



## Venice Summons the World

The 60th International Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia. Entrance to the Central Pavilion at the Giardini.

“A stranger I arrived here, a stranger I go hence.” Nearly two hundred years ago, the opening verses of Franz Schubert’s “Winter Journey” addressed an existential pain familiar to almost all artists. You embark on a journey without knowing its destination, hopeful, but are then often betrayed and disillusioned. **“Strangers Everywhere,” Adriano Pedrosa’s insightful and memorable title for the 60th International Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, runs until November 24, 2024. It is time, he says, for the “global south” to come to the fore. 331 artists were selected.** Already in 2009, Pedrosa had been advocating for this in Brazil, where he lives, by exclusively showcasing foreign artists. Without immigrants, he argued, his country’s cultural ‘identity’ was inconceivable. Sexual orientation was not a determining factor in the selection of those he invited. Noteworthy Brazilian figures, for him, were widely beloved *Artistas populares* celebrated for their performances in Carneval. As this kind of popularity was less common in Europe, the USA, or the Far East, Pedrosa chose artists resembling Aloïse Corbaz, born in Lausanne in 1886, whose works have typically been categorized as “outsider art” or “art of the mentally ill.” A large room is dedicated to her in Venice. **Aloïse, an exceptionally impassioned artist who was also intensely devoted to singing, suffered from delusions, which for Pedrosa was a primary reason to include such personalities. Indigenous artists were also important to him, rare though they have become. Thanks to his wide-ranging, deliberately heterogeneous selection, the stranger’s condition manifests itself in Venice as a globally pervasive diaspora.** It is no secret that countless lives have been painfully marked by exile, by the despair of a marginalized existence, by barriers to integration into new communities. As director of the *Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo*, Pedrosa can point to many Italian artists exiled by Hitler’s and Mussolini’s fascist regimes who lived and worked in Brazil until they died, some of them well into the 21st Century. In the Venice exhibition, Frida Kahlo, born in 1910 as the daughter of an exiled German national, also belongs to the global south. An accompanying publication with 290 short biographies highlights her stance in almost hymnic language: “She regarded artistic practice as all-encompassing and made no distinction between art, life, and political commitment.”

Pedrosa's 'strangers' orient themselves in many directions, struggling for recognition as a means of escape from the margins. Heroic resilience conjoined with despair is the ground that Pedrosa's exhibition rolls out as a panorama of parallel cultural worlds. **The good luck, perhaps the miracle, of this Biennale lies in the fact that a significant number, if not almost all, of the national pavilions have addressed the themes of foreignness, exile, and colonialism and their cultural consequences. No matter whether we are speaking of Egypt, Germany, France, Great Britain, Lebanon, the Netherlands, or Spain, not only artists but countless individuals have lost their homeland and with it their personal ties and almost every sheltered form of life.** Art conveys this in Venice on a scale never seen before. Thus the Biennale serves as an urgent global appeal. Outside the *Giardini* and the *Arsenale* you can see "Willem de Kooning and Italy" in the *Accademia* Museum. One of the greatest American painters spent several months in both Rome and Venice in 1959 and 1969. He too was an exile and had to wait a long time before being granted American citizenship. His first bronzes were made in Italy. His current curators hoped those circumstances would furnish a "perfect context" for the theme of the Biennale. But that hope finds no traction. The exhibition at Nicolas Berggruen of work by the Japanese Hiroshi Sugimoto and the Korean Lee Ufan similarly shows long established Western art from the far East, which has already enjoyed great success for decades. In parallel, the newly founded *Berggruen Arts & Culture Foundation* is presenting commissioned works by highly renowned contemporaries such as Urs Fischer, Carsten Höller and Mariko Mori. **The particularly elaborate exhibition of Zeng Fanzhi in the *Gran Scuola di Misericordia*, presented by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando with the *Los Angeles County Museum of Art* and the *Hauser & Wirth* gallery, gives a somewhat ambivalent impression. New steel floors and steel stairs and towering white partition walls create an almost royal ambience for Zeng's work. It is an impressive painterly feat, a rebirth of pointillism with up to thirty colors on his canvases. But Zeng, too, lives in the diaspora.** He is one of the five or six Chinese artists who managed to gain international attention under Deng Xiaoping from the 1990s onwards. Today it is unclear how long they can continue to have a home in the People's Republic of China. Venice is calling for our solidarity. The many people and nations form a whole on account of their diversity.

DR. THOMAS KELLEIN  
*Head of Art Consult*  
thomas.kellein@bergos.ch

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