 May 2010), Lisbon: Norprint, 2010, pp. 21-22.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Bachelors, Even. Through the use of automotive painting, unconventional materials, and vivid allegories, Vasconcelos symbolises the complexities of the modern era. Navigating between tradition and modernity, collective unconsciousness and history, and the sublime and the symbolic, Vasconcelos explores the significance of artistic aura. The artist employs allegory to critically examine contemporary life and its intersections with identity, such as gender, class, and nationality. By deconstructing the realities of consumer society, Vasconcelos challenges societal norms and questions the values, ideas, and practices that shape today material and social world¹³⁶.



Ill. 6: Joana Vasconcelos, *A Novia*, 2001, Stainless steel and about 14,000 internal OB pads. Chandelier hung from the ceiling of the first exhibition space at the Arsenale, 680x300x300, 51st. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

Moreover, Vasconcelos adeptly preserves the core of Portuguese identity, deftly merging it with both overwhelming modernity and the traditions of bygone eras. This is vividly evident in her recent series of grand sculptures that feature the delicate filigree motif, an emblem of pure ornamental tradition in Portuguese culture. However, Vasconcelos employs plastic cutlery to intensify the interplay between tradition and

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 24, 27.

modernity, simultaneously embracing and challenging their coexistence. In an interview, the artist summarises her artistic practice by stating:

My work certainly has a feminine tone, which is often mistaken for a feminist purpose. I am a woman, and I am Portuguese, so it is natural for my work to have a feminine and Portuguese voice in terms of form, but this pertains to form rather than substance. My concerns are not feminist in the common sense of the word, although I do advocate for equal opportunities for women, of course. Above all, I support human rights regardless of gender, faith, political or sexual orientations. I am interested in the qualities of each individual and what a person can offer to others and the community, freely and without restrictions, irrespective of differentiating factors¹³⁷.

In this statement, the artist clarifies that her work has Portuguese female voice in terms of form, but their concerns extend beyond feminism. She advocates for equal opportunities and support human rights for all individuals, irrespective of gender, faith, politics, or sexual orientation. They value the qualities and contributions of each person, emphasizing freedom and inclusivity. Influenced by the realms of design and architecture, encompassing aspects of proportion and functionality, the artist restore significance to objects, endowing them with new categorisations from critical, functional, and aesthetic perspectives. A *Noiva* exemplifies this approach in its magnificence, coupled with the intricacy of its minutiae, which creates an atmosphere that seems to graciously welcome the visitor¹³⁸. The whimsical nature of Vasconcelos' creations and her exploration of feminine themes establish an intimate connection with objects, design, or fashion that bear relevance to the contemporary context they inhabit. In many instances, these objects transition from the particular to the universal, encompassing a reservoir of tradition, social and cultural identity, and the interplay between them. Much of the artist's oeuvre revolves around a delightful interplay between linguistic and material elements, avoiding any affiliation with surrealist assumptions. Her piece can be likened to poetic statements, be they linguistic or object-

¹³⁷ R. Moratto, *Joana Vasconcelos* in "Flash Art", 20 July 2015; <https://flash---art.it/article/joana-vasconcelos/> [last access on 19 May 2023].

¹³⁸ R. Martinez, *Sempre un po' più lontano*, cit., pp. 286-288.

based, often aligning with the principles of relational aesthetics. In this manner, Joana Vasconcelos has evolved into an artist for whom both the aesthetic dimension and communicative nature of her work hold paramount importance. Furthermore, she places great value on the audience and their interaction with her pieces. Within this context, it becomes apparent how the artist has contributed to numerous site-specific projects and proposals tailored to distinct locations and spatial contexts. In this regard, another example of Vasconcelos' adaptable works and participation at the Venice Biennale can be seen through *Tradaria Praia* (Ill.7).



Ill. 7: Joana Vasconcelos, *Tradaria Praia*, 2013, project, 55th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

It was the first floating pavilion representing Portugal in the 2013 Venice Biennale, curated by Massimiliano Gioni. Vasconcelos explored the similarities between Lisbon and Venice, focusing on three shared characteristics: water, navigation, and vessels. Both cities have historically played significant roles in expanding the European worldview during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance¹³⁹. Vasconcelos aimed for her work to symbolically transcend the power struggles seen in contemporary

¹³⁹ R. Moratto, *Joana Vasconcelos*, cit.

international relations. This approach is typical of the artist, who often appropriates everyday objects and meticulously transforms them. Since Portugal doesn't have a traditional pavilion in the Giardini, the artist, in collaboration with curator Miguel Amado, decided to present *Trafaria Praia* as a floating pavilion in Venice lagoon. The artwork was commissioned by the Portuguese state agency Direção-Geral das Artes, under the auspices of the Secretário de Estado da Cultura, Governo de Portugal. The ferry boat was adorned with tiled panels depicting a contemporary view of Lisbon, inspired by Gabriel del Barco's Grande Panorama de Lisboa from 1700. The intention was to provide a modern perspective of Lisbon prior to the 1755 earthquake¹⁴⁰. The interior of the boat continued the blue and white tones, featuring a textile installation covering the entire deck. Crocheted tentacles in blue and white slowly moved on and off, creating the sensation of being inside a living organism¹⁴¹. Like in this case, many of Vasconcelos' creations are designed to encourage audience participation, inviting active engagement and allowing spectators to witness the effects and impact they generate within a given space. Vasconcelos' option for large scale in various public art projects encapsulates her approach to monumentality. This category central to European tradition of sculpture is examined not only aesthetically but also in terms of ethics, diverting it from the uses that were dominant down the centuries. Therefore, it is not the monument in itself that had the artist deal with, but with utopia underlying the actual monumental dimension, as she interested in the meaning site-specificity and the context of the local and not the rhetoric of celebration. This is why the reference to architecture in general and to spatial organisation defines another of the main threads in Vasconcelos's oeuvre, especially with regard to the relationship between the work and the built environment¹⁴². Vasconcelos' artistic production embodies a historical perspective, contemplating the nature of public experience. The artist's trajectory responds to the diminishing social and commemorative interactions in contemporary sculpture. Positioned away from the art world's mainstream centres, Vasconcelos undertakes the deconstruction and fragmentation of public space,

¹⁴⁰ H. Brady, *Joana Vasconcelos's Floating Pavillon for Portugal At The Venice Biennale*, in "Culture trip", 29 November 2016; <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/portugal/articles/joana-vasconcelos-s-floating-pavilion-portugal-at-the-venice-biennale/> [last access on 19 May 2023].

¹⁴¹ H. Brady, *Joana Vasconcelos's Floating Pavillon for Portugal At The Venice Biennale*, cit.

¹⁴² M. Amado, *Meeting Point or The Return of the Art of the Real*, p. 44.

exploring the object's role in modern and contemporary sculpture through assimilation and appropriation¹⁴³.

Returning to 2005 Venice Biennale edition, specifically at the Corderie, Vasconcelos' chandelier was surrounded in the exhibition by Guerrilla Girls' installation¹⁴⁴. They are an influential feminist art collective, established in 1984. Renowned for their distinctive gorilla masks, clever slogans, and subversive performances, the group is dedicated to advocating for women, minority, and LGBTQ+'s rights within the art world and beyond. Their innovative use of art and performance to promote social justice and gender equality has earned them widespread acclaim. In addition to their focus on the art world, the collective addresses broader cultural and political issues. Guerrilla Girls employ various strategies in their artistic practice, including poster campaigns, interventions on billboards, and public installations. These works often incorporate statistics, facts, and message-based content that critically examines sexism and racism prevalent in the art world. As a result, their creations go beyond conventional artistic boundaries, becoming interactive forms of social protest. The origins of Guerrilla Girls can be traced back to a protest against the exhibition titled *An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York¹⁴⁵. The exhibition featured 148 male artists, only 13 women, and no artists of colour, highlighting a stark gender and racial disparity. This inequality prompted the formation of the group, as women sought new methods to combat discrimination. Embracing guerrilla-style tactics, they adopted gorilla masks and pseudonyms inspired by female artists from history. The veterans of the group are known by the names of Frida Kahlo and Käthe Kollwitz, in reference to internationally recognised artists

¹⁴³ E. Lebovici, *Meeting Point or The Return of the Art of the Real*, in Joana Vasconcelos, exhibition catalogue (Lisbon, Museu Coleção Berardo, 1 March - 18 May 2010), Lisbon: Norprint, 2010, p. 88.

¹⁴⁴ The selection of project manager Paolo Cimarosti for the Biennale's interactions with the Guerrilla Girls raises questions about the curatorial decision-making process and the extent of his engagement with their work. The involvement of architect Manuela Lucà-Dazio in practical management also raises concerns about artistic integrity. Further examination is needed regarding the spatial and conceptual integration of the artworks within the Arsenale, prompting a critical assessment of the curatorial strategies and their impact on the presentation and reception of the Guerrilla Girls' artworks. Information gathered consulting: La Biennale Historical Archive of Contemporary Art (ASAC) Fondo Storico, box 837, folder Guerrilla Girls.

¹⁴⁵ R. Cordova, *Taking it to the Street: the Guerrilla Girls' Struggle for Diversity*, in "Glasstire", 28 November 2021; <https://glasstire.com/2021/11/28/taking-it-to-the-street-the-guerrilla-girls-struggle-for-diversity/> [last access on 19 May 2023].

whose resonance in the art world is a milestone in art history. The use of these pseudonyms also serves to maintain anonymity, a distinctive characteristic of the group's guerrilla activity. All the other members likewise maintain this sort of professional secrecy and use other names dedicated to women who have made history. The ethicality behind the choice of anonymity lies in the desire not to attribute merit to individual persons, but to the group as a whole¹⁴⁶. Therefore, their primary objective was to shift the focus towards the pertinent issues rather than their individual identities. Guerrilla Girls launched their activism by anonymously disseminating thought-provoking posters throughout SoHo, targeting galleries, critics, and museum directors who predominantly showcased male artists. They also challenged the ethical integrity of esteemed institutions within the city. As time progressed, their endeavours expanded to address discrimination against women artists, homelessness, abortion, eating disorders, and war. One of their most iconic campaigns, the *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?* initiative, directly confronted the disconcerting fact that less than 5% of the 5,000+ artworks displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art were created by women¹⁴⁷. Guerrilla Girls highlighted these stark statistics in a poster that questioned the necessity of female nudity for representation. Although the Public Art Fund initially rejected the poster due to concerns about its clarity, Guerrilla Girls found an alternative platform for their design: New York City buses. The poster swiftly gained recognition for its striking graphic design, featuring a depiction of the female nude from Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' painting *Grande Odalisque*, 1814, Musée du Louvre, Paris, donning a gorilla mask¹⁴⁸. Its message brought attention to the lack of gender diversity within the museum and the art world during the 1980s. Remarkably, the Guerrilla Girls reissued the poster in 2005 and 2012, demonstrating its enduring relevance and profound impact, as it continued to resonate with audiences throughout the years¹⁴⁹. The Guerrilla Girls' journey to the Biennale was propelled by Frida's participation in ARCO Madrid,

¹⁴⁶ J. Perna, *Guerrilla Girls. Sotto la maschera*, Castelvocchi: Roma, 2018, pp. 24-26, 35-36.

¹⁴⁷ Guerrilla Girls, *Do Women Have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, in "Met Museum", 1989; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/849438> [last access on 19 May 2023].

¹⁴⁸ C. Small, *Review of Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls; Divisions of Labor: "Women's Work" in Contemporary Art*, in "Woman's Art Journal", vol. 19, no. 2, 1998, pp. 38-40.

¹⁴⁹ TATE, *Guerrilla Girls. Where are the Women Artists At Venice?*; <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-where-are-the-women-artists-of-venice-p15276> [last accessed 3 May 2023].

where their significance captured the Martinez and art world's attention through thought-provoking discussions on gender issues and striking visual presentations. As the head of the art and feminism debate at the ARCO contemporary art forum from 2003 to 2006, Spanish feminist curator Xabier Arakistain demonstrated a commitment to gender equality in the art world and to Guerrilla Girls. Arakistain authored the ARCO Manifesto in 2005 and dedicated it to the Guerrilla Girls, recognizing the importance and relevance of their cause¹⁵⁰. The works of the Guerrilla Girls were prominently displayed on the walls of the primary section within the Corderie. This collection consisted of six large-scale posters with titles such as *Benvenuti alla Biennale Femminista*, 2005 (Ill.8), *Where are the women artists of Venice? Underneath the men*, 2005; *The Birth of Feminism Movie Poster*, 2005; *The U.S. Homeland Terror Alert for Women*, 2005, *The Anatomically correct Oscar*, 2005, and *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met Museum?*, 2005. These striking billboards possess a significant size and a visually uncomplicated composition, ensuring that their powerful messages directly engage the viewer¹⁵¹. The collective plea made by this group of artists is firmly rooted in addressing the persistent disparity between the representation of male and female artists. They underscore the remarkable nature of having two women in positions of artistic leadership, the insufficient recognition accorded to female artists, and the prevailing subordination of women to their male counterparts¹⁵². For instance, their manifesto *Where are the women artists of Venice Underneath the men* called out galleries in Venice for hiding artworks by women artists. Using a clever double entendre, they referenced Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* to urge viewers to demand the exhibition of these hidden artworks metaphorically tucked away in museum basements. Their second artwork, exclusively for the Biennale, featured four Guerrilla Girls within Canaletto's painting of Palazzo Ducale. Holding placards with data on the 2005 Biennale's increased representation of women, they emphasised progress in providing space for women artists. Other works were reprints but remained unsettling with disconcerting statistics. They also satirically

¹⁵⁰ X. Arakistain, *Reflections on a Feminist Model for the Field of Art: Montehermoso, 2008–2011*, in *Beyond Guernica and the Guggenheim. Arts and Politics from a Comparative Perspective*, edited by Zoe Bray, University of Nevada: Reno, 2015, pp. 253-263.

¹⁵¹ National Gallery of Art, *Benvenuti alla Biennale Femminista!*; <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.139877.html> [last access on 30 May 2023].

¹⁵² J. Perna, *Guerrilla Girls. Sotto la maschera*, cit., pp.82-87.

targeted Italian politics, the Bush administration, and Hollywood. For example, they exposed the true anatomy of the prestigious Oscar award and used the style of safety posters to reveal the misconduct of the American government¹⁵³.



Ill.8: Guerrilla Girls, *Benvenuti alla Biennale Femminista*, 2005, project for the Venice Biennale, Print Materials, Colour offset lithograph, Edition 13/50, Dimensions 60.9x45.7, 51st 51st. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

Moreover, their call resolutely highlights the pervasive presence of the male-dominating gaze in everyday life, mass media, entertainment, and, most notably, the art world – an unfortunate and seemingly ingrained phenomenon that regrettably often goes unchallenged. For instance, embodied by the group’s distinctive style of bold graphics and provoking slogans the posters conveyed powerful messages, such as “Less than 10% of the artists in the last Venice Biennale were women, but 76% of the nudes were female”¹⁵⁴. The exhibition included a phone booth where visitors could

¹⁵³ G. Oltolini, *Il Femminismo nell’arte contemporanea: Il fenomeno delle Guerrilla Girls*, “tesi triennale”, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, 2019-2020, pp.60-64.

¹⁵⁴ R. Martinez, *Sempre un po più lontano*, cit., p. 126.

listen to recorded messages from the Guerrilla Girls, as well as a computer station providing access to the group's extensive archives. The installation sought to inspire visitors to take action towards addressing these issues.

In these terms, the Guerrilla Girls' art practice is also widely recognised as a powerful form of activism because their performances often take the form of dramatic, theatrical actions that invite audience participation and dialogue. By actively engaging the public in their performances, Guerrilla Girls are able to build momentum and visibility for the movements they are advocating for¹⁵⁵. The practice of Guerrilla Girls has enabled them to reach a wide-ranging audience and effectively instigate meaningful transformations within the art world and beyond, thus, they have been the subject of numerous exhibitions, books, and documentaries¹⁵⁶. Their approach is not to provide definitive answers, but rather to present enigmatic situations, illuminating juxtapositions, and unanswered queries that prompt observers to reconsider their perspectives. Rather than simply asserting incorrectness, their aim is to be subversive by offering disarming visual proposals supported by factual evidence¹⁵⁷.

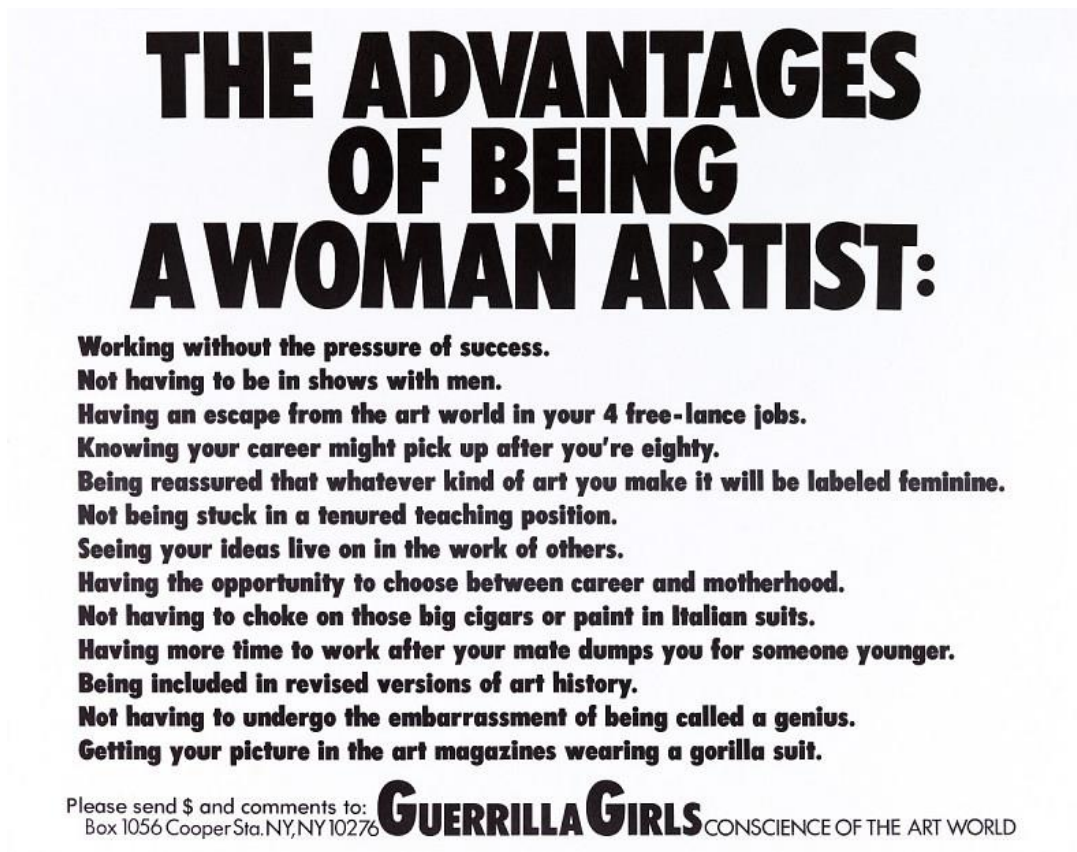
Guerrilla Girls collectively fearlessly confronts a society deeply entrenched in an unquestioned patriarchal system, which permeates all facets of daily life. Through their

¹⁵⁵ L. R. Lippard, Lucy, *Making Something Out of Nothing* (Towards a Definition of Women's 'Hobbyist' Art), in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, E. P. Dutton, 1976, pp. 137-50.; M. Bal, *A Guerrilla Girl's Guide to Postmodernism*, in *October*, vol. 55, 1990, pp. 73-92.

¹⁵⁶ A non-exhaustive list follows. Solo exhibitions: *Art of Attack*, Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA, 1993; *The Guerrilla Girls*, Foundation Bilbao Arte, Bilbao, Spain, 2002; *The Guerrilla Girls' Art Museum Activity Book*, Printed Matter, New York, USA, 2004. Group exhibitions: *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards*, 1980-1995, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA, 1996; *Billboard: Art on the Road*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, USA, 1998; *DETOX*, Borderland Museum, Kirkenes, Norway - touring exhibition to eight venues including Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, 2004-2005; *Guerrilla Girls: Art in Action*, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, USA, 2016; *Guerrilla Girls: Not Ready to Make Nice*, Abron's Arts Centre, New York City, 2015. Publications: *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls*, Harper Perennial, 1995; *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*, Penguin, 1998; *Bitches, Bimbos and Ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls' Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes*, Penguin, 2003; *The Hysterical Herstory of Hysteria and How It Was Cured*, in digital form on compact disc in advance of publication dated close to Biennale Arte 2005. The specifics of all these can be found at the following link: Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls' Complete Chronology*; <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/chronology-exhibitions> [last accessed on 5 May 2023]. It was also consulted the following publication, which contains all the artists' works and exhibitions of the group from its origins to the year of release. Guerrilla Girls, *The Art of Behaving Badly*, San Francisco: Chronicle Books Llc, 2020.

¹⁵⁷ https://www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/notable/guerrilla_girls.html#:~:text=Guerrilla%20Girls%20grew%20out%20of,contemporary%20art%20in%20the%20world [last accessed on 2 May 2023].

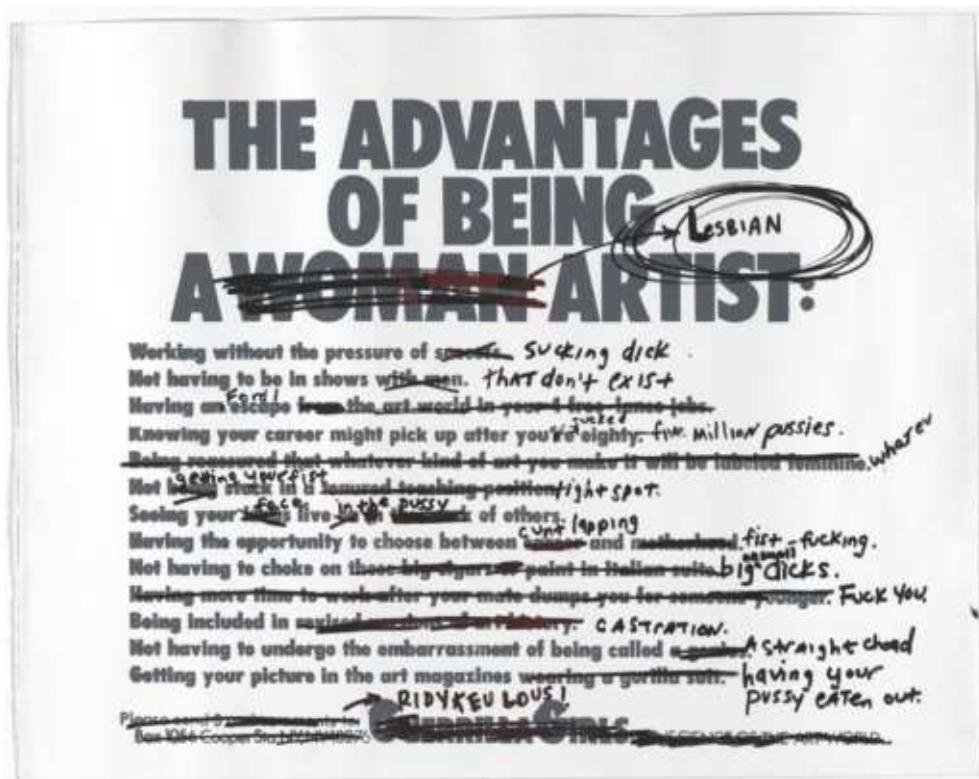
actions, they elicit a range of reactions and interpretations, showcasing the extensive impact of their interventions. In 2006, Ridykeulous, a queer and feminist curatorial duo from the United States, edited *The Advantages of Being A Woman Artist*¹⁵⁸ by the Guerrilla Girls, adapting it to resonate with queer feminists. For instance, they replaced the word “success” in the opening line with “sucking dick,” offering a reinterpretation that reflects their own unique perspective and lived experiences (Ill.9, Ill.10). Initially, Guerrilla Girls did not respond to the modified version of their work, but later expressed their willingness to incorporate it into one of their exhibitions, thereby demonstrating their acceptance and endorsement of the revised piece ¹⁵⁹.



Ill. 9: Guerrilla Girls, *The advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988, Photo-offset lithograph on paper, 43.1x56, 1988, Tate, London.

¹⁵⁸ L. Gosling, H. Robinson, A. Tobin, *The Personal Feminist. Making the Personal Political*, in *The Art of feminism. Images that Shaped the Fight for Equality, 1857-2022*, revised edition, edited by H. Reckitt, London: Tate Publishing, 2022, pp. 236-256, here p. 246.

¹⁵⁹ They are founded in 2005 by painter Nicole Eisenman and multimedia artist A.L.Steiner. They are committed to creating exhibitions, events and written works that use humour and irony to critique the art world.



Ill. 10: Ridykeulous with Nicole Eisenman, A.L. Steiner, *The Advantages of Being a Lesbian Woman Artist*, 2006, screenprint, 41.2x51, Moma, New York.

When evaluating the contributions of the Guerrilla Girls, it becomes evident that their efforts to raise awareness among institutions and the general public have yielded tangible outcomes in fostering a more inclusive engagement within the art world. Drawing on their successful method demonstrated through thought-provoking posters, statistical data highlights the continued marginalization of non-heteronormative and non-Western male participation at the 2022 Venice Art Biennale. The artists themselves underscored this issue in an Instagram post on April 23, 2022, noting that the percentage of women artists in the 2005 Biennale stood at 38%, a figure that increased to 90% in 2022. This achievement represents a significant milestone during the intervening period (Ill.11)¹⁶⁰.

¹⁶⁰ The information was obtained from browsing Instagram social media via the author's profile page. Instagram, Guerrilla Girls;



Ill. 11: Guerrilla Girls' Instagram profile page, photo and comment posted on April 23, 2022. Screenshoted by the author.

In conclusion, the examination of Barbara Kruger, Joana Vasconcelos, and the Guerrilla Girls' artistic practices illuminates the formidable barriers women have encountered in the realm of art. Initially marginalized and excluded from artistic circles, women faced hindrances due to societal expectations that confined their roles to other domains. The scarcity of women in art history books is a testament to the limited number of female practitioners, and those who defied societal norms and opinions were often perceived as inferior, their artistic brilliance overshadowed by their male counterparts, reducing their creative expressions to mere hobbies.

While Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls prioritised the political dimensions of activism and advocacy, extending the boundaries of feminism to encompass racial discrimination and corruption alongside gender bias, their artistic mediums, such as citywide posters and billboards embellished with photographs and incisive slogans infused with biting irony, resonate with each other in their powerful messaging. Conversely, Vasconcelos adopted a more light-hearted approach in her artworks, deconstructing and critiquing stereotypes associated with the female image to expose their inherent absurdity and fallacy. Her renditions of the symbolism surrounding the

https://www.instagram.com/p/Ccs1L5VFRv5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA== [last access on 24 May 2023].

female figure evoke a disquieting sense, influenced significantly by preceding periods in art history, wherein women were often objectified as art subjects or relegated to the status of narrative devices. Such portrayals reflected a society that perceived women as passive objects, existing solely to fulfil the desires of their male counterparts.

Kruger, Vasconcelos and Guerrilla Girls employ also irony as a powerful tool in their artistic practice to critique and challenge societal norms, power structures, and cultural conventions, but all in different ways. Kruger's irony, for example, can be perceived through her iconic text-based artworks, but presenting contradictory messages. Vasconcelos also utilises irony while playfully combining unexpected elements and symbols, creating visual and conceptual contrasts. While Guerrilla Girls use humour and satire to expose the gender and racial inequalities unmasking the hypocrisy and discrimination within the art establishment. By means of irony, these artists create a sense of dissonance, prompting viewers to critically examine societal norms, power dynamics, and the constructed nature of reality provoking thoughts, stimulating dialogues, and encouraging a deeper understanding of the complexities and contradictions inherent in contemporary culture. Furthermore, these artists engaged in direct or indirect feminist discourse seek to offer an alternative perspective on society, fostering an understanding of the detrimental nature of certain attitudes and advocating for equal opportunities and rights for women. They emphasise that genius and creativity transcend gender boundaries, challenging the notion that these qualities are exclusive to certain segments of the population. This analysis reveals an interconnectedness among an entire generation of artists who navigated the intersection of politics, human rights activism, and an increasing awareness of the art world's shortcomings, such as artists who resorted to public actions and street art, utilising posters and billboards as public canvases for self-expression. By integrating the perspectives of the two selected artists as case studies with the collective and activist experiences of the Guerrilla Girls, valuable insights into the art world of the feminist era are gained, appreciating the progress made while identifying areas that warrant further improvement. Overall, the presented artistic practices have played transformative roles in shaping feminist discourse within the art world. Their works not only interrogate societal norms but also instigate critical reflection on gender equality and the imperative for inclusivity within the artistic realm. By reflecting upon

their contributions, it becomes apparent that their artistic legacies will endure, inspiring future generations to challenge existing paradigms and cultivate a more equitable and inclusive art world.

3. Venice Art Biennale 2022

From 2005 to 2022, the Venice Biennale has presented a succession of editions that have showcased a diverse array of artistic expressions, examining various thematic and conceptual frameworks. Each edition has brought forth distinct perspectives, shedding light on specific issues and concerns within the contemporary art world. The thematic focus of the Venice Biennale exhibitions is inherently shaped by the chronological context, as it responds to the evolving needs and interests of the time¹⁶¹. Following Rosa Martinez and Maria de Corral's 2005 edition, the artistic direction led by women have demonstrated their adaptability to these changing demands. The chosen title for the 54th International Art Exhibition, *ILLUMInazioni*, curated by Bice Curiger in 2011, directly highlighted the Biennale's crucial role and capability, even in the context of a globalised world. Furthermore, *ILLUMInazioni* sought to celebrate the power of intuition and the potential for experiential understanding through encounters with art, which enhanced our perceptual faculties. The exhibition focused on the "light" that emerges from engaging with art, fostering illuminating experiences and epiphanies derived from mutual communication and intellectual comprehension. Additionally, the title resonates with the echoes of the Enlightenment era, underscoring its enduring and essential legacy that continues to influence us.

In the catalogue introduction, she declared:

Con ILLUMInazioni si intende portare al centro dell'attenzione un concetto artistico che pone enfasi sul riconoscimento intuitivo, sulla chiarificazione del pensiero, un incontro con l'arte che affina gli strumento della percezione [...]. ILLUMInazioni mira a incentrarsi sulla 'luce', sulla esperienza che discerne, sulla comprensione intellettuale intercomunicativa delle epifanie [...]. ILLUMInazioni rimanda al suo retaffio oggi sempre più virulento. Anche se

¹⁶¹ The 52nd edition in 2007 emphasised individual creative processes, while the 53rd edition in 2009 explored the visionary role of artists. The 54th edition in 2011, while the 55th edition in 2013 examined the artistic process itself; the 56th edition in 2015 addressed global issues the 57th edition in 2017 celebrated the vitality of art, and the 58th edition in 2019 critically engaged with contemporary society. La Biennale di Venezia, *Storia. Gli anni recenti*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/storia/gli-anni-recenti>, [last access on 16 May 2023].

negli ultimi anni sono state rivolte molteplici critiche all'idealizzazione della razionalità illuministica e a pratiche cognitive specificatamente europeo-occidentali, valeva e vale comunque la pena di continuare a celebrare e a salvaguardarle, non da ultimo anche nel campo di battaglia in cui infuria il dibattito sui diritti umani¹⁶².

The curatorial approach behind the 2011 edition referred to the Enlightenment era as a vital legacy worth celebrating disregards the ongoing debates surrounding its idealization and the need for a more inclusive understanding of knowledge production and cognitive practices. Notably, the exhibition was characterised by a spirit that surpassed national boundaries. Additionally, the term “nations” in the title represented the global developments in arts, where overlapping groups from various local activities and mentalities converged. During the press release, Curiger expressed support for the Biennale’s pavilions as a means of fostering dialogue among artists. According to her, Arsenale provided an opportunity to create ‘para-Pavilions,’ utilising the space as a medium. Curiger emphasised that rather than being considered outdated, the pavilions were tools for contemplating identity. By bridging the International Exhibition and National Participations, the Venice Biennale sought to foster unity and encourage artists to engage in critical reflection on identity and artistic expression¹⁶³.

Sharing a common goal of showcasing the richness and diversity of contemporary art and promoting a deeper understanding of artistic practices in a global context, the 2017 edition titled *Viva Arte Viva* and curated by Christine Macel presented a curated display shaped by the artworks of various artists, rather than a singular guiding theme, within a context aimed at facilitating access and understanding, fostering encounters, resonances, and reflections. The exhibition unfolds around nine chapters or artist families, with the first two located in the Central Pavilion and the following seven

¹⁶² It follows the English translation by the author: “The aim of ILLUMInazioni is to bring attention to an artistic concept that emphasizes intuitive recognition and the clarification of thought, an encounter with art that refines the instruments of perception [...]. ILLUMInazioni aims to focus on 'light,' on the discerning experience, on the intercommunicative intellectual understanding of epiphanies [...]. ILLUMInazioni refers to its increasingly vigorous thread today. Despite multiple criticisms directed in recent years towards the idealization of Enlightenment rationality and specifically Euro-Western cognitive practices, it is still worthwhile to continue celebrating and safeguarding them, not least in the battlefield of the ongoing debate on human rights”. From B. Curiger, *ILLUMInations*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 54. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 6 June - 27 November 2011), edited by B. Curiger, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, p.37;. pp.43-46, here 44.

¹⁶³ B. Curiger, *ILLUMInations*, cit., p.45.

sectors extending from the Arsenale to the Giardino delle Vergini¹⁶⁴. Each subdivision stands as a self-contained pavilion, a trans-pavilion in a transnational sense, recalling the historical division of the Biennale into national pavilions, the number of which has steadily increased over time. This semantic reference addresses the debated issue of the relevance of national pavilions, transcending it by involving artists of different generations and origins in each universe. Hence, no material separation punctuates the path of these pavilions, which flow seamlessly like chapters in a book. The exhibition, thus, presents itself as an experience, an outward motion from the self towards the other, towards a shared space beyond defined dimensions, thereby opening up the possibility of a new humanism¹⁶⁵.

The 2011 and 2017 editions have built the groundwork for the future 2022 art director. They celebrated the transformative power of art, encouraged dialogue and exchange, and sought to broaden the horizons of artistic expression. In this sense, art can be seen as a knight in service of a cause, but it is also dependent on and subject to external events. Indeed, the period of the pandemic and the subsequent, lamentable period of war have greatly hindered the accessibility and consumption of art. Since the outbreak of both these emergencies, the Venice Biennale has not only continuously adapted its regulations to protect its workers and the public, but it has also, much like a knight, become a carrier of a principle, a message of strong political significance¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁴ The nine exhibition chapters regards artists and books, joys and fears, common space, land, traditions, shamans, Dionysian, colours, time and infinity.

¹⁶⁵ C. Macel, *Viva Arte Viva*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 57. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 13 May - 26 November 2011), edited by C. Macel, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, pp.16-31, here 16.

¹⁶⁶ In this passage, the reference is first made to the numerous regulatory changes drafted by the Director of Technical and Logistics Services, Engineer C. Frizzelle, approved and authorized by, respectively, Attorney D. Rossi and A. Del Mercato. Then, allusion is made to the consequences of the prolonged health emergency and the belligerent situation in Eastern Europe, including difficulties in content research and logistics for organizing the exhibition in its entirety. Furthermore, there was an alteration in the annual schedule of international exhibitions between art and architecture, where odd-numbered years were traditionally assigned to the former and even-numbered years to the latter since the 1980s. Additionally, the Russian pavilion did not participate in the 2022 Biennale following the artists and curator's resignation. Instead, collaboration was established with the national participation of the Ukrainian state to facilitate the presence of the artist and their team with their artwork, thereby expressing full support to the Ukrainian people and artists. This collaboration also served as a strong condemnation of the unacceptable military aggression perpetrated by Russia. La Biennale di Venezia, *documento sicurezza covid19 78 miac 24 agosto*; <https://static.labiennale.org/files/cinema/2021/Documenti/misure-anti-covid-78miac.pdf> [last access on 26 May 2023]; La Biennale di Venezia, *COMUNICAZIONE DELLA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA SUL PADIGLIONE RUSSO ALLA BIENNALE ARTE 2022*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/comunicazione-della-biennale-di-veneziasul-padiglione-russo-alla-biennale-arte-2022> [last access on 26 May 2023]; La Biennale di Venezia, *LA BIENNALE DI*

Building upon these premises, the subsequent analysis delves into the 2022 edition of the Venice Biennale. The forthcoming sections examine the curatorial methodology employed by Cecilia Alemani, the first Italian female curator entrusted with overseeing this art event. Subsequently, the focus shifts towards the artistic practices of four women artists. The objective of this chapter is to discern the significant factors contributing to the transformation of gender-related notions and their manifestation within the realm of art, particularly within the trajectory spanning from the 2005 Biennale edition to the latest of 2022.

3.1 Cecilia Alemani and *The Milk of Dreams*

Cecilia Alemani (Milan, 1977) is an Italian curator and art historian, currently living in New York City. Alemani received her BA in Philosophy from the Università degli Studi in Milan and her MA in Curatorial Studies from Bard College in Annandale on Hudson, New York. Her education has contributed to her form-mentis and curatorial approach, which is based on in-depth multidisciplinary research and tends to problematise aspects of the contemporary cultural condition. She has contributed to several art publications, collaborated with various museums, institutions, and foundations, both in conventional and unconventional settings. Since 2011, Alemani has been the Director and Chief Curator of *High Line Art*, a public art initiative in New York City. Over the past ten years, She has developed a specialisation in commissioning and producing large-scale artworks for public and unconventional spaces. During her tenure at the *High Line*, she has commissioned major projects by renowned artists and organised group exhibitions. Alemani's public initiatives aim to encourage civic engagement by initiating dialogue, creating awareness, and evoking a sense of possibility. These exhibitions have also explored the role of art in creating and defining public spaces, the relationship between humans and nature, and the inevitable obsolescence of technology, among other relevant topics. In 2018, Alemani was the artistic Director of the first edition of Art Basel Cities, a partnership between

VENEZIA SUL PADIGLIONE UCRAINA ALLA BIENNALE ARTE;
<https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/la-biennale-di-veneziasul-padiglione-ucraina-alla-biennale-arte>,
[last access on 26 May 2023].

the art fair and Buenos Aires to celebrate the city's thriving cultural ecosystem forming a multi-layered experience that connected visual art, urban spaces, and the city's histories in unexpected ways¹⁶⁷. The following year, Alemani commissioned Alexandra Pirici to stage a new iteration of *Aggregate* for Art Basel 2019, which was held at the city's Messe Platz¹⁶⁸. Additionally, she co-founded *No Soul For Sale*, a festival that celebrated independent spaces, non-profit organisations, and artists' collectives. The festival took place at *X Initiative* in June 2009 in New York and at Tate Modern's Turbine, in London¹⁶⁹.

Having dealt with different realities, whether non-profit, international commercial fairs or smaller public initiatives, her professional experiences have been of great relevance in the art world. These have brought her the highest accolades. Among these recognitions was her participation as a curator in three different editions of the Venice Biennale. Formerly, she curated the 57th International Art Exhibition's Italian Pavilion, *Il mondo magico*, inspired by Ernesto de Martino's book of the same title, published in 1948. Three artists were chosen, Giorgio Andreotta Calò, Roberto Cuoghi, and Adelita Husni-Bey, to produce new projects sharing a fascination for the transformative power of imagination and an interest in magic, despite many stylistic differences¹⁷⁰. As in the rituals described by Ernesto de Martino, the works of the artists stage situations of crisis that are resolved through processes of aesthetic and ecstatic transfiguration. These works reveal the image of a country, both real and

¹⁶⁷ S. S. Gander, *For seven days, see Buenos Aires through the eyes of 18 artists*, in "Art Basel-Stories"; <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/an-artistic-journey-through-buenos-aires> [last access on 15 May 2023].

¹⁶⁸ The work is an immersive, performative environment featuring over 60 performers who interact with visitors, creating gestures and sounds that reference different cultural heritages and creating a time capsule-like experience. R. Voinea, *A guide to Alexandra Pirici's Aggregate - Art Basel's public art project*, in *Art Basel – Stories*; <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/messeplatz-alexandra-pirici-glossary> [last access on 15 May 2023].

¹⁶⁹ Data for Cecilia Alemani's biography is taken from her website Cecilia Almani, *About. Cecilia Almani*; <https://www.ceciliaalemani.com/> [last access on 13 May 2023], Cecilia Alemani, *Projects*; <https://www.ceciliaalemani.com/projects> [last access on 13 May 2023], Cecilia Almani, *Writings*; <https://www.ceciliaalemani.com/writings-1> [last access on 13 May 2023], and her biography in Square Space, Alemani_full_biography; https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dd305d2699a1b3c39b28265/t/5e8ccf60f1e18465f52817a2/1586286435116/Alemani_full_bio.pdf [last access on 13 May 2023]; Rai Cultura, *Cecilia Alemani. Breve biografia della curatrice della biennale Arte 2022*; <https://www.raicultura.it/arte/articoli/2022/02/Cecilia-Alemani-f3766db2-86ed-4d32-8b59-5809515843c3.html> [last access on 15 May 2023].

¹⁷⁰ C. Alemani, *Il Mondo Magico*, Padiglione Italia, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 57. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 23 April-27 November 2022), edited by C. Alemani, Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2017, pp.12-21.

fantastic, in which ancient traditions coexist with new global languages and in which reality and imagination fuse into a new magical world¹⁷¹. The exhibition also includes a rich and varied collateral program, including workshops for students of Italian Fine Arts Academies, aimed at increasing their awareness of the complexity of art world professions (Ill. 12)¹⁷².



Ill.12: Roberto Cuoghi, *Imitazione di Cristo*, 2017, organic materials, 57th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2017, Italian Pavilion, photo credit Andrea Ferro.

Moreover, in 2020, Alemani coordinated the exhibition *Disquieted Muses. When La Biennale di Venezia Meets History*, together with the other five directors of Biennale's research sectors – cinema, music, theatre, architecture, and dance. They retraced the history of the Venice Biennale and explored how the institution has been affected by major global events throughout the 20th century. The exhibition was set up in the

¹⁷¹The artist create parallel universes filled with references to magic, fantasy, and fable that give shape to complex personal cosmologies. They use magic and imagination not to escape into the irrational but to experience reality differently and inhabit the world in all its richness and diversity. From C. Alemani, *Il Mondo Magico*, cit., pp 17-45.

¹⁷² Other information resumed from Cecilia Alemani, *Il Mondo Magico*, 13 May 2023; <https://www.ceciliaalemani.com/projects/2017-il-mondo-magico> [last access on 13 May 2023]; La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale Arte 2017. Il Mondo Magico. Padiglione Italia*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2017/padiglione-italia> [last access on 13 May 2023].

Central Pavilion's rooms and demonstrated how Venice Biennale plays a role as a witness to significant social and cultural changes over its 125-year history¹⁷³. The exhibition showcased historical documents, archival materials, rare films, works of art, and research paths, highlighting the moments when the institution's past intersected with global events¹⁷⁴. The exhibition display was produced by the designer duo Formafantasma and characterised by a project concept that emphasises the potential for disassembly, repair, and re-composition of the display structures for future archival exhibitions¹⁷⁵. The displays were crafted using a limited selection of materials and elements, including unpainted frames and tables made from plywood, coloured textiles, and out-of-scale black and white prints sourced from Biennale's archives. The modular system allowed for flexibility in creating different compositions and adapting to the varying spaces available in the Giardini's Central Pavilion (Ill. 13)¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷³ *Le Muse Inquiete. La Biennale di Venezia di fronte alla storia.* (La Biennale di Venezia 29 August-8 December) edited by Johanna Bishop, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Specifically, the explored time-periods were: from Fascism (1928-1945) to the Cold War and the emergence of a new world order (1948-1964), the turbulence of '68, the Carlo Ripa di Meana chaired Biennales (1974-78), the postmodernism, the first Architecture Biennale, the 1990s and the onset of globalisation.

¹⁷⁵ Formafantasma's design studio investigates the ecological, historical, political and social forces that shape the design discipline. Founded by Italians Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin in 2009, the studio champions value-laden advocacy merged with holistic design thinking. Their goal is to facilitate a deeper understanding of both natural and built environments and to propose transformative interventions through design and its material, technical, social, and discursive possibilities. Based in Milan (Italy) and Rotterdam (The Netherlands), the studio applies a rigorous attention to context, process, and detail whether working on client briefs or self-initiated projects. The project of creating an installation that can be reused is characteristic of the Formafantasma studio. In fact, it has been conceived and realised several times by them. Other installations realised with the same intention are those for the Milan Design Week 2023 and the Luigi Pecci Centre for Contemporary Art. Formafantasma's crossflow of knowledge and experience taken from both their commercial contracts and their more autonomous projects has benefitted and informed each other, and has given them a unique perspective of the design industry.

¹⁷⁶ La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale Archivio. The Disquieted Muses. When La Biennale di Venezia Meets History*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/asac/disquieted-muses/disquieted-muses-when-la-biennale-di-venezias-meets-history> [last access on 13 May 2023]; YouTube, *The Disquieted Muses. When La Biennale Meets History – Presentation*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2ammCAo4Bc>; [last access on 13 May 2023]; Cecilia Alemani, *Projects. The Disquieted Muses. When La Biennale Meets History*; <https://www.ceciliaalemani.com/projects/the-disquieted-muses> [last access on 13 May 2023]; Formafantasma, *The Disquieted Muses*; <https://formafantasma.com/work/the-disquieted-muses> [last access on 15 May 2023]



Ill.13: Formafantasma, № 2.3.4.1 The Disquited Muses 2020, La Biennale di Venezia Central Pavillion. Facade., photo, courtesy Formafantasma.

Lastly, in 2022, Cecilia Alemani curated the 59th International Venice Biennale Art Exhibition. The exhibition, titled *The Milk of Dreams*, drew inspiration from the book of the same name by Leonora Carrington, a surrealist artist. Carrington's book explores a fantastical world where life is constantly reimagined through the power of imagination, allowing for transformation and a departure from one's own self. Remaining on the theme of magic from the 2017 exhibition, *The Milk of Dreams* focused on Carrington's mythical creatures and other figures of metamorphosis, taking visitors on an imaginary journey through the transformative nature of the human body and its definitions¹⁷⁷. The exhibition delved into various inquiries. Many artists contemplated a posthuman condition that challenges the modern and Western notion of human centrality, which historically prioritises white males as the measure of all things. Instead, these artists proposed alternative worlds built on alliances between diverse species, inhabited by permeable, hybrid, and multifaceted beings, reminiscent

¹⁷⁷ C. Alemani, in *The Milk of Dreams*, catalogue (Venezia, 59. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 10 May -23 November 2022), edited by C. Alemani, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2022, pp. 24-37.

of Carrington's fantastical creations¹⁷⁸. Alemani's curatorial vision also explored the profound division in the contemporary world between technological optimism, which promises endless enhancement of the human body through scientific advancements, and the looming threat of complete automation and artificial intelligence control. This dichotomy was further intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has heightened social distancing and confined most human interactions to digital screens¹⁷⁹. The pressures of technology, escalating social tensions, the pandemic's impact, and the impending environmental crises served as reminders to visitors that as mortal beings, humans are neither invincible nor self-sufficient, but rather interconnected and reliant on a system of symbiotic dependencies that bind us to other species and the entire planet¹⁸⁰.

The exhibition was spread across the spaces of the Central Pavilion at the Giardini and in the Corderie, Artiglierie, Gaggiandre and Giardino delle Vergini areas of the Arsenale complex. Featuring 213 artists from 58 nations, *The Milk of Dreams* showcased contemporary works and new productions specifically conceived for the Venice Art Biennale¹⁸¹. Additionally, the exhibition included historic works dating back to the 19th century. Notably, over 180 of the participating artists are first-time exhibitors at the International Art Exhibition. The 2022 Venice Art Biennale marked a significant milestone in its over 127-year history, including the presence of predominantly female and non-binary artists, which reflected the international creative landscape and intentionally challenges the centrality of male roles in art and culture. Therefore, only 21 artists were men. The artworks on display echoed their connection to ancestors (40% dead artists; 23% artists active during the first half of the 20th

¹⁷⁸ M. Papini, *The Milk of Dreams*, in *The Milk of Dreams*, catalogue (Venezia, 59. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 10 May -23 November 2022), edited by C. Alemani, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2022, pp. 24-37.

¹⁷⁹ C. Alemani, in *The Milk of Dreams*, exhibition catalogue (Venezia, 59. Esposizione Internazionale d'arte, La Biennale di Venezia, 10 May -23 November 2022), edited by C. Alemani, M. Papini, Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 2022, pp. 24-37. Indeed, the exhibition *Muse Inquiete* was also organized in an exceptional manner due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The format adopted for the exhibition, which involved all the artistic directors, was another way to provide space and voice to the history of art and its professionals at a time when silence and distance were imposed.

¹⁸⁰ La Biennale di Venezia, *Dichiarazione di Cecilia Alemani curatrice della 59. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. Il Titolo e i Temi*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/dichiarazione-di-cecilia-alemani>, [last access on 15 May 2023].

¹⁸¹ La Biennale di Venezia, *The 59th International Art Exhibition in Numbers*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/59th-international-art-exhibition-numbers> [last access on 13 May 2023].

century) showcased in dedicated spaces and tell us where today's artists have drawn their inspiration from¹⁸². Projected again by Formafantasma studio, the exhibition had also an unique structure. Five small, thematically focused historical exhibitions situated along the exhibition path in the Central Pavilion and Corderie form a series of constellations in which art works, found objects, artifacts and documents were collected to address some of the fundamental themes of the exhibition. These micro-exhibitions, conceived as time capsules, provided tools for in-depth analysis and introspection, interweaving references and correspondences between historic works – including significant loans from museums and unusual inclusions – and the experiences of contemporary artists exhibited in adjacent spaces. The thematic capsules enriched the show with a trans-historical and transversal approach. They drew similarities and inheritances between similar artistic methodologies and practices, even across generations and creates new layers of meaning and short-circuits between the present and the past: a historiography that proceeds not through filiations and conflicts, but through symbiotic relationships, sympathies, and sisterhoods. The five time-capsule featured a precise architectural choreography that also reflects on how art history is constructed and how certain museum and exhibition devices establish hierarchies of taste and inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. These presentations participated in the complex process of rewriting history, which has profoundly marked recent years, during which it has become increasingly clear that no historical narrative could be considered definitive. The thematic capsules, thus, told stories that may appear minor or less well-known at first glance, not yet assimilated into official canons¹⁸³. Textiles and colours, which change according to the curatorial themes, are fundamental components of the design. *The Witch's Cradle* (Ill.13) was the first of these capsules, characterised by monochromatic ochre tones covering floors, ceilings, and walls, with extensive use of carpeted surfaces and tone on tone velvet. *Corps Orbit* (Ill.14) was the second, focusing on textual art and calligraphy, with displays referencing reading rooms and public libraries. *Technologies of Enchantment* (Ill.15) was the third, with a design and material choices that extend to the exhibited artworks. The fourth capsule, *A Leaf a Gourd a Shell a Net a Bag a Sling a Snack a Bottle a Pot*

¹⁸² La Biennale di Venezia, *Intervento di Roberto Cicutto*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/intervento-di-roberto-cicutto> [last access on 15 May 2023].

¹⁸³ Ibid.

a Box a Container (Ill.16), features an oval room with warm whites and pinks, evoking a uterine-organic environment. Finally, *Seduction of the Cyborg* (Ill.17) was the last capsule, referencing the iconography of the cyborg and scientific laboratories with a cold atmosphere emphasised by colour and an imposing lightbox¹⁸⁴.



Ill. 13: Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.15 – *The Witch's Cradle*, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.



Ill.14: Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.24 – *Corps Orbité*, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.

¹⁸⁴ Formafantasma, 2.3.6 *THE MILK OF DREAMS. LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA, 2022*; <https://formafantasma.com/work/the-milk-of-dreams> [last access on 15 May 2023].



Ill.15: Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.40 – *Technologies of Enchantment*, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.



Ill.16: Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.59 – *Arsenale, A Leaf a Gourd a Shell a Net a Bag a Sling a Snack a Bottle a Pot a Box a Container*, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, courtesy of Formafantasma.



Ill.17: Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.72 – *Seduction of the Cyborg*, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, courtesy of Formafantasma.

Alemani’s curatorial approach, together with Formafantasma exhibition-making which promotes inclusivity and diversity in representation, challenges traditional narratives, and fosters critical reflection on art history and museum practices. Alemani, like many curators, often poses fundamental questions as the basis of her research. Here, she questions:

“How is the definition of the human changing? What constitutes life, and what differentiates plant and animal, human and non-human? What are our responsibilities towards the planet, other people, and other life forms? And what would life look like without us?”¹⁸⁵.

In order to answer, Alemani’s curatorial approach centred around three thematic areas: the representation of bodies and their metamorphoses, the relationship between individuals and technology, and the links between bodies and the Earth¹⁸⁶. These areas of investigation were also chosen in the previous archival research because they highlight the main artistic trends in contemporary art. President Roberto Cicutto

¹⁸⁵ Cecilia Alemani, *The Milk of Dreams*; <https://www.ceciliaalemani.com/projects/the-milk-of-dreams>, [last access on 15 May 2023].

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

acknowledged the curator's determination and capacity in organising a rich and significant Exhibition, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Alemani visited hundreds of artists' studios worldwide, but only virtually navigating through paintings, sculptures, videos, installations, and performances. This digital experience must have provided her with a perception quite distinct from what she would have experienced in person. She did admit the difficulties in organising the exhibition remotely, however, it was difficult to determine the extent to which this has influenced the spirit of her exhibition. The 800,000 tickets sold demonstrated the power of art to foster participation and provide a joyful communal experience¹⁸⁷. She believes that art and artists can help us imagine new modes of coexistence and transformation in times of crisis, as evidenced by the history of the Venice Biennale. Through her selection of artists and artworks, Alemani provided a platform for female artists to showcase their work and contribute to the discourse on contemporary art. By highlighting the voices and perspectives of women artists, Alemani's curatorial choices challenge traditional gender imbalances within the art world and address the historical underrepresentation of women in major art exhibitions. Her approach goes beyond merely featuring women artists; she explores the nuanced and complex ways in which they essentially intersect with contemporary artistic production. By presenting a diverse range of artistic voices, Alemani challenges preconceived notions and stereotypes, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable art world, while also fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of gender within artistic practice.

The Venice Biennale's commitment to becoming a platform for dialogue, creation, and intellectual stimulation has been demonstrated through the inauguration of the first Biennale Art Collage for young artists who were given the chance to exhibit in the central exhibition and the organization of subsequent meetings within the "Meetings on Art" section. The 2022 program aimed to explore various topics raised within the exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*. From June 7th to 11th, 2022 (first edition), then from 4th and 6th October 2022 (second edition), a series of conversations, conferences, and film screenings brought together thirty-five artists, scholars, curators, thinkers, and

¹⁸⁷ La Biennale di Venezia, *Chiude la Biennale Arte 2022 Con Oltre 800,000 Biglietti Venduti*, <https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/chiude-la-biennale-arte-2022-con-oltre-800000-biglietti-venduti>, [last access on 14 May 2023].

writers from diverse fields of interest. One of their discussion regarded the failure of binary gender forms, as well as the posthuman turn, the relationship with the Earth and technologies, and feminist approaches to curating. The program features renowned participants such as Rosi Braidotti, Jeffrey Deitch, Jack Halberstam, Yuk Hui, Gloria Orenstein, Saidiya Hartman, and many others. Through Keynote speeches, conversations, and interventions, they delved into subjects such as posthumanism, queer/trans visual culture, the connection and intersections of individuals and technologies. It also discussed feminist curatorial practices, the inclusion of women at the Venice Biennale over the years, and the significance of exhibitions dedicated to female artists. The program encompasses thought-provoking conversations, performances, and film screenings, providing a platform for interdisciplinary discussions and fostering a deeper understanding of the explored themes and their relevance in contemporary art and society¹⁸⁸.

All these interconnections and Aleman's curatorial approach can be characterized as dynamic and thought-provoking. Her ability to engage with contemporary art and create immersive experiences for the audience is noteworthy. Alemani has demonstrated a keen understanding of the artistic context and an ability to curate exhibitions that push boundaries and challenge conventional norms. Her emphasis on creating dialogues between artists, artworks, and viewers enhances the overall impact of the exhibitions she curates. Alemani's curatorial vision often reflects a deep exploration of societal and cultural themes, bringing forth important conversations and critical perspectives. Her innovative and inclusive approach to curating has contributed to the continued relevance and success of the exhibitions she has been involved with. The seamless convergence of multiple disciplines within the curatorial practice not only highlights the deliberate and calculated nature of contemporary curatorial methods but also underscores their remarkable success. It is evident that the curator's

¹⁸⁸ La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale Arte 2022. Meetings on Art*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/meetings-art> [last access on 30 May 2023]. The entire conference programme can be viewed by consulting the and two brochures published for the two different editions at Static.labiennale.org, *moa-giugno22d.pdf*; <https://static.labiennale.org/files/arte/Documenti/moa-giugno22d.pdf> [last access on 30 May 2023], Static.labiennale.org, *moa-ott22.pdf*; <https://static.labiennale.org/files/arte/Documenti/moa-ott22.pdf> [last access on 30 May 2023].

meticulous attention extends beyond the selection of artists showcased in the exhibition. The careful curation of the exhibition design itself transforms it into a work of art, contributing to the overall immersive experience. Furthermore, the thoughtful organisation of complementary events and activities demonstrates a commitment to engaging the public and fostering a deeper understanding not only of the artistic production but also of the profound underlying themes, including those of a philosophical nature that may be more challenging to grasp. This multi-faceted approach exemplifies the curators' dedication to providing a holistic and enlightening experience for the audience, ultimately enriching the artistic discourse and promoting a broader cultural appreciation.

3.2 Katharina Fritsch, Cecilia Vicuña, Simone Leigh and Yuki Kihara

To conduct an analysis of the artistic production at the 2022 Venice Biennale, particular attention was given to four selected artists. Firstly, those who awarded the prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement, namely Katharina Fritsch and Cecilia Vicuña, whose artistic contributions have demonstrated exceptional longevity and impact. Additionally, Simone Leigh was recognised with the Golden Lion for Best National Participation, acknowledging the profound influence of her installation works¹⁸⁹. Lastly, Yuki Kihara's project title was recognised as a remarkable model of resistance and collective empowerment. By focusing on these artists and their respective achievements and artistic practices, a comprehensive examination of the diverse and noteworthy artistic production at the 2022 Venice Biennale is facilitated.

¹⁸⁹ The International Jury presented the following awards and special mentions: The Golden Lion for Best National Participation was awarded to Great Britain's Sonia Boyce for her collaborative work that unveils silenced stories and offers a contemporary language through fragmented forms. Special mentions were given to France for its exploration of cinema history beyond the West and to Uganda for its commitment to art and sustainable practices. Simone Leigh received the prestigious Golden Lion for the Best Artist in the International Exhibition. Her monumental sculptural opening at the Arsenale demonstrated rigorous research, virtuosic execution, and powerful persuasion. Ali Cherri was honored with the Silver Lion for a Promising Young Artist in the International Exhibition. His interdisciplinary presentation explored earth, fire, and water from a constructive and mythical perspective, offering alternative narratives to traditional notions of progress and reason.

In order to carry out the research by means of a conceptual link between the artists' works, it was decided to begin with Katharina Fritsch (Essen, 1956). She is an artist based in Wuppertal and Düsseldorf. Since 1979, she has been creating sculptures of various sizes and vibrant colours, which she considers to be three-dimensional images. Her works feature a wide range of subjects, including saints, mice, buildings, shells, snakes, umbrellas, human figures, and everyday objects. Through her attention to detail and the use of a finish, Fritsch creates an atmosphere of strangeness and surprise, blurring the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Many of Fritsch's sculptures are produced as multiples, while some are singular large-scale works. Her pieces are typically monochrome or two-toned, with a smooth application of paint that conceals the technical process and creates a sense of religious fervour rather than technical mastery¹⁹⁰. Each sculpture is first moulded by hand, then cast and reworked, before being cast again in a chosen material and finished with a matte paint. Fritsch's sculptures are characterised by their formal naturalism and the disorienting immaterial quality created by the paint's absorption of light. The singular realism of Katharina Fritsch ties in with the central theme of the exhibition by evoking childhood memories of religious tales, fairy tales, and myths. In *the Milk of Dreams*, Fritsch's *Elefant/Elephant*, 1987 (Ill.18), was displayed at the entrance of the Central Pavilion. Crafted in dark green polyester from a cast of a stuffed elephant, *Elefant/Elephant* reproduces with astonishing accuracy every fold and wrinkle of the animal's body, while its dimensions, sharpness of anatomical detail, and chromatic profile generate a supernatural effect. In this artwork, the profound disquiet is not solely generated by the radical distortion of the everyday, but also by the technique employed by the artist. *Elefant/Elephant* carries echoes of tales of magnificence, intelligence, captivity, as well as matriarchal societies, which underlie the familial structure of this animal species. As with the following artist, the connection to the Venetian context is not absent. The city's familiarity with the figure of the elephant dates back to the 19th

¹⁹⁰ Katharina Fritsch, *Exhibitions*; <https://www.katharinafritsch.de/en/exhibitions>, [last access on May 16 2023]; Katharina Fritsch, *Biography*; <https://www.katharinafritsch.de/en/biography> [last access on May 16 2023]; Katharina Fritsch, *Curation*; <https://www.katharinafritsch.de/en/curated> [last access on May 16 2023].

century, just prior to the organisation of the first Biennale, when an elephant named *Toni* resided in Castello, known as the prisoner of the Gardens¹⁹¹.



Ill.18: Katharina Fritsch, *Elefant/Ephant*, 1987, Polyester, bois, peinture, 420x160x380 cm cm, photo, courtesy Formafantasma.

Her work engages with shared experiences, fantasies, and cultural references, presenting them in a manner that is both open and mysterious. Fritsch explores the public dimension of art by using techniques and themes with a specifically public focus. Her sculptures evoke familiarity through precision and transform latent notions into memorable images. They bridge the gap between art and reality without merging

¹⁹¹ La Biennale di Venezia, *News*. Katharina Fritsch and Cecilia Vicuña Golden Lions for Lifetime Achievement of the Biennale Arte 2022; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/katharina-fritsch-and-cecilia-vicu%C3%B1a-golden-lions-lifetime-achievement-biennale-arte-2022> [last access on 16 May 2023].

the two. Additionally, Fritsch's works create a heightened collective perception, resonating with the public in various fleeting forms, from fleeting scents to ephemeral moments and soundscapes. They find a balance between anonymity and a characteristic signature, engaging with the public realm in different ways, such as through cemetery designs and public sculptures. However, Fritsch's works also challenge the familiar symbols, casting doubt on their self-satisfaction and relocating them in a realm of contradiction¹⁹².

The work exhibited at the 2022 Biennale echoes the one that was shown at the 1999 Biennale curated by Harald Szeemann. As *Elefant/Elephant*, the '99 artwork was a massive piece. It was titled *Rattenkönig*, the *Rat King*, a disquieting sculpture in which a group of giant rodents is crouched in a circle with their tails knotted together, like some strange magic ritual. The same disturbing emotion might have been felt by the viewer in front of *Stilleben*, another large installation by the artist, exhibited during 2011 edition. It is also worth noting that Fritsch represented Germany at the 1995 Venice Biennale, showcasing her artistic prowess on an international stage¹⁹³. She participated with her work *Museum, Modell 1:10* highlighting her ability to vary in size, style, and medium, ranging from small and intimate to grand and monumental. Fritsch has worked with objects, sculptures, sound, and ephemeral events¹⁹⁴.

Fritsch's contribution to the field of contemporary art, especially sculpture, has been incomparable. Fritsch has participated in numerous international art exhibitions and

¹⁹² J. Heynen, *The Arena of the Image – Public Works, Imaginary Places*, in *Katharina Fritsch*, edited by Iwona Blazwick, London: Tate publishing, 2002, pp. 9-21.

¹⁹³ 6. *Stilleben* brings together various elements: a life-size St. Catherine painted in a deep crimson red, a vibrant yellow skull, a deep purple-painted egg, and a green St. Nicholas. In contrast to these colourful figures, there is also a colourless snake. The sculptures' smooth and brightly coloured industrial exteriors create a juxtaposition with the inherent religious undertones embodied by the figures themselves. Although certain figures may offer hints regarding their inspiration, the overall meaning behind their arrangement remains elusive. When examining each object individually, the artwork is replete with religious iconography. However, taking a step back and observing the pieces collectively, as intended, reveals allusions to the artistic tradition of still life in the pre-1700s. This tradition often incorporated religious and allegorical symbolism or served as memento mori, artworks designed to remind viewers of their own mortality. Museum of Stanford, *Katharina Fritsch's 6. Stilleben (6th Still Life)*; <https://museum.stanford.edu/exhibitions/katharina-fritschs-6-stilleben-6th-still-life> [last access on 16 May 2023].

¹⁹⁴ G. Garrels, *An Introduction*, in *Katharina Fritsch*, exhibition catalogue (San Francisco, Museum of Modern Art, 31- October 1996 – 11 March 1997, Basel, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 26 April – 31 August 1997), edited by G. Garrels, H. von Kleist, M. Winzen, T. Vischer, V., Liebermann, San Francisco: SMOMA, 1996, pp. 12-28.

had solo shows at museums across Europe and the United States¹⁹⁵. She creates figurative works that are both hyperrealist and fanciful: copies of objects, animals, and people, faithfully rendered in every detail, but transformed into uncanny apparitions. Fritsch often alters the scale of her subjects, shrinking them down or vastly enlarging them, and coating them in disorienting solid colours. The 2022 exhibited artwork captivate the viewer's attention through its calculated lightness, evoking a sense of mental Rococo. Stylization in this work aims to reflect essence and explore an ideal, surpassing distortion. This embodiment of ideality instils a sense of timelessness and permanence, while emphasising the mutable ponderability of reality. Fritsch fearlessly explores this uncharted realm, tapping into its optimistic human warmth and dreamlike qualities that enliven in the spirits¹⁹⁶.

Another artist whose work was recognised as symbolic and to which also given considerable visibility was Cecilia Vicuña's. In this regard, like Fritsch, Vicuña was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement and some of her works were chosen as the official image of the 2022 edition. They can therefore be found on the cover of some versions of the general catalogues, short guides, posters and other communication media used by the institution. Vicuña (Santiago, 1948) is a poet, artist, filmmaker, and activist who addresses world issues, including ecological destruction, human rights, and cultural homogenisation. She was born and raised in Santiago, but was exiled after the violent military coup against President Salvador Allende in the early 1970s¹⁹⁷. Then, Vicuña embarked on a creative journey characterised by a profound sense of impermanence. From that moment, she has been engaged in an ongoing project known as *precarios*, temporary and anti-monumental assemblages. These sculptures are intentionally left exposed to the elements and tides, serving as poignant symbols of fragility. The term *precarios* also serves as the title of Vicuña's poetry book from 1983 and influenced her illustrations at Exit Art in New York in

¹⁹⁵ As evidence of the artist's reputation, she has participated in exhibitions at institutions, museums and foundations such as the Kunst museum Basel, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Tate Modern in London and K21 in Düsseldorf. Recently, she was also involved in retrospectives at the Kunsthaus Zürich and the Deichtorhallen Hamburg in 2019.

¹⁹⁶ B. Curiger, *Katharina Fritsch*, Düsseldorf: Buchhandlung Walther König GmbH & Co. KG. Abt. Verlag, p. 38.

¹⁹⁷ L. Lippard, *Spinning the common Thread*, in "*Seehearing the Enlightened Failure*", edited by Miguel A. Lopez, Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 2019, p. 95.

1990¹⁹⁸. Vicuña's motivation for creating these sculptures was driven by a desire to expand her artistic expression and commune with nature. Titled objects introduced into the landscapes became focal points, evoking poetic responses from the surroundings. The sculptures are visual poems, incorporating various materials such as stone, wood, feathers, shells, and cloth, often in muted colours and bound together with coloured thread. There is a strong spiritual element in the process of making the precarious, which begins in the recognition of worth in the lost or discarded. She stated:

I look at things backwards, as they are going to look when I am gone. I have a very intense feeling that what we do is already the remains of what we are doing. The dead water, our poems. I try to bring awareness of what we are leaving, so that by picking up things I am conscious of what has been thrown away, but is staying.¹⁹⁹

Her artistic practice often manifests through abstract and ephemeral works crafted from salvaged materials. At 2022 Venice Biennale Central Exhibition, she exhibited an installation titled *NAUfraga* (2022), comprised of ropes and debris collected in Venice (Ill. 19). Vicuña's unwavering political opposition resonates powerfully. The work's title, derived from the Latin words for ship, *navis*, and to break, *frangere*. It evokes the tragic narrative of Earth's exploitation and Venice's gradual submergence. Moreover, Vicuña displayed her paintings as well, bearing witness to her indebtedness to indigenous thought. Her works, *Leoparda de Ojitos* (1977) and *La Comegente* (1971) wing inspiration from 16th-century paintings by Inca artists in Cuzco, Peru, who were coerced into converting to Catholicism and incorporating Spanish religious icons into their art. The vibrantly coloured painting *Leoparda de Ojitos*, represents a feline figure standing between two trees, one pink and one green, adorned with eyes and unapologetically displaying her genitals. Representing a decolonial approach to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 105.

portraiture, Vicuña's paintings challenge conventional forms, centring the imaginative perspective of an indigenous woman²⁰⁰.



Ill.19: Cecilia Vicuña, *NAUfraga*, 2022, mixed technique, variable dimensions, 2022, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.

Vicuña's efforts to preserve the work of Latin American writers, translating and editing anthologies of poetry that might have otherwise been lost, are highly valued. She has had solo exhibitions at various important venues, received numerous awards and she has her work displayed in numerous private and public collections²⁰¹. Her work as an activist, advocating for the rights of Indigenous peoples in Chile and Latin

²⁰⁰ La Biennale di Venezia, *The Milk of Dreams*. Cecilia Vicuña; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/il-latte-dei-sogni/cecilia-vicu%C3%B1a> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁰¹ In this regard, her work has been recently displayed at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA (2022); Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (CA2M), Madrid, Spain (2021); MUAC, Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico (2020); and Kunststituut Melly Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2019). The received awards are Premio Velázquez de Artes Plásticas, Madrid, Spain (2019); Herb Alpert Award in the Arts, Santa Monica, CA (2019); Anonymous Was a Woman Award, New York, NY (1999); and The Andy Warhol Foundation Award, New York, NY (1997). Her works are part of the following collections: Tate, London; MoMA, Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Guggenheim Museum; The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago; MALBA, Museo Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL. From Cecilia Vicuña, *Timeline*; <http://www.ceciliavicuna.com/timeline>, [last access on 16 May 2023].

America, is also significant. Vicuña's artistic language is rooted in a profound fascination with Indigenous traditions and non-Western epistemologies. For decades, she has followed her own path, addressing environmental and feminist debates, and envisioning personal and collective mythologies²⁰². Her work ranges from painting to performance to complex assemblages, using found objects or scrap materials, woven into delicate compositions where the microscopic and monumental seem to find a fragile equilibrium. In her vision, art is at a precarious state that is both intimate and powerful. The artist received the award at a time when humanity is striving to maintain peace and justice against all odds. She believes that art and consciousness can contribute to the urgent need to move away from violence and destruction and save the environment from impending collapse²⁰³. Venice is a meaningful place for her since some of her paternal ancestors came to Chile from Northern Italy in the 19th century, and her maternal line is indigenous. Therefore, Vicuña joins an exceptional group of artists who share in the spirit of the 2022 Venice Biennale exhibition to find a new way of being on Earth²⁰⁴.

Vicuña's dialogue with history, ancestors, the territory and with what deviates from the typical Western vision, bonds her with Simone Leigh's vision (Chicago, 1967). Leigh is an African-American artist and currently resides and works in New York City, United States. Her artistic practice encompasses a range of mediums, including sculpture, installations, video, performance, and social engagement. Leigh has spent over two decades crafting a remarkable collection of sculptures, installations, videos, and relational artworks that explore themes of race, beauty, community, and care, with a particular focus on "Black female subjectivity, aiming to unravel the intricate interplay of diverse historical strands"²⁰⁵.

²⁰² Cecilia Vicuña, *Biography*; <http://www.ceciliavicuna.com/biography> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁰³ La Biennale di Venezia, *The Milk of Dreams. Cecilia Vicuña*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/il-latte-dei-sogni/cecilia-vicu%C3%B1a> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁰⁴ La Biennale di Venezia, *News. Katharina Fritsch and Cecilia Vicuña Golden Lions for Lifetime Achievement of the Biennale Arte 2022*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/katharina-fritsch-and-cecilia-vicu%C3%B1a-golden-lions-lifetime-achievement-biennale-arte-2022> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁰⁵ A. Greenberg, *Simone Leigh, Sculptor with a Focus on 'Black Female Subjectivity,' Heads to Hauser & Wirth*, in "Artnews", 17 January 2020; <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/simone-leigh-hauser-wirth-1202675699/> [last access on 16 May 2023]

Notably, in 2023, Time magazine recognised Leigh as one of the 100 most influential people worldwide, acknowledging the significant impact of her artistic contributions²⁰⁶. Employing a combination of premodern and contemporary sculptural techniques, including lost-wax casting and salt glazing, alongside culturally significant materials such as Cyprus shells, green bananas, raffia, and tobacco leaves, Leigh has created a body of work that resonates poetically and politically²⁰⁷. Her notable piece, *Brick House*, was initially situated by Cecilia Alemani on New York's *High Line* in 2019 and then, exhibited at 2022 Venice Biennale immediately after entering Arsenale, a sort of counter-representation of Fritsch's work at the Giardini (Ill.20).



Ill. 20: Simone Leigh, *Brick House*, 2019, bronze, 490x270, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, courtesy of Formafantasma.

It commanded a divine presence as a monumental bronze bust of a Black woman adorned with a skirt resembling a clay house, soaring above the lively Tenth Avenue in Manhattan. Part of the ongoing *Anatomy of Architecture series* (2016-present),

²⁰⁶ Time, *Time 100*; <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2023/> [last access on 16 May 2023].

²⁰⁷ Rai Cultura, *Sime Leigh. Sovereignty*; <https://www.raicultura.it/arte/articoli/2022/04/Simone-Leigh-Sovreignty---Padiglione-degli-Stati-Uniti---f4f2acea-7ca6-4ddc-a8ff-476a24437e5a.html> [last access on 16 May 2023].

Brick House belongs to a collection of sculptures that seamlessly blend human forms with architectural references. These references encompass a wide range of influences, from the granaries of the Mousgoum people in Chad and Cameroon, to the clay and wood structures of the Batammaliba in Togo, the Nigerian ibeji statuettes, and even the 19th-century Afro-American craft tradition featuring anthropomorphic jugs. Additionally, the piece draws inspiration from Mammy's Cupboard, a restaurant in Natchez, Mississippi, constructed in the likeness of the racist mammy archetype, where the dining area is housed within the mammoth red skirt²⁰⁸. *Brick House* evokes the ideas of containment, a comforting space, a consumable object, and a sanctuary. It offers a potent depiction of the Black woman's body as a site of multiplicity, embodying various symbolic meanings and cultural references. Leigh's masterful craftsmanship and her ability to merge materials, techniques, and cultural inspirations result in a powerful portrayal that challenges conventional notions of identity, representation, and the role of Black women in society. *Brick House* was not the only artist's house to take part in the 2022 Venice Biennale. The artist was chosen to represent the American Pavilion, which was entirely dedicated to her. It featured several of her works, including sculptures, installations and a special installation. The entire project was entitled *Sovereignty* and commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs²⁰⁹. The title itself conveys the idea of self-governance and independence, both at the individual and collective levels. *Sovereignty* implies being the author of one's own history, free from external authority, desires, and scrutiny. Within the exhibition, many sculptures delve into the appropriation of images and objects from the African diaspora, which have been commodified as souvenirs reinforcing colonial narratives. This project suggests to invent what might be missing from the archive in order to reveal something more true than fact²¹⁰. Through this strategies, Leigh enables a more comprehensive understanding of history.

²⁰⁸ La Biennale di Venezia, *Simone Leigh*; <https://www.labiennale.org/it/arte/2022/il-latte-dei-sogni/simone-leigh> [last access on 15 May 2023].

²⁰⁹ Simone Leigh, *Simone Leigh Venice 2022*; <https://simoneleighvenice2022.org/sovereignty/> [last access on 16 May 2023]. M. Warner, *The Milk of Dreams*, cit., p. 330.

²¹⁰ J. Medvedow, E. Respini, *Simone Leigh. Sovereignty*, in *Sovereignty*, exhibition catalogue (Vneice, 59th Internaitonal Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, U.S. Pavilion, Giardini, 23 April – 27 November 2022), edited by P. Watson, Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art / Boston, 2022, p. 2.

Sovereignty presented a fresh body of work specifically created for the United States Pavilion. Informed by a fascination with performativity and affect, Leigh's expansive artistic practice delves into the construction of Black femme subjectivity. Utilising materials and techniques associated with African diasporic artistic traditions, her large-scale sculptural pieces combine elements derived from vernacular architecture and the female body. *Sovereignty* weaves together diverse histories and narratives, including the ritual performances of the Baga peoples in Guinea, early Black American material culture from South Carolina's Edgefield District, and the significant 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition²¹¹. Through the introduction of new bronze and ceramic artworks both within and outside the Pavilion, Leigh imaginatively intervenes to fill gaps in the historical record, proposing new hybridities. The works featured in *Sovereignty* collectively extend the artist's ongoing exploration of self-determination. Sculptures like *Last Garment* and *Sentinel* challenge stereotypes and explore themes of autonomy and voyeurism. The final gallery showcases ceramic and raffia sculptures, including *Cupboard*, which reimagines architecture and references women's dress. Leigh disrupts gendered associations and essentialist ideas of the Black femme body.

The exhibition's title encompasses notions of self-governance and independence, both at the individual and collective levels. To be *sovereign* is to exist beyond the authority, desires, and gaze of others, and instead, to be the author of one's own history. Many of Leigh's sculptures showcased in the exhibition interrogate images and objects from across the African diaspora, often circulating as souvenirs that reinforce colonial narratives. While her figurative works present their subjects as autonomous and self-sufficient, they do not simply celebrate the resilience of Black women in overcoming oppressive circumstances. Instead, they indict the very conditions that frequently necessitate Black women to affirm their own humanity. Recognising Leigh's ability to articulate a comprehensive understanding of Black female experiences, American author and scholar Saidiya Hartman describes the artist's engagement with the Black feminine as an "architecture of possibility"²¹². Hartman's concept of "critical

²¹¹ D. Pappalardo, *Biennale 2022: il Leone d'oro all'afroamericana Simone Leigh*, in "Repubblica. Cultura", 23 April 2022;

https://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2022/04/23/news/biennale_arte_2022_ileone_d_oro_afroamericana_simone_leigh-346575872/ [last access on 16 May 2023].

²¹² Simone Leigh, *Simone Leigh Venice 2022*; <https://simoneleighvenice2022.org/sovereignty/>, [last access on 16 May 2023].

fabulation,” which encourages historians, artists, and critics to creatively fill historical gaps, provides a resonant framework for approaching Leigh’s work²¹³. Simone Leigh redefines the archive in her art, elevating marginalized voices and histories. She conducts extensive research, unearths forgotten narratives, and challenges traditional archives. Leigh not only examines existing archives but also contributes to creating new ones by incorporating oral history and personal narratives. Her work blurs the boundaries between past and present, prompting viewers to question biases and imagine alternative possibilities. Rooted in social justice, her artistic practice celebrates Black culture while calling for a critical re-evaluation of the archive and active participation in rewriting narratives.

Leigh’s exhibition also extended beyond the U.S. Pavilion with *Loophole of Retreat: Venice*, an assembly of Black women scholars, performers, writers, and artists organised by Rashida Bumbray in October 2022. This project reflects the collaborative ethos inherent in Leigh’s practice and pays homage to the longstanding history of Black femme collectivity, communalism, and care²¹⁴. The symposium, *Loophole of Retreat: Venice*, was built upon a previous one-day event held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2019. The conceptual framework of the project is inspired by Harriet Jacobs’ 1861 autobiography. Jacobs, a formerly enslaved woman, lived in a crawl space for seven years after escaping, referring to it as a “loophole of retreat.” This space served as both a confinement and a space for intellectual activities such as thinking, planning, writing, and envisioning new forms of freedom. *Loophole of Retreat: Venice* reimagines and centres this concept as a space for the intellectual labour of Black women and femmes.

As well as Leigh, the artist Yuki Kihara problematises her non-Western identity and origins, the traditional conception of the archive and circulation of stereotypes, proposing also a forum aimed at raising awareness on specific addressed themes. Participating at the Venice Biennale for the first time, Kihara takes some of the Leigh’s concepts and personally develops them, including the importance of ecology, similarly

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Sime Leigh, *Simone Leigh Venice 2022. Brochure*; https://simoneleighvenice2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/001-024_ICAB_SimoneLeighBiennale_Brochure_forweb_linked_200dpi.pdf [last access on 16 May 2023].

to Fritsch and Vicuña's works. Kihara (Samoa, 1974) is an interdisciplinary artist and curator working in the fields of performance, photography, video and installation. Kihara's artistic practice also involves extensive research, archival study, and the exploration of overlooked histories. Her research often explores themes of Pacific Islander culture, colonialism, gender and sexuality to challenge dominant and singular historical narratives, particularly in relation to postcolonial history. In 2021, she awarded the *New Generation Award* by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand and selected for the New Zealand Pavilion at Biennale Arte 2022. This was significant as she is the first Pacific artist to receive this honour. Her exhibited work, *Paradise Camp*, is known for being critical, dynamic and engaging. This commission underscores the urgent need for Pacific Indigenous perspectives to be included in global dialogues, and also highlights New Zealand's historical and ongoing social, political and cultural ties to Pacific. It also reinforces New Zealand's reputation as an innovative country with a diverse range of artistic practices.

Paradise Camp was curated by Natalie King and offers a unique perspective on pressing local and global issues through the lens of Samoa's Fa'afafine community, to which Kihara belongs. Kihara's project title incorporates the words "paradise" and "camp" as a possible catachresis, delving into the deconstructive potential of her performative initiations. Paradise represents both purity and danger, as it becomes a site of resistance and extraction. The concept of camp refers to a space that emerges when a state of exception becomes the norm, resulting in the exclusion²¹⁵. The project comprised twelve tableau photographs in vibrant colours (Ill. 21, Ill. 22) and a five-part talk show series in which a group of Fa'afafine provide witty commentary on selected paintings by Paul Gauguin.

²¹⁵ N. King, *Paradise Camp by Yuki Kihara*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, 59th International Exhibition, New Zealand Pavilion, Arsenale, 2022, 23 April – 27 November 2022) edited by N. King, Melbourne: Themes and Hudson Ltd, 2022, p. 125.



Ill. 21: Yuki Kihara, *Two Fa'afafine (After Gauguin)*, 2020, c-print mounted behind acrylic glass, edition of 9 + 2 AP, panel: 940 x 720 mm. 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, New Zealand Pavilion, courtesy of Yuki Kihara.

Furthermore, she dedicates a section to revisiting archives, incorporating colonial portraits, a 3D rendering of Vailulu'u volcano (also known as Fa'afafine volcano), source materials, posters, advertisements, and explorers' journals. Kihara's approach to archives challenges their rigid nature by creating an alternative and exploratory collection that merges pop culture, ethnography, aesthetic anthropology, and historical imagery. This collection includes diverse elements such as cruise advertising campaigns in the Pacific, a controversial photograph of Jeanine Tuivaiki's alleged suicide published in the Samoa Observer, Kihara's personal archive of missionary and explorer accounts from the 19th century, colonial portraits, Pasifika safe sex posters, and interviews with Fa'afafine featured in the publication *Samoa Queer Lives*²¹⁶.

²¹⁶ Y. Kihara, *Queering the Archive*, in *Paradise Camp by Yuki Kihara*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, 59th International Exhibition, New Zealand Pavilion, Arsenale, 2022, 23 April – 27 November 2022) edited by N. King, Melbourne: Themes and Hudson Ltd, 2022, p. 27.



Ill. 22: Yuki Kihara, *Three Fa'afafine (after Gauguin)*, 2020, c-print mounted behind acrylic glass, edition of 9 + 2 AP, panel: 730 x 940 mm. Milfordgalleries, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, New Zeland Pavilion, courtesy of Yuki Kihara

The project comprehends Kihara's film *First Impressions: Paul Gauguin*, that combines interviews with Fa'afafine addressing the colonial gaze with footage of local workshops on the climate crisis, highlighting the importance of collaboration in their work²¹⁷. Kihara's reimagining of Western art history, spanning from Gauguin to Manet, is embodied in their extensive photograph *Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the Rainbow (After Gauguin)*. This piece is a tribute to Gauguin's famous work *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*²¹⁸. The series is intercut

²¹⁷ Aesthetica, *Paradise, Gender and Place*, https://aestheticamagazine.com/?p=567495&fbclid=IwAR0UAZxyeefXFtxHuQfHf_JI9X8a8fJe3oJV2hm-oPZ4qvkRigA2cNOXrW4, [last access on 1 May 2023].

²¹⁸ Nzatvenice, *Fonofono o le nuanua: Patches of the rainbow*, <https://www.nzatvenice.com/virtual-explore/artwork/fonofono-o-le-nuanua> [last access on 6 May 2023].

with footage from *Fa'afafine beauty pageants*. Filmed on Upolu Island in Samoa, the video production incorporates a cast comprised of local individuals. As highlighted by the UN Human Rights Office, approximately 5% of Samoa's population is fa'afafine. In Samoan culture, four distinct gender categories exist: female, male, fa'afafine, and fa'afatama, with the latter two terms signifying *in the manner of a woman* and *in the manner of a man*, respectively. Kihara's approach disrupts the Western art canon by reclaiming images that were originally used for colonial documentation. Their subjects defiantly confront the camera with expressions of joy, playfulness, and longing, thereby subverting the Pacific paradise myth and shifting the focus from individual perspectives to a communal one. Collaborating with traditional landowners and over 100 Samoans, Kihara's reimagined compositions form powerful portraits that challenge Western notions portrayed in vintage travel posters and brochures often associated with tiki bars and romantic getaways. By employing an intersectional lens that considers gender identity and the climate crisis, the exhibition at 2022 Venice Art Biennale critically examines Pacific colonialism. Utilising archival research materials and a series of photographs, Kihara's exhibition aims to dismantle the influence of Gauguin's contribution to European art history while highlighting the cultural specificity that transcends gender binarism. Notably, Kihara's exhibition marked a significant milestone in the history of the event by featuring the work of a Pasifika and Fa'afafine artist for the first time. In a lively panel discussion, part of the exhibited project and titled *First Impression*, participants delved into the formal characteristics of Gauguin's paintings, reflected on his motivations for portraying Tahitian communities, and scrutinise the contextual portrayal of subjects from a Pasifika perspective. While addressing the underlying themes of the exoticisation and objectification of Tahitian bodies and Gauguin's role in France's colonial history, the Fa'afafine panellists maintain a light-hearted and humorous tone. One of the panellists, Dora, jests that Gauguin wished for Polynesians to possess breasts while still retaining male genitalia, referring to them as *tipo* (a colloquial term for a penis). The panellists amusingly concur, creating a playful and conspiratorial atmosphere²¹⁹.

²¹⁹ ArtReview, *Venice Biennale 2022: Three Pavilions To See in the Arsenale*; <https://artreview.com/venice-biennale-2022-three-pavilions-to-see-in-the-arsenale/?fbclid=IwAR0fvgnAl4-lgLDATPE3yBFaC4guQ5w5aoLzpxRw8p7y5zdWkxX5Jye0bEo> [last access 15 April 2023]; J. Ure-Smith, *Yuki Kihara: "I want to reclaim our place as an indigenous, third-gender community"*, in "Financial Times" 14, April 2022;

Kihara's artistic practice holds significant implications when examining their diverse modes of expression. To elucidate these implications, the analysis begins by recognising artistic performance as an outcome of organised interactions between artists and other participants. As an act of collective empowerment, Kihara did also organise a forum centred around inclusivity and cultural awareness. Co-directed by King, *the Talanoa Forum: Swimming Against the Tide* was developed in collaboration with Francesca Tarocco (NICHE, University Ca' Foscari Venice), Cristina Baldacci (University Ca' Foscari Venice), Wonu Veys, and Erna Lilje (National Museum of World Cultures, Netherlands) and took place from 11th to 13th October 2022.²²⁰ The term *Talanoa* originates from the pan-Pacific region and refers to an inclusive, participatory, and transparent dialogue process. By adopting *Talanoa* as a conceptual foundation, Kihara organised this forum to expand upon the themes explored in their exhibition, encompassing ecology, intersectionality, oceanography, colonisation, and the experiences of small island communities. Drawing inspiration from the words of the late Māori New Zealand filmmaker Merata Mita, who thinks that swimming against the tide makes you stronger, the Talanoa Forum fostered critical discussions across virtual and physical spaces in Venice and Leiden²²¹. Its aim was to bring together artists, curators, scholars, activists, community leaders, and politicians. Mita, known for her exploration of political tensions in Aotearoa during the 1970s and 1980s, advocated for indigenous sovereignty and gender equality. Her words served as a guiding principle for the *Talanoa* Forum, emphasising the need to shape localised strategies encompassing art, activism, and politics to address global concerns. This engaging initiative encompassed various platforms, with live broadcasts during the event and ongoing availability on its website²²². Additionally, through collaboration

https://www.ft.com/content/8a2a1e96-1e8f-4447-8e29-a7fa44859a01?shareType=nongift&fbclid=IwAR1iR24IDSHBCKo9wWIFS1A_OxEC3DQT4j1oIQxSj4ACfOqtzDBuDCiYKY [last access 15 April 2023].

²²⁰ The *Talanoa Forum* is presented with the collaboration and support of several esteemed organisations. These include the Ministry of Pacific Affairs of the Government of New Zealand, the CoVA Centre of Visual Art at the University of Melbourne, the NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities at the University Ca' Foscari Venezia (NICHE), the National Museum of World Cultures of the Netherlands, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and the Querini Stampalia Foundation.

²²¹ Unive.it, *Talanoa Forum: Swimming Against the Tide*; <https://www.unive.it/data/agenda/1/63871> [last access on 5 May 2023].

²²² Talanoa, *Talanoa Forum*; <https://www.talanoaforum.ws/online-talanoa>, [last access on 9 April 2023].

with several universities, the Talanoa Forum has served as a catalyst for raising awareness among numerous students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Its ability to capture the attention of those who are still in the process of developing their critical thinking is where both Guerrilla Girls and Kihara have made their most significant impact. Despite their differing mediums and temporal contexts, these artists both confront a common adversary: patriarchal society and its entrenched norms, particularly in relation to sexual difference and gender representation. Thus, these case studies have been presented not only for their shared characteristics but also for their communicative effectiveness in heightening awareness of the interplay between activism, gender understanding, and contemporary art²²³.

The artists Cecilia Vicuña, Katharina Fritsch, Simone Leigh, and Yuki Kihara exhibit a profound engagement with the exploration of identity, encompassing personal, cultural, and gender-related aspects. Fritsch's elephant-like sculpture delves into the psychological and social dimensions of human existence, similarly Vicuña's creatures explore into indigenous history and culture. Leigh is also interested in past narrations focusing her work on black women's subjectivity. Then, Kihara's project problematises a collectively conceived subjectivity and addresses themes of gender, colonialism, and cultural identity.

These artists draw inspiration from diverse cultural and historical references, enriching their artistic practice. Vicuña's work is influenced by her Chilean heritage and the history of political upheaval in her home country. Fritsch's sculptures often incorporate references to history and mythology or religion in order to consign a message to the viewer. Leigh explores African and diasporic cultures, while Kihara examines the intersections of Pacific Islander and European cultures. Moreover, these artists utilise their artwork as a platform for social and political commentary. Vicuña tackles issues such as ecological destruction, human rights, and cultural homogenisation. Fritsch's sculptures convey social critique and provoke introspection. Leigh's work explores race, gender, and social inequality, while Kihara's art examines postcolonialism and the effects of globalisation.

²²³ The success of the New Zealand pavilion can also be seen at Yuki Kihara, *Paradise Camp Reviews Articles*; <https://yukikihara.ws/paradise-camp/reviews-articles>, [last access 8 May 2023].

Furthermore, these artists adopt a multidisciplinary approach, seamlessly integrating various mediums and techniques into their artistic practice. Vicuña employs pluridisciplinary practise, conceiving poetry, film, visual art, performance and sculpture. Fritsch is recognised for her sculptures, installations, and conceptual artworks. Leigh's practice encompasses sculpture, video, and social engagement. Kihara incorporates photography, performance, and video in her artistic endeavours.

Through their exploration of identity, engagement with cultural and historical references, social and political commentary, as well as their multidisciplinary approaches, the presented artists contribute significantly to the contemporary art discourse, offering profound insights into the complexities of our society and the multifaceted nature of human existence.

4. Result Discussion

The research offers a perspective on the dynamics of gender subordination within the art world, specifically in the context of the Venice Biennale.

It unveils a subsequent interpretative framework for understanding the aspects conditioned by this subordination mechanism, highlighting the irreversibility of its questioning. This was guided by both scholars and personal investigations, with a methodology influenced by academic contingencies. The research approach, evident from the structure and choice of case studies, reflects a desire to clarify its intentions without excessive speculation, even though such speculation often stimulates and determines knowledge advancements. The author has opted for presenting quantitative data to minimise the possibility of negative refutation. However, this approach would also attempt to bring experimental quality, but encountering difficulties given the reviewed literature complexity and the political linkage. Specifically, the methodology examines the 2005 and the 2022 Venice Biennale editions to witness two notable and unprecedented events, the first artistic direction led by women and the exhibition with the largest participation of women artists. The thesis is proved thanks to the selected curators and artists' work which have grounded in the significance of the Venice Biennale as a representative platform for showcasing the most prominent art production and promoting relevant discourses. The research process narrowed down the initial broad research question, shifting it from a study on the evolution of gender understanding within curators and artists' practices at the 2005 and the 2022 Venice Biennale editions to an examination of their specific strategies to discuss inclusivity and social sustainability issues. Therefore, in this concluding chapter, the author delves into the derived findings, further elucidating a cohesive link with the former literature review and incorporating supplementary scholars' perspectives. By adopting this approach, thought-provoking inquiries are posed regarding the intersection of art, gender, activism and ecology, opening avenues for exploring the potential outcomes and implications of such convergences.

The present study generally puts a question mark alongside discourses and practices that assert *doxic* knowledge regarding gender concept²²⁴. Gender binarism division ranks at the top of the list of classificatory systems that generate knowledge and produce power relations, ensuring the misconception of the arbitrariness upon which they are based. According to the *doxa*, gender roles and the discourses that naturalise them are made to seem inevitable, and the binary conception of gender becomes part of what is taken for granted. It represents a particularly entrenched view, as while many other aspects of the world can be reimagined and reconsidered from scratch, the topic of gender seems to have a more difficult consistency to reshape. It is only when gender is decreed as discussable that it enters the realm of questioning what can be rejected from its conception. According to Helen Hester's interpretation of Michel Foucault's teachings, a discursive explosion revolving around a topic, wherein there is an incitement to engage in endless processes of analysis, classification, and specification, often indicates political efforts aimed at regulating it²²⁵. In the context of gender binarism, *doxa* perpetuates the notion that binary gender roles are inevitable and unquestionable. It solidifies the division of labour in the professional environment and reinforces a boundless gender-based discrimination. Challenging and denaturalizing *doxa* is crucial in striving for a society where gender characteristics are considered, yet no longer dictate identity and discrimination²²⁶.

The analysis of the 2005 edition highlights the significant influence of globalisation on practices and habits related to how gender is conceived and problematised. It formerly reveals several incidents at an organisational level that shaped the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in Venice Biennale. As assumed by Peter Weibel in the preface of *The Global Contemporary* exhibition, referring to Niklas Luhmann's 1997

²²⁴ The author here refers to Helen Hester's quotation: "[...] the most powerful mechanism through which this occurs is the cultivation of correspondence between 'social structures and mental structures,' aligning collective perception with individual perception. When there is a nearly perfect correspondence between objective order and subjective principles of organization, the natural and social world appears self-evident. This experience is referred to as *doxa*. The effect of *doxa* is to make the elements of our social world seem inevitable, generating tacit acceptance of authority and the necessity of a collectively adopted position based on inherently related structures. The field of *doxa* encompasses what is taken for granted. In other words, *doxa* is the unrecognized knowledge of a social system, unconscious knowledge [...]. Consequently, *doxic* knowledge is not explicitly articulated because it is recognized or recognizable as knowledge within the system in which it operates." From H. Hester, *Gender*, in *Unknown Unknown. An introduction to Mysteries*, Milan: Electa, 2022, pp. 69-86, here p.79.

²²⁵ H. Hester, *Gender*, cit., p.80.

²²⁶ H. Hester, *Gender*, cit., p.81.

book *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, it becomes apparent that problems of exclusion are inevitable consequences of the functional rules of differentiation within the globalised social system. These mechanisms are crucial for constructing identities or closed subsystems within social structures and it seems that there is no simple solution for counteracting exclusionary tendencies²²⁷. The binarism conception of gender is a result of this difficulty in addressing a straightforward remedy to the intensification of exclusionary processes established by habitus and customs in society. Binarism grows alterities and subjugations to the dominant culture and the extinction of diverse identities.

The Venice Biennale has adapted its institutional practices to embrace a global perspective, welcoming a wider range of artistic voices and addressing interconnected issues such as cultural hybridity, identity, and ecological dynamics. This has resulted in diverse increasing national pavilion participation and in various artistic practices and aesthetic languages. The Venice Biennale's exhibition formats have also expanded beyond the traditional outset of national pavilions. Structural improvements, collateral and special projects have been introduced to engage with global themes and transnational artistic practices. This has encouraged experimentation, interdisciplinary collaborations, and site-specific installations, creating a cosmopolitan atmosphere that fosters dialogue, exchange, and artistic innovation. Within this framework, artists find themselves navigating complex networks of relationships and international contexts. Their cultural and geographical identities are frequently scrutinized by artists themselves, as well as professional authorities.

The decision to construct a new Italian Pavilion at Arsenale by Croff can be seen as a response to globalisation, aiming to showcase diverse artistic practices and acknowledge the relevance of local artists' identities. Economic factors also played a role in the 2005 edition, as reported in the press review comments by both Rosa Martinez and Maria De Corral. The construction of Italian Pavilion and the division of the budget for the two central exhibitions may have led to certain restrictions, such as a reduction in the number of participating artists and space limitations. However, it is important to consider the broader economic factors that shape the Venice Biennale,

²²⁷ P. Weibel, *Preface*, in *The Global Contemporary. Art worlds After 1989*, edited by H. Belting, A. Buddensieg, P. Weibel, exhibition catalogue (Karlsruhe, ZKM Center for Art and Media, 17 September 2011–5 February 2012), pp. 30-31.

including funding, sponsorship, market influence, tourism, revenue generation, artist fees, and cultural and urban development. These factors impact the scale, quality, and overall experience of the Venice Biennale, as well as its relationship with the art market, visitor attraction, and contribution to the local economy. While Martinez's assertion holds true to some extent, it is challenging to precisely determine the influence of economic factors on the 2005 Venice Biennale due to the lack of recorded correspondence in the Biennial Archive (ASAC) for that year. The communication between curators and artists, often relies on personal means facilitated by technology, making it difficult to compile a comprehensive archive. Therefore, it is challenging to assess the exact impact of economic factors on the curatorial decisions of the 2005 edition. Examining the professional backgrounds of curators can provide insights into their choices and motivations. Understanding their expertise and experiences helps shed light on the factors that influenced their curatorial approach. In the case of Martinez, her previous curated exhibitions, such as *Trans Sexual Express* in 2001 and *Intimacy is Political* in 2017, reveal her sensitivity towards issues of identity and gender. The concepts explored in these exhibitions show an interrelation and evolution in her curatorial practice. When considering Martinez's experiences at the Venice Biennale, including her curatorship of the Spanish pavilion in 2003 and her principal involvement in 2005, the interconnectedness of identity construction within the context of globalization and differentiation can be better comprehended. Therefore, Martinez's theoretical advancements can be seen as a progression of ideas shaped by historical circumstances, requiring continuous questioning and temporal progression for comprehensive understanding. As can be deduced from Martinez's comment after visiting the 2022 Venice Biennale edition:

Non pensavo alla fittizia progressione lineare della modernità, semmai ai divenire mutanti delle arti, alle trasformazioni che fan sì che queste si dispieghino in direzioni rizomatiche, con linguaggi diversi e da prospettive formaliste, storiciste, femministe, ecologiche, postcoloniali, transgender, spirituali o implacabilmente critiche verso il neoliberismo che ci appiattisce. Nel tentativo di dare efficacia alla coscienza estetica e significato all'azione politica, avevo invitato le Guerrilla Girls. Le loro statistiche erano agghiaccianti: nel 1895, anno di fondazione della Biennale, le donne partecipanti erano state il 2,4%, laddove nel 1995, ovvero un

secolo dopo, la percentuale era salita solo al 9%. Ecco perché la Biennale d'Arte del 2022 'Il Latte dei Sogni' è stata così significativa, con incredibili capsule storiche in cui è emerso chiaramente come ci siano sempre state donne che hanno lavorato in orbite parallele e sincrone a quelle dei «geni» maschi, ma assenti dai libri di storia²²⁸.

The progress made in terms of participation and representation for women artists is commendable and marks a significant shift in dynamics. Its significance has been acknowledged by both Martinez and the artists themselves who published a post on Instagram to celebrate this award highlighting the substantial increase in the percentage of women artists participating in the Venice Biennale, from 38% in the 2005 edition to 90% in 2022. Guerrilla Girls provide clear and explicit evidence of the positive changes that have taken place. This significant jump in representation cannot be contested, underscoring the efforts to address the historical underrepresentation of women in the art world and creating a more inclusive and equitable platform for their voices and artistic contributions.

The relationship between the institution and the curators is crucial in shaping the art system. The curators' role is closely tied to their individual inclination towards thematic research, which should align with the perspectives and interests of the artists involved. Generally, the curator acts as a bridge between the institution and the artists, bringing together their respective visions and creating a cohesive and meaningful exhibition. The success of this relationship hinges on the curator's ability to understand and support the artists' creative intentions while navigating the institutional framework. By fostering a collaborative and symbiotic connection, the curator can

²²⁸ It follows the English translation by the author: "I did not consider the fictitious linear progression of modernity, but rather the mutating trajectories of the arts, the transformations that allow them to unfold in rhizomatic directions, with diverse languages and from formalist, historicist, feminist, ecological, postcolonial, transgender, spiritual, or relentlessly critical perspectives towards the neoliberalism that flattens us. In an attempt to give efficacy to aesthetic consciousness and meaning to political action, I invited the Guerrilla Girls. Their statistics were chilling: in 1895, the year of the Biennale's founding, female participants accounted for only 2.4%, and by 1995, a century later, the percentage had only risen to 9%. This is why the 2022 Art Biennale 'The Milk of Dreams' was so significant, with incredible historical capsules where it became clear that there have always been women working in parallel and synchronous orbits with those of male 'geniuses,' but absent from the history books". From R. Martinez, *Cominciamo a immaginare e a costruire a Venezia il laboratorio del futuro*, in "IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE", 21 February 2023; <https://www.ilgiornaledellarte.com/articoli/rosa-mart-nez-cominciamo-a-immaginare-e-a-costruire-a-venezia-il-laboratorio-del-futuro-/141526.html> [last access on 26 May 2023].

facilitate a dynamic and engaging exhibition that resonates with both the artists and the institution's objectives. Indeed, it is crucial for the institution to embrace its role as a promoter of dialogue for the relationship with the curator and the artists to flourish. As David Balzer asserts in his critical book on the figure of the art curator:

Such curators – referring to 2013 and 2015 Venice Biennale artistic directors – may not collect in an official capacity, but they are powerful arbiters influencing the shape of collections worldwide. Their exhibitions behave like high-end fashion shows, generating desirability for specific works and, perhaps more importantly, asserting trends. [...] As is the case in fashion, which has always embraced the capitalist nature of the avant-garde more readily than the art world, a show with buzz can have a profound effect on how those in the industry think and create. An alliance with a star curator makes an artist's career, among other things facilitating their collection by institutions sensitive to their work's specific needs. It can also permanently associate an artist with the sensibility of that star curator, as if the artist has been inducted into a sort of tribe²²⁹.

By exploring the rise of the curator's role and its impact on the art world and beyond, Balzer discusses the increasing prominence and influence of curators in shaping the contemporary art landscape and the dynamics of their relationships with cultural institutions and artists. According to Balzer, curators have become central figures in the art world, not only responsible for selecting and organising artworks for exhibitions but also playing a significant role in interpreting and contextualizing artistic practices. They have the power to shape the narratives and meanings associated with artworks and can influence the reception and understanding of art by the public and engage in dialogue and negotiation to develop innovative projects that push the boundaries of traditional art practices. The curator-artist relationship is portrayed as a dynamic and sometimes complex interaction, where ideas, intentions, and creative visions merge. However, in Balzer's view, commodification of curating is not avoided in the mechanism. Curatorial practices has a lot of potential in prioritising spectacle and marketability over artistic content, and the impact of curatorial decisions on the art

²²⁹ D. Balzer, *Curationism. How curationism took over the artworld and everything else*, Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014, p. 68.

market and the art world as a whole. It is in this regard that the art curator is appointed as “authoritative arbitrators”²³⁰.

Open communication channels and a willingness to engage in meaningful conversations are essential for fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment within the artworld. By actively encouraging dialogue, the institution can create a platform where diverse perspectives, ideas, and artistic approaches can be shared and explored. Through this collaborative engagement, the institution can cultivate a vibrant and forward-thinking art community that embraces the power of conversation and exchange. It is in fact in this direction that De Corral has reasoned throughout her professional career. Her perspective on the role of cultural institutions emphasises their responsibility to engage and educate the public, providing access to art and nurturing artistic dialogue. Corral recognised the evolving nature of art practices and stressed the need for institutions to adapt to contemporary challenges. During her career, she highlighted the importance of museums and cultural institutions maintaining relevance and inclusivity by cultivating connections with diverse communities and reaching new audiences. According to Corral, curators play a crucial role in shaping meaningful museum experiences by producing innovative exhibitions that go beyond traditional art history and address pressing social and political issues.

In 2005, Martinez and De Corral curated *The Experience of Art. Always a Little Further* with the intention of provoking contemplation, challenging established norms, and fostering dialogue regarding the complex nature of contemporary art. This approach of questioning aligns closely with the activist practices of feminist artists, exemplified by Guerrilla Girls. From their initial propaganda actions to their recent Instagram posts, Guerrilla Girls have consistently and publicly emphasised the importance of equitable representation for women artists by institutions. This commitment plays a crucial role in supporting the pressing need to achieve a more inclusive artworld. Rather than simply visually replicating existing political struggles, the Guerrilla Girls’ strategy, like other forms of feminist art activism, aims to transform our understanding of social and political issues. It surpasses generating mere sympathy or empathy for predetermined causes and instead seeks to redefine how we

²³⁰ Ibid.

comprehend both art and politics. By incorporating unexpected elements and innovative configurations, art activism encourages us to perceive the world and its operations from alternative perspectives, presenting diverse models of production and social structuring. Kruger, renowned for her thought-provoking text-based artworks, challenges normalised issues perpetuated by the capitalist system, thus globalization. Through commanding phrases and visually striking elements, she confronts viewers, prompting critical reflection on topics such as consumerism, media saturation, and the construction of identity. Despite variations in references and visual strategies between her 2005 and 2022 artworks, Kruger's commitment to challenging societal norms and power structures remains consistent. The discourse surrounding the role of art in activism can be attributed to the emergence of participatory art projects that actively engage diverse communities and audiences in multiple ways. Vasconcelos, for instance, restores significance to objects by endowing them with critical, functional, and aesthetic perspectives. Vasconcelos' art can be seen as poetic statements, both in language and object-based form, aligning with the principles of relational aesthetics. Through their transformation of ordinary assumptions and everyday objects, she invites audience engagement and create impactful experiences within the exhibition space. Additionally, her creations often transcend the particular to address universal themes encompassing tradition, geo-cultural identity, and the exploration of femininity and its interplay.

Overall, the artworks of the Guerrilla Girls, Barbara Kruger, and Joana Vasconcelos at the Venice Biennale serve as powerful symbols of feminist expression, stimulating dialogue and reflection on femininity, tradition, and contemporary globalized society. In this context, it can be argued that the role of the curator, akin to the participating artists in Venice Biennale, is defined within a dynamic field. Contemporary institutional models, funding strategies, and exhibition production methods have broadened the scope of curatorial approaches and art production beyond mere opposition to traditional exhibition practices and ideologies. Curatorial and artistic projects do follow activist interventions commonly associated with politics, encompassing nuanced demonstrations that expose the contingent nature of the dominant social order when disrupted. To unveil the political dimensions of exhibition practices, it is essential to adopt a perspective that extends beyond the purview of the

professional curator or the objectivity of artwork production. At this level, the relationship between curating and politics should be examined from a standpoint that acknowledges both curators and artists as active participants within a dynamic field. This “field” needs also to be considered in its being inclusive and physical, serving as a platform to facilitate dialogue.

In terms of public engagement, efforts to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive understanding has been attempted by the Venice Biennale in 2022. By developing educational initiatives, public programs and addressing contemporary issues such as identity and gender-related topics it promoted a more inclusive understanding and acceptance for differences. The forums planned by the pavilions of the United States and the New Zealand worked in this direction and used Venice Biennale as a launching pad. Both the United States and New Zealand pavilions were conceived and brought to fruition through the collaborative efforts of diverse professionals, extending beyond the roles of the artist and curator alone. The interplay and multidisciplinary nature of these teams serve as catalysts for engaging discussions. While each forum activity had its distinct focus – the United States pavilion specifically delved into Black feminine experiences, whereas New Zealand explored themes such as ecology, intersectionality, oceanography, colonization, and the experiences of marginalized communities – both exemplify the importance of dialogue that extends beyond the presentation of artistic artifacts or projects in a narrow sense. These thought-stimulating initiatives demonstrate the need for critical engagement and exchange of ideas within the artistic sphere. In particular, through their interdisciplinary practice, Kihara challenges dominant historical narratives by exploring themes of Pacific Islander culture, colonialism, gender, and sexuality. The *Talanoa Forum* served as an important opportunity to raise awareness among students and engage a diverse audience in critical thinking. Therefore, both Yuki Kihara and Simone Leigh have made significant impacts through their artistic practices, challenging patriarchal norms and increasing awareness of activism and gender understanding because they initiate the denaturalization of doxic knowledge challenging it also through collective discussion and deconstruction of traditional archive conception. However, during the conception of the entire 2022 edition, Covid-

19 pandemic hindered the organisation of physical spaces for discourse was hindered and rendered seemingly impossible to arrange or participate in community activities or public gatherings for an extended period. In that situation, technology played a pivotal role in overcoming the challenge. Alemani, in her conversation with interviewer Marta Papini, highlights the essentiality of online studio visits in facilitating the exchange of information and ideas, ultimately contributing to the effective planning of *The Milk of Dreams*²³¹. This notion is corroborated not only by Alemani and Cicutto's statements but also by various artists and scholars who engaged in a series of presentations on the exhibition. Notably, the documentation of these lectures and dialogues, collectively referred to as *Meetings on Art*, has been made available on the Venice Biennale's official YouTube channel²³². This aspect becomes relevant when comparing it to the previous obstacle caused by technology in documenting the knowledge exchanges between curators and artists in the archive. Technological advancements have brought about logistical conveniences, particularly during a time of uncertainty and challenges for many individuals. But its impact extends beyond facilitating communication between curators, artists, and other professionals involved in exhibition production. It has also proven invaluable in enabling curators to access research materials, even when physically distanced from locations outside their residence. This is especially significant in Alemani's curatorial practice, where the meticulous selection and analysis of texts form the foundation of her research's conceptual framework. In her curatorial activity at Venice Biennale, this approach is evident in the 2017 Italian Pavilion, where an in-depth exploration was undertaken, drawing upon Ernesto De Martino's writings. Similarly, in 2020, the overarching exhibition was constructed based on extensive archival research spanning 175 years of history. Furthermore, in 2022, the catalogue itself featured diverse philosophical and literary references to provide enhanced explanations and contextualization of the selected artists and themes. The need to draw from literary contributions across various disciplines highlights the significance Alemani places on referencing the past to strengthen the present. This approach aligns with her research

²³¹ C. Alemani *The Milk of Dreams*, cit., p. 25.

²³² YouTube, *Biennale Arte 2022 - Meetings on Art*; https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2J3c5AtY5K_kpw97qxH6L5ndDoui911a [last access on 30 May 2023].

methodology and exhibition design methods. Historical capsules, in fact, prove immensely valuable in emphasizing how looking back can enhance our understanding of the present. A visual chronological overview also serves an educational purpose by facilitating comprehension of complex or sensitive subject matters. Indeed, historical capsules can be perceived more as museological elements. When considered in their entirety, they can be seen as small-scale exhibitions themselves, engaging in a dialogue with each other and with the artists displayed externally. They play a crucial role in facilitating the visitor's journey towards a wide-ranging comprehension of the exhibition's overarching themes and concepts, summarised in the following statement by Alemani:

To summarise, one might say the Exhibition revolves around three main themes: the representation of bodies and their metamorphoses; the relationship between individuals and technologies; the connection between bodies and the Earth. Or, as Rosi Braidotti-whose writings on the posthuman have been fundamental to this Exhibition – succinctly puts it, the end of the centrality of man, becoming-machine and becoming-earth. Many contemporary artists and thinkers have been envisioning a new "posthuman" condition, which Braidotti defines as “a convergence phenomenon between post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, that is to say, the critique of the universal ideal of the Man of reason on the one hand and the reject of species supremacy on the other.” They challenge the Renaissance and Enlightenment notion of the human being - especially the white European male - as motionless hub of the universe and measure of all things. And in its place, they propose new alliances among species, in worlds inhabited by porous, hybrid, manifold beings²³³.

Breaking down boundaries between human bodies represents the transcendence of the binary understanding of gender. As a result of invasive technologies and patriarchal structures, significant changes have occurred, reshaping subjectivity and challenging established hierarchies and anatomies. This has opened up the possibility of equating the binary condition with other identities, species, and objects, thereby paving the way for potential transformations. Consequently, the

²³³ C. Alemani, *The Milk of Dreams*, cit., p.26.

interdependence between individuals and their bodies does not consider relevant differentiation mechanisms, and especially exclusion dynamics. This becomes evident when considering external influences, making them susceptible to intrusions and transcending gender gap division.

Currently, the fragility of the human body has tragically been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated divisions among people by isolating human interactions and intensifying social distances. This, along with social tension and ecological concerns, serves as a constant reminder that human bodies are not invincible or self-sufficient. Rather, they are interconnected within a system of dependencies that bind us to one another, other species, and the entire planet. Many artists respond to this decline by celebrating a newfound sense of unity with the non-human world, including animals, nature, and the inorganic. They foster a sense of connectivity among different species, animate and inanimate alike. Silvia Federici refers to this process as the “re-enchantment of the world,” as it reconnects nature, others, and our bodies, allowing us to regain integrity and break free from the grip of capitalism²³⁴.

In line with this perspective, it is important to highlight the significant contributions of artists Vicuña and Fritsch in concluding the argument of this thesis. Vicuña’s exhibited works, including a range of paintings and a site-specific installation, draw inspiration from the precariousness of nature, particularly the Venetian environment, where she perceives a rich interplay between the natural and the artificial, the human and the non-human. Vicuña’s artistry lies in her ability to imbue even the humblest objects with tension and vitality. Her work embodies a delicate and precarious balance, yet possesses a remarkable potency, much like nature itself. Fritsch, on the other hand, explores the theme of artificiality, delving into a world that is increasingly characterised by artificial and synthetic elements. In doing so, she also reflects on the role of museums, exhibitions, and institutions such as the Venice Biennale in preserving and narrating the stories of humanity. The works of these artists demonstrate an

²³⁴ YouTube, *La Biennale Arte 2022 – Meetings on Art: “Re-Enchanting The World”*; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rM7_jk_fh5s&list=PL2J3c5AtY5K_kpw97qxH6L5ndDoui911a&index=13 [last access on 30 May 2023].

attitude that transcends anthropocentrism, problematising and challenging it by placing human existence on par with the natural world and the animal kingdom. The importance of changing narrative is also explained in Judith Butler's recent publication where the prominence of loss in the context of Covid merges with the urgent need for a different attitude in the face of the ongoing climate catastrophe²³⁵ Given the unquestionable relation between art and market, Butler argues that this art commodification could render art a mean to create spaces where individuals gather freely and assemble – an invaluable space not only for the present state of art but also for its future as a public good. From here, Butler suggests only the process that is established in a collective dynamic is able to question the present by finding solutions that can imagine other structures of thought and action that safeguard diversity. This regenerative power is embodied by art. The strong relational dimension that underlies Butler's thinking resonates with Nicolas Bourriaud's theories in *Aesthetic of the Capitolocene*. Recognising the power of surveillance capitalism in constructing society thinking structures, they both advocate for transcending the separation between nature and culture. As for posthuman theorists, for Butler and Bourriaud, a closed-circuit humanity that excludes the other would also exclude its own future. Therefore, these scholars' theories reject any kind of subaltern positioning in social structures. To realize this, even if deeply rooted in contemporary social structuring, the gender binarism conception must be replaced with a broader and more inclusive conception that puts all kinds of diversity on an equal footing. It is at this moment that art comes to the rescue, and the space that contains it should serve to facilitate this need for awareness²³⁶.

In this regard, the Venice Biennale has certainly taken steps to set an example and promote gender inclusiveness, the awareness of fostering systems of practice and thought that encourage fluidity, as well as having a particular sensitivity towards the environment and the natural surroundings. For instance, the Venice Biennale has undertaken efforts to minimise its carbon footprint by focusing on

²³⁵ J. Butler, *Perdita e rigenerazione. Ambiente, arte, politica*, Venezia: Marsilio Arte, 2023, pp.35-36.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-76.

two main approaches. Formerly, it has implemented measures to reduce emissions within its control. Latterly, it has offset any remaining emissions by purchasing certified carbon credits from renewable energy projects in India and Colombia. In order to reduce emissions, the Venice Biennale has integrated principles of environmental sustainability into all stages of its events' life cycles. This includes raising awareness and involving suppliers to ensure sustainable practices are followed. In 2021, it achieved the first carbon-free event, the 78th Venice International Film Festival²³⁷. To convert all the venues carbon-free, the Venice Biennale plans to launch a communication campaign next year to raise public awareness on sustainable travel options. Notwithstanding the huge number of attempts in being less-waste-as-possible, as recently pointed out in two article-letters published in "L'Espresso", the Venice Biennale is a complex, articulated and huge machine, thus even well-regulated internal organizational aspects are not sufficient to its perfect and sustainable functioning²³⁸.

Throughout the course of the study, several limitations were encountered. Initially, there was a challenge in accessing relevant literature due to the decision to focus on recent case studies. Furthermore, as this study encompassed a trans-historical nature, selecting disciplines beyond those traditionally associated with art history posed a complexity in contributing to the analysis. Subsequently, during the actual analysis of the case studies, a significant discrepancy in source availability was observed between the 2005 edition and the 2022 edition. Specifically, the earlier edition had not yet gained widespread dissemination in

²³⁷ La Biennale di Venezia, *Certification of carbon-free neutrality for all the events of la Biennale di Venezia 2022*; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/certification-carbon-neutrality-all-events-la-biennale-di-venezia-2022> [last access on 30 May 2023].

²³⁸ The exchange of digital epistolary correspondence took place in May 2023 between Diletta Bellotti from L'Espresso and Roberto Cicutto, the President of the Venice Biennale at the time of writing. Diletta Bellotti (1995) is a political activist, writer, and researcher from Rome who specializes in Human Rights and International Migration in Brussels. In 2019, she launched the awareness and information campaign "Red Blood Tomatoes," which fights against agromafia. Currently, she is a journalist for L'Espresso and actively involved in transfeminist movements. D. Bellotti, *Venezia è lunapark di cui noi cittadini siamo le comparse. Questa città non è per chi la abita*, in "L'Espresso", 4 May 2023; https://espresso.repubblica.it/opinioni/2023/05/04/news/venezia_abitanti-397802959/ [last access on 30 May 2023]. The reply was written by President on L'Espresso online blog. It follows the reference R. Cicutto, *Venezia lunapark, la parola alla Biennale*, in "L'Espresso", 4 May 2023; <http://precisoche.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2023/05/04/venezia-lunapark-la-parola-alla-biennale/> [last access on 30 May 2023].

publications pertaining to critical analysis, whereas the more recent edition offered numerous sources, both digital and print. This resulted in a contamination of knowledge stemming from diverse sources. Finally, for the analysis of the results, the main difficulties were related to the interpretation of the data itself and justifying it through sources that were personally studied.

The contributions of literature, curatorial approaches, and artistic productions examined in this study highlight the need to critically reconsider issues related to a radicalised knowledge in our practices, which has consequently led to imbalances on multiple levels. Specifically focusing on the contemporary art system and within the context of the Venice Biennale in recent years, this thesis has demonstrated the unquestionable connection between art and gender. In organizing and producing exhibitions at the Venice Biennale, disparities are first represented by an undeniable and unequal representation of women curators and artists, whose attention to gender issues is internalized and externally expressed in their research and work through various methods and media. The analysed art projects have contributed to opening a dialogue towards the deradicalization of disproportions, formerly the conception of gender binarism. In 2005, visitors were alerted to gender imbalances through the voices of women, Martinez and De Corral, as well as through the works produced by women artists, which employed verbal language in the case of Kruger, symbolism of everyday objects in Vasconcelos' work, and activist propaganda by the Guerrilla Girls. In 2022, however, the gender binarism was problematised, offering the already alarmed visitor possible alternatives and alluding to the presence of other dimensions of interconnected problematisation. According to Fritsch, Vicuña, Leigh, and Kihara, it is possible to give new meanings to categorised imaginings and create new cosmologies that respect the diversity of identities only by respecting the diversity of the cultural and natural ecosystems to which they belong. The possibility of establishing a new dimension founded on mutual respect for diversity and the plurality of identities can face obstacles posed by agents such as technology or, as recently experienced, the Covid pandemic. Given the challenges encountered, it is appropriate to rely on multiple tools, including art

and its belonged spaces. Due to their inherent political significance²³⁹, art and its associated framework should be acknowledged as potential strong allies in the battle aimed at deconstructing differentiating dynamics and questioning dogmatic knowledge. Therefore, echoing Butler's thoughts while quoting Bourriaud's words:

Creativity, critical thinking, exchange, transcendence, the relationship to the Other and to history are many values intrinsic to artistic practice that will soon be of vital importance for the future of humankind. We need art to give a meaning to our lives [...]. Art is a sustainable energy whose place has long been at the centre of human societies, and contemporary anthropology confirms this idea. Beyond satisfying an aesthetic need, art reveals the principles that organize space within a society, how knowledge is transmitted and how signs circulate²⁴⁰.

²³⁹ J. Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009, pp.24-25.

According to Jacques Rancière's ongoing research, politics is not merely the exercise of power; rather, it is constituted by the rupture or revelation of the dominant social order as a contingent structure, ultimately leading to its reconfiguration for the better.

²⁴⁰ N. Bourriaud, *Inclusions. Aesthetics of the Capitalocene*, London: Sternberg Press, 2022, p. 53.

Conclusion

The author's aim in this dissertation, as suggested by the title, is not to present a definitive theory or comprehensive overview of the relationship between art and gender. Rather, the case studies compiled here serve as an initial exploration on how deconstructing the knowledge of subalternity upon gender conception. It is an attempt to examine contemporary art through a specific lens, employing a vocabulary that diverges from the prevailing discourse in art history practice.

Maintaining a clear distinction between theory and practice, it proves challenging when addressing art, gender, and politics, as these aspects are inherently interconnected. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this analysis, the author has deliberately selected literature and case studies aiming to bridge gender with a broader inclusive discourse. By doing so, the author aims to avoid relying solely on information semantically accessible to art history, which often becomes an exclusive barrier. Some case studies delve deeply into the realm of art-gender discourse and practice, while others explore the broader context.

The hope is that this diverse mix will stimulate new perspectives on the interplay between art and gender, while simultaneously expanding upon existing avenues of inquiry into related subjects. The pressing nature of the debate surrounding concrete aspects of art, gender, and activism is evident, underscoring the need for critical discussion. However, it also highlights the inherent uncertainty regarding the potential outcomes of such a debate.

These dilemmas prompt further questions, such as: *should art and its practitioners move away from the symbolic realm of gender concepts and instead focus on conforming to gender binarism?* In other words, *should art exhibitions and artists be considered primarily in terms of their impact within a patriarchal heteronormative society?* Alternatively, *should they be examined more deeply in terms of their social and ethical power on the preservation of diversity challenging subjugation to dominant cultural norms?*

These quandaries invite reflection for the future on the broader implications and responsibilities of art in relation to gender and society and how binary understanding structures has been constructed on these foundations.

To the reader:

Il futuro non è in una terra promessa dove arriveranno i nostri figli, né in un pianeta diverso da questo. Il futuro è nell'equivalenza di tutti i luoghi e nella migrazione perpetua che permette a ogni spazio di diventare il contenuto di qualsiasi altro spazio. Il domani è l'unità spirituale di tutti gli spazi. Il futuro non è l'evoluzione di questa o quella identità, né il rispetto delle identità. Il futuro è nella capacità di ogni identità di includere e diventare qualsiasi altra, di dimenticare se stessa e vivere senza ricordare il proprio nome. Il domani è l'unità e il respiro di tutti i sé²⁴¹.

²⁴¹ It follows the English translation by the author: “The future does not lie in a promised land where our children will arrive, nor in a planet different from this one. The future lies in the equivalence of all places and in perpetual migration that allows every space to become the content of any other space. Tomorrow is the spiritual unity of all spaces. The future is not the evolution of this or that identity, nor the preservation of identities. The future lies in the capacity of every identity to include and become any other, to forget itself and live without remembering its own name. Tomorrow is the unity and breath of all selves”. From E. Coccia, *Introduzione*, in *Unknown Unknown. An introduction to Mysteries*, Milan: Electa, 2022, pp. 10-22, here p.22.

Appendix

Illustrations

III. 1

Graph drawn up by the author on the basis of statistics collected for the Biennale Arte editions by 2001-2009.

III. 2

Graph drawn up by the author on the basis of statistics collected for the Biennale Arte editions by 2011-2019.

III. 3

ASAC Dati webpage screenshot - sections examined by the author during the archive research are highlighted with red circular marks.

III. 4

Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Façade): wall tattoo*, 2005, digital photographic printing, print on vinyl, 51st. International Exhibition, Venice, 2015, Central Pavilion, photo credit Haupt & Binder.

III. 5

Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Beginning/Middle/End)*, 2022, digital photographic printing, print on vinyl, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

III. 6:

Joana Vasconcelos, *A Novia*, 2001, Stainless steel and about 14,000 internal OB pads. Chandelier hung from the ceiling of the first exhibition space at the Arsenale, 680x300x300, 51st. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

III. 7:

Joana Vasconcelos, *Tradaria Praia*, 2013, project, 55th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

III. 8

Guerrilla Girls, *Benvenuti alla Biennale Femminista*, project for the Venice Biennale, 2005, Print Materials, Colour offset lithograph, Edition 13/50, Dimensions 60.9x45.7, 51st. International Exhibition, Venice, 2005, Arsenale, photo credit La Biennale di Venezia.

III. 9

Guerrilla Girls, *The advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988, Photo-offset lithograph on paper, 43.1 x 56. Tate, London.

III. 10

Ridykeulous with Nicole Eisenman, A.L. Steiner, *The Advantages of Being a Lesbian Woman Artist*, 2006, screenprint, 41.2x51, Moma, New York.

III. 11

Guerrilla Girls' Instagram profile page, photo and comment posted on April 23, 2022. Screenshotted by the author.

III. 12

Roberto Cuoghi, *Imitazione di Cristo*, 2017, organic materials, 57th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2017, Italian Pavilion, photo credit Andrea Ferro.

III. 13

Formafantasma, № 2.3.4.1 The Disquited Muses 2020, La Biennale di Venezia Central Pavillion. Facade., photo, courtesy Formafantasma.

III. 14

Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.15 – The Witch's Cradle, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III. 15

Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.24 – Corps Orbite, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III. 16

Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.40 – Technologies of Enchantment, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III.17

Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.59 – Arsenale, A Leaf a Gourd a Shell a Net a Bag a Sling a Snack a Bottle a Pot a Box a Container, 2022, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III.18

Formafantasma, № 2.3.6.72 – Seduction of the Cyborg, photo, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III.19

Katharina Fritsch, *Elefant/Ephant*, 1987, Polyester, bois, peinture, 420x160x380 cm cm, photo, courtesy Formafantasma.

III.20

Cecilia Vicuña, *NAUfraga*, 2022, mixed technique, variable dimensions, 2022, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Central Pavilion, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III.21

Simone Leigh, *Brick House*, 2019, bronze, 490x270, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, Arsenale, courtesy of Formafantasma.

III.22

Yuki Kihara, *Two Fa'afafine (After Gauguin)*, 2020, c-print mounted behind acrylic glass, edition of 9 + 2 AP, panel: 940 x 720 mm. 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, New Zeland Pavilion, courtesy of Yuki Kihara

III.23

Yuki Kihara, *Three Fa'afafine (after Gauguin)*, 2020.
c-print mounted behind acrylic glass, edition of 9 + 2 AP, panel: 730 x 940 mm.
Milfordgalleries, 59th. International Exhibition, Venice, 2022, New Zeland Pavilion, courtesy of Yuki Kihara

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