

Para-Pavilions 2011

הביאנלה ה־54 לאמנות בוונציה

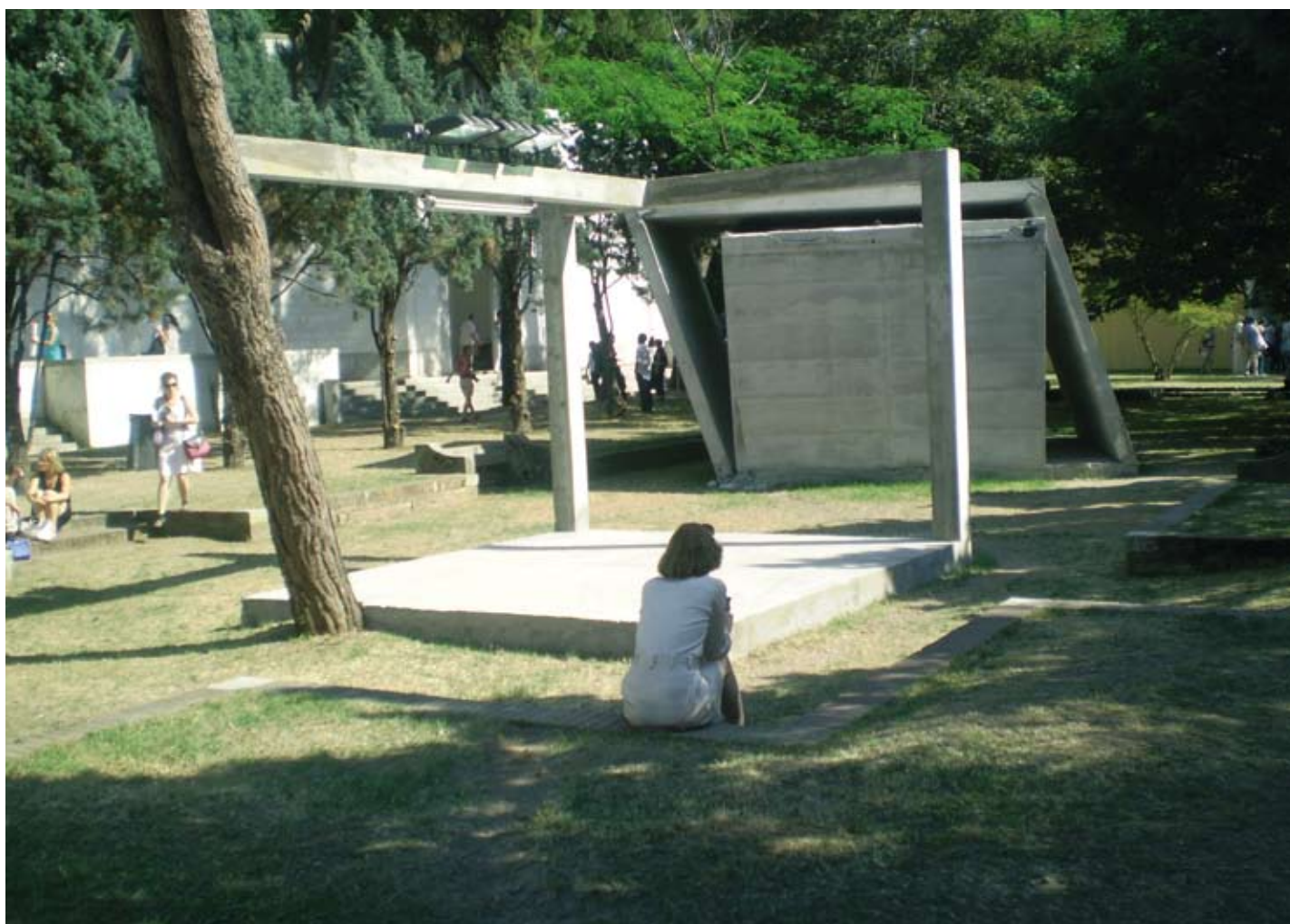
מאמר
מערכת



^
Nils Bech, *When You Looked at Me*, 2011, performance
Oscar Tuazon's Para-Pavilion. Photo: Rachel Sukman

Oscar Tuazon

>
Ida Ekblad, *A Caged Law of the Bird the Hand the Land*, 2011,
site-specific installation, painting, sculpture, drawing
Oscar Tuazon's Para-Pavilion. Photo: Rachel Sukman



Venice Biennale

angelic face on a youthful body. As soon as the song ended, he continued with a story-song (about himself?) in English. While singing and moving like an adept dancer, he directed his movements, especially his hands, to create an interplay of light and shade, like sculpture, drawing, or stain work. His delicate, slow gestures outlined an indelible memory. All this happened inside Tuazon's "pavilion."

In his Para-Pavilion, Tuazon collaborated with two Paris-based friends: Ida Ekblad who painted a landscape with an exotic palm tree in green and purple on the external concrete surface, and Nils Bech in When You Looked at Me, a performance comprising song and movement outside and inside the architectural sculpture. Le Corbusier's assertion that the house must resemble a sculpture within which one may walk immediately popped to mind.

Among the national pavilions at the Giardini which left a political, social, or utopian impression, each in its own way, and used the Biennale platform to express some thought or reality by artistic means, one may mention several which will be remembered when the curtain is drawn on the Biennale in November 2011: the Japanese, Korean, Brazilian, Israeli, Polish, and mainly—the Swiss pavilions.

Thomas Hirschhorn was assigned the large, high structure of the Swiss Pavilion located first in the row of pavilions on the right side of the right hand path at the entrance to the Giardini. The sense of war is thrust in one's face even before entering the pavilion. The first sights appearing to the viewer are masses of wrapping materials crudely and crassly attached to one another with strips of brown packing tape. From the very first instant it is clear that the interior has come out, and that we are invited to a workshop which conveys a hysterical, obsessive air.

The title, "Crystal of Resistance," doesn't really elucidate the intention of the art works to which we are about to be exposed later on... In an interview held the day after the opening, Hirschhorn tried to explain once again what he had written before: "I want to give a form that creates the conditions for thinking," adding that "This is the mission of art. The word 'resistance' is associated in our collective memory with the *résistance*, objection, totalitarian regimes, destructive government, death, war and various other words of this arsenal." He goes on to explain the idea of the crystals within all this and recount the story about the trip he took and how he discovered the crystals in the hands of children who collected them during a bike ride in a mountainous area in Switzerland.

Upon entering the pavilion one realizes that we are concerned with socio-political criticism addressing the ailments of Western civilization (the crystal), obviously represented in all the media forms: cellular phones, television, photographed and broadcast media. Featured vis-à-vis these are the casualties, third world citizens of the totalitarian or quasi-democratic countries. Images of pain, murder, occupation, rape, corrupt leaders of third world countries—a well-blended mix presented on clotheslines as if it were dirty laundry. Once again, the same faces of the world's leaders, from politics to religion and fashion, stare at us from the covers of magazines piled up on the mountain of hostility. Crystals—in thousands of variations which only an artist obsessed with his own theme could have invented. In addition we get rows of blonde Barbie dolls and two super-models towering to five meters in height. At times it is hard to draw the line between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false, beauty and horror, art and craft.

While Hirschhorn indeed endeavored to create a place or conditions for reflection, most of all he succeeded in creating conditions of horror regarding the direction in which our world is heading. It was an unforgettable pavilion also due to the fact that it was created by a Swiss artist. How did the cold, restrained, civilized behavior of the Swiss spawn this horrific pavilion? Hirschhorn criticizes the Swiss neutrality, in a manner at once sensitive and intelligent.

The 2011 Biennale was most of all tiring. Its organizers tried to be a little too generous to everyone. They allowed too many participants, far over the absorption capacity of an adept visitor. I have often asked myself what the genetic code is which secures an artist an invitation to present at the Venice Biennale? Without slighting the fact that such participation furnishes an artist with great respect, the question arises, whether the choice of a given work or a given artist brings respect to the Biennale itself too... ♦

Curator Bice Curiger chose the theme "ILLUMInations" for the 54th Venice Biennale. A highly esteemed figure in the world of contemporary art, Curiger is an art historian, a graduate of the University of Zurich, co-founder and editor-in-chief of the renowned contemporary art magazine Parkett published in Zurich and New York since 1984.

Oscar Tuazon's Para-Pavilion >
Oscar Tuazon, *Raped Land & The Trees*, 2011,
Photo: Rachel Sukman



Felipe Cardeña, *The Last Crisis of this Crazy Crazy World* (details), 2011, collage on canvas
Photo: Antonio de Luca

Daide Coltro, *Res Publica I*, 2011 (detail), installation: 96 electronic frames, MD-System 19 with wireless remote upgrade
Italian Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale
Photo: Davide Coltro's Archive



ILLUMInations

Venice Biennale 2011

elicited quandaries for which I failed to find answers, even later along the way. This year Consorti also exhibits a work at the Alessandria Biennale, Italy. No other than the American president, Obama, smiles at us from the frame, equipped with trendy sun glasses, with dollar bills flying around him, looking rather laughable as he tries to rule the world with his money and the whip in his hand. This and other works made me wonder, why is the current period so similar to the Middle Ages or the early Renaissance in Europe? One hypothesis is that history repeats itself; another possibility is that the artists of the 21st century adapt their works to the spirit of the time and present them in the time, place, and context suitable to the decision makers...

In the midst of all this artistic noise I found a gem: a spectacularly beautiful work by Florencia Martinez (born in Spain; lives and works in Milan since 1990): a 2-meter high and 3.5-meter wide piece of tranquility; fabric embroidered with red flowers, revealed only after prolonged close observation. Martinez created a delicate collage from a series of photographs portraying male and female figures, which she printed on a single strip of fabric. The photographed figures are seen from the back or in profile, unidentifiable. The concealment and protection of the subjects' privacy was likewise subtle and praiseworthy in the present reality era. Martinez elongated the figures' bodies, lending them an astonishing appearance, mannerist in the positive sense. Each photograph was marked with a numbered barcode, introducing yet another facet of discreetness. The division into twelve panels was made after the entire composition was printed on the fabric. Once the photographed sheet was attached to the boards, the exposure of the flowers embroidered in red (on an industrial fabric) began. Each panel was treated differently, from total concealment of the flower traces to their discreet exposure. Some of the flowers had to be re-embroidered, in which case the artist left the threads exposed on the surface of the work, hanging from it in varying lengths. I cannot tell how long I observed this work, which transmitted mainly an enriching, intriguing serenity. The desire to delve into the *modus operandi* of the embroidering photographer was an utter pleasure. These moments infused me with the necessary quiet which in the past came between an individual and his thinking (an idea which I have borrowed from Max Picard's book The World of Silence).

The exhibition "ILLUMInations" was presented at the Arsenale and the Giardini. The tall and wide elongated warehouse space of the Arsenale (previously used as

armories) enables viewers to walk about in a spacious exhibition and observe the works from several points of view. As part of her curatorial concept for the 2011 Biennale, Curiger invited four sculptors—Franz West (Austria), Monika Sosnowska (Poland), Song Dong (Beijing, China), and Oscar Tuazon (born in the USA; lives and works in Paris and Tacoma, Washington). They were asked to create a sculptural architectural work within which they may host works by other artists, in such a way that the totality would convey a message of their own—a pretentious, interesting project entitled "Para-Pavilions." West and Dong exhibited at the Arsenale; Sosnowska exhibited at the Giardini, in the large structure which functioned for many years as the Italian Pavilion; as for Tuazon, I went to look for him... and finally found his work on the lawn across from the Polish Pavilion.

If only because of this thing that happened to me, it was worthwhile coming to the Biennale.

I asked the girls in the Polish Pavilion whether the concrete structure on the lawn was Tuazon's and they confirmed, adding that there was a little sign down there, hidden behind a rock. I climbed down and crossed the lawn into a cubic structure cast from concrete slabs, some of which glided one over the other, with entry gaps for people in their four corners. The immediate connotations—monument, grave, security room, shelter, protected area—divert one from contemplating other concepts. I entered and stopped in the center. I looked up and down and to the sides, at the intersections between the slabs, in an attempt to figure out what this gray concrete locus makes me feel and think. Through the ventilation and entry slits I could peek at the lawn outside, and even get a glimpse of the little canal on whose opposite bank the Israeli Pavilion is located. Once again I concentrated on the concrete connections between the walls and ceiling where I noticed a little round hole. "A camera?" I wondered. Suddenly, right from there, I heard a gentle singing voice. I was afraid to move lest the magic dissolves; perhaps there was a connection between the ray which captured me and activated this marvelous singing emanating from behind the wall... Frozen and excited from that wonderful thing that happened to me, the singing voice gradually grew stronger and nearer. I was lured to the slit facing the lawn, and lo and behold—the voice "walks"... A guy in a white t-shirt and shorts, purity incarnate, walks backwards, approaching with his back to me, and only then do I discover a young man holding a microphone. He entered the structure, still walking backwards, until he reached the opposite concrete slab, and was now facing me with his blue eyes and fair hair, an

Biennale 2011

A Portrait of the Visitor to the 2011 Venice Biennale as an Eclectic Hedonistic

The Venice Biennale

54th International Art Exhibition

Preview: 1 June 2011

Opening to the general public: 4 June 2011

Closing: 27 November 2011

Director: Bice Curiger

Rachel Sukman

The Biennale's title, "ILLUMInations," gave rise to simplistic religious and political interpretations. Many of the participating artists fell into a trap of excessive mannerism instead of expressing their unique artistic handwriting

A Biennale visitor/viewer requires two major traits: eclecticism and hedonism. While the first may sound somewhat critical, by eclecticism I mean, in fact, an interdisciplinary, broad-minded individual, someone who is not locked in a single concern, but rather continually seeks diverse fields of interest. The second quality is also ambiguous: a hedonist is a pleasure-seeker who hankers after the pleasures of life, such as food, drink, etc. At the same time, however, he possesses a profound passion for art-related pleasures, and there is no place like Venice to fulfill many of these.

The viewing of a multi-participant art exhibition such as the Biennale requires considerable observation skills as well as a physical and mental ability to experience thousands of artworks all at once. Hence, sometimes it is a good idea to let the sights sink in and settle within our inner image reservoir, and take a while before revisiting them to see what remained etched in our consciousness.

I began my viewing in the Italian Pavilion at the Arsenale curated by Vittorio Sgarbi. Already at the entrance I was gripped by claustrophobia at the sight of countless art works closing in on me. An overdose in an art exhibition makes it difficult to concentrate, affecting the time required to absorb its contents, let alone the pleasure!

I chose a wall to view. Dense hanging, with no gaps

between either artists or works. The wall appeared like a tapestry of artworks, from ceiling to floor or vice versa. I started with Davide Coltro who exhibited a large series of light boxes in which landscapes alternate between color and black-and-white. The works are hung with impressive accuracy, which made me praise the marvels of technology, but no more than that, alas. I tried to focus my gaze on Felipe Cardeña's flower surfaces. From two meters away, the fifteen variously-sized, collaged canvases create the texture of a vernal world. Cardeña uses the media heroes of recent years, whose portraits are inserted into a flower field which reminded me of the plastic tablecloths typically used by Polish-Jewish women, a familiar sight in many Israeli kitchens. The artistic idea was to incorporate the figures of Muammar al-Gaddafi, Barack Obama, Osama bin Laden, Hare Krishna, Ganesha (Hindu elephant deity), Shiva, and the Pope into the floral plastic carpets—all together in an illusive religious and political world masquerading as a pastoral flower field. Represented on the same wall was Italian artist Paolo Consorti with two works featuring religious figures decorated with artificial romantic roses: in one frame, a Capuchin monk, in another—a nun. The proximity of religious themes, the dimensions of the works, and the choice of mundane, inexpensive materials such as plastic flowers—all these

Venice



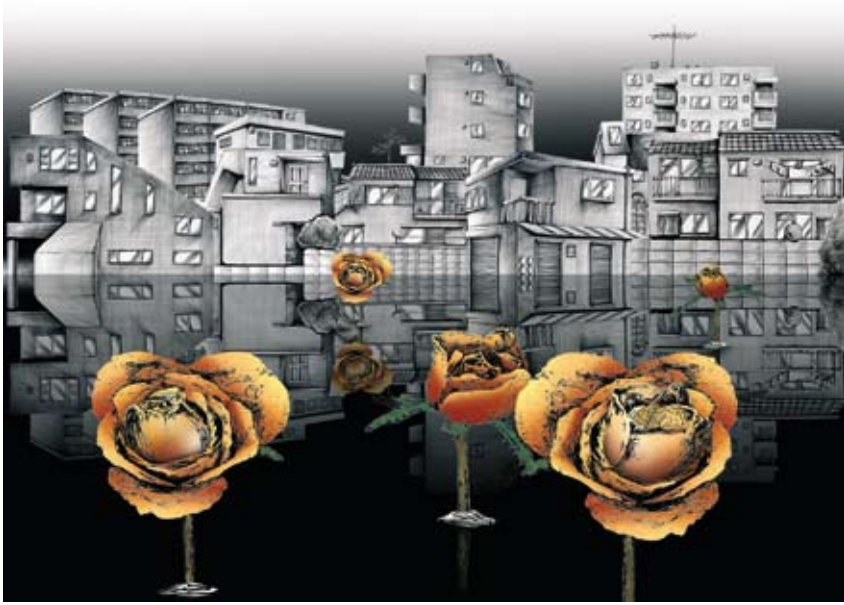
Thomas Hirschhorn, *Crystal of Resistance*, 2011
Swiss Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, 2011
Photo: Rachel Sukman

Switzerland



Venice Biennale 2011

Japan | Tabaimo: Teleco-soup | Giardini



Japan

Tabaimo, *Teleco-Soup*, 2011, still images from a video installation, 5:27 min, loop

© Tabaimo / Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi and James Cohan Gallery

