

**Le muse
inquiete**

**La Biennale
di Venezia
di fronte
alla storia**


La Biennale di Venezia

Archivio Storico
della Biennale
di Venezia

125



**The
Disquieted
Muses**

**When
La Biennale
di Venezia
meets history**



1968

Tra conte- stazioni e nuovi ideali

1968 Tra contestazioni e nuovi ideali

Vittorio Pajusco
Giuseppe Ghigi

FIG. 01 — (pagina precedente) "Uomo-sandwich" con cartello di protesta con la scritta 'Johnson non rompere i padiglioni!', Riva degli Schiavoni, 1968 • (previous page) "Sandwich man" with the protest sign 'Johnson non rompere i padiglioni!' during the demonstration, Riva degli Schiavoni, 1968

ITA Il 1968 è l'anno delle contestazioni: mancano pochi giorni all'inaugurazione della Biennale quando gli studenti delle università e delle accademie, solidali con i rivoluzionari di Praga, occupano gli atenei e scendono a manifestare in strada. La Biennale, vista come simbolo della cultura borghese con uno statuto anacronistico, diventa l'obiettivo principale di tutte le contestazioni. Le autorità si preoccupano per i possibili disordini dopo che a maggio la Triennale di Milano era stata occupata. Da più parti si chiede di rimandare l'inaugurazione della XXXIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, tuttavia i commercianti veneziani insistono perché si realizzi l'evento mondano per non compromettere la stagione turistica. Arrivano intanto le dimissioni di Giuseppe Mazzariol, Arnaldo Pomodoro e Giuseppe Santomaso dalla sottocommissione delle Arti Figurative, mentre alcuni artisti preoccupati mandano telegrammi alla Biennale per ritirare le proprie opere. Le proteste giovanili in piazza San Marco, capeggiate dal musicista Luigi Nono e dal pittore Emilio Vedova, vengono represses dalle cariche della polizia e i giornali titolano: *la Biennale del manganello*. Nei tafferugli sono coinvolti molti critici e cronisti stranieri. Il 18 giugno l'ingresso della mostra è sorvegliato da un numero spropositato di forze dell'ordine, cosa che crea un clima di tensione generale. All'interno dei Giardini invece il panorama è desolante: la maggior parte dei padiglioni nazionali è chiusa e molti degli artisti italiani come Lorenzo Guerrini e Gastone Novelli, in sostegno ai manifestanti, girano i loro quadri verso le pareti e alcuni arrivano a scrivere sul retro delle loro opere: "Biennale fascista". Tra i premiati del '68 troviamo la pittrice optical Bridget Riley e lo scultore cibernetico Nicolas Schöffer; tra gli italiani Gianni Colombo che presenta il suo *Spazio elastico* e Pino Pascali, che morirà tragicamente un mese prima della fine della Biennale, con una sala 'ludica' fatta di oggetti ricoperti di stuoie di plastica, lana di ferro e piume di gallina. All'indomani delle proteste del 1968 importanti cambiamenti modificheranno l'Esposizione d'Arte: si aboliscono, infatti, i Gran premi (ripristinati solo nel 1986) e si modifica l'ufficio vendite trasformandolo in un 'servizio vendite', quest'ultimo cancellato definitivamente nel 1973.

FIG. 02 — Volantino 'Benvenuto colui che viene nel nome del questore', 1968 • 'Benvenuto colui che viene nel nome del questore' flyer, 1968

FIG. 03 — *Ciò che resta della Biennale si inaugura oggi a Venezia*, Corriere della Sera, 21 giugno/June 1968, Sandro Meccoli



03

1968 A year of protests and new ideals

Vittorio Pajusco
Giuseppe Ghigi

ENG The 25 August 1968 for the inaugural evening of the XXIX. International Art Exhibition at the Palazzo were over, the saracinesche lowered and, in front, a cord of police officers blocks a group of protesters who demand the resignation of Luigi Chiarini, director of the Exhibition since 1963, and to self-manage the exhibition. Together with students, critics and some directors of the Italian Association of Cinematographers: Liliana Cavani, Marco Ferreri, Ugo Gregoretti, Francesco Maselli, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Gillo Pontecorvo and Cesare Zavattini. "No alla cultura dei padroni!" is the slogan. Chiarini and the 'sua' Exhibition have in program a film as *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* by Carmelo Bene, *Partner* by Bernardo Bertolucci, *Fuoco!* by Gian Vittorio Baldi, *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos* by Alexander Kluge (who will win the Lion of Gold), *Faces* by John Cassavetes, *Csend és kiáltás* by Miklós Jancsó, *Teorema* by Pier Paolo Pasolini. The evening of opening is cancelled and the Exhibition is inaugurated two days later. At the end of the festival Luigi Chiarini is forced to resign. In 1972-1973, the Anac organizes the Italian Cinema Days, in Santa Margherita and in the factories of Marghera, a kind of permanent assembly to which participate Jean-Luc Godard, Marco Ferreri, Bernardo Bertolucci, Gian Maria Volonté and Marco Bellocchio who presents in anteprima *Nel nome del padre*. The doors of the Exhibition close in 1972 in anticipation of the new statute that will arrive in 1974. The epilogue of the Sessantotto is reached in 1974 with the 'case' *Chung Kuo*, *Cina* by Michelangelo Antonioni which Carlo Ripa di Meana, neopresident of the Venice Biennale, and Giacomo Gambetti, director of the Cinema Sector, would project at the Teatro La Fenice, provoking the protests of the Chinese government and the Italian filmmakers who consider the film a provocation. Umberto Eco remembers that "at the last moment the prefect of Venice, running to the aid of the authorities of Peking, discovered that La Fenice was inaccessible as a cinema hall". The projection will take place at the Olympia cinema besieged by the protesters.

ENG 1968 was the year of protests: just a few days before the Biennale Arte opened, students occupied their universities and art academies and took to the streets to demonstrate in support of the Prague Spring. Seen as a symbol of bourgeois culture, with an anachronistic statute, the Biennale became the demonstrators' primary target. The authorities worried about the potential for disruptions after the Triennale in Milan was occupied in May. Calls to postpone the opening of the 34th International Art Exhibition came in from various sides, but Venetian businesses insisted that the event should start as planned to avoid jeopardising the



tourist season. Meanwhile, Giuseppe Mazzariol, Arnaldo Pomodoro and Giuseppe Santomaso resigned from the figurative arts subcommittee and a number of artists sent telegrams to La Biennale to withdraw their work. Youth protests in Piazza San Marco, led by composer Luigi Nono and painter Emilio Vedova, were put down by the police and the headlines read: “The Biennale of Truncheons”. A great many critics and foreign journalists were caught up in the ensuing scuffles. On 18 June there was an unprecedented police presence at the entrance, creating a general climate of tension. Inside, on the other hand, the Giardini looked deserted, with most national pavilions closed. Many of the Italian artists, including Lorenzo Guerrini and Gastone Novelli, turned their paintings to the wall in support of the demonstrators, and some even went so far as to write “Fascist Biennale” on the back of their work. The prize winners for 1968 included optical painter Bridget Riley and cybernetic sculptor Nicolas Schöffer. Among the Italians, Gianni Colombo presented his *Spazio elastico* and Pino Pascali, who died tragically a month before the end of the Biennale, brought a playful room of objects covered in plastic matting, steel wool and chicken feathers.

The 1968 protests ushered in significant changes to the Biennale Arte: the grand prizes were abolished (until 1986), and the sales office was turned into a “sales service” before being definitively closed in 1973.

On 25 August 1968, on the opening night of the 29th Venice International Film Festival, the lights at the Palazzo del Cinema were switched off and its blinds were pulled down. A line of police officers held back the group of protestors outside; they were demanding the resignation of Luigi Chiarini, who had been the director since 1963, and that the festival be self-managed by participants. Some critics and directors from the Associazione Italiana Autori Cinematografici (ANAC – Italian Association of Filmmakers) – Liana Cavani, Marco Ferreri, Ugo Gregoretti, Francesco Maselli, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Gillo Pontecorvo and Cesare Zavattini – backed the students. “Down with the culture of the powerful!” became their slogan. Chiarini and “his” festival had drawn up a programme that included Carmelo Bene’s *Nostra Signora dei Turchi*, Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Partner*, Gian Vittorio Baldi’s *Fuoco!*, Alexander Kluge’s *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos* (which won the Golden Lion), John Cassavetes’ *Faces*, Miklós Jancsó’s *Csend és kiáltás* and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Teorema*. The opening night was cancelled and the festival began two days later. At the end of it, Luigi Chiarini was forced to resign.

In 1972-73, ANAC organised the Giornate del Cinema Italiano, an alternative festival held at Cinema Olimpia, in Campo Santa Margherita and at the Marghera

factories. It was a sort of general assembly in which Jean-Luc Godard, Marco Ferreri, Bernardo Bertolucci, Gian Maria Volonté and Marco Bellocchio all took part, with Bellocchio presenting a preview of *Nel nome del padre*. The Venice Film Festival closed down in 1972 until a new statute could be adopted, which happened only in 1974. The epilogue to the 1968 movement came along in 1974 in the form of friction over Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Chung Kuo, Cina*: Carlo Ripa di Meana, the new president of La Biennale, and Giacomo Gambetti, director of the Cinema Department, wanted to screen it at Teatro La Fenice, but this brought complaints from the Chinese government and from Mao supporters in Italy who considered the film a provocation. Umberto Eco recalled that “at the last moment the Venice prefect came to the aid of the Beijing regime and suddenly discovered that La Fenice was unfit for use as a cinema”. The screening took place at Cinema Olimpia, but was besieged by protestors.

05

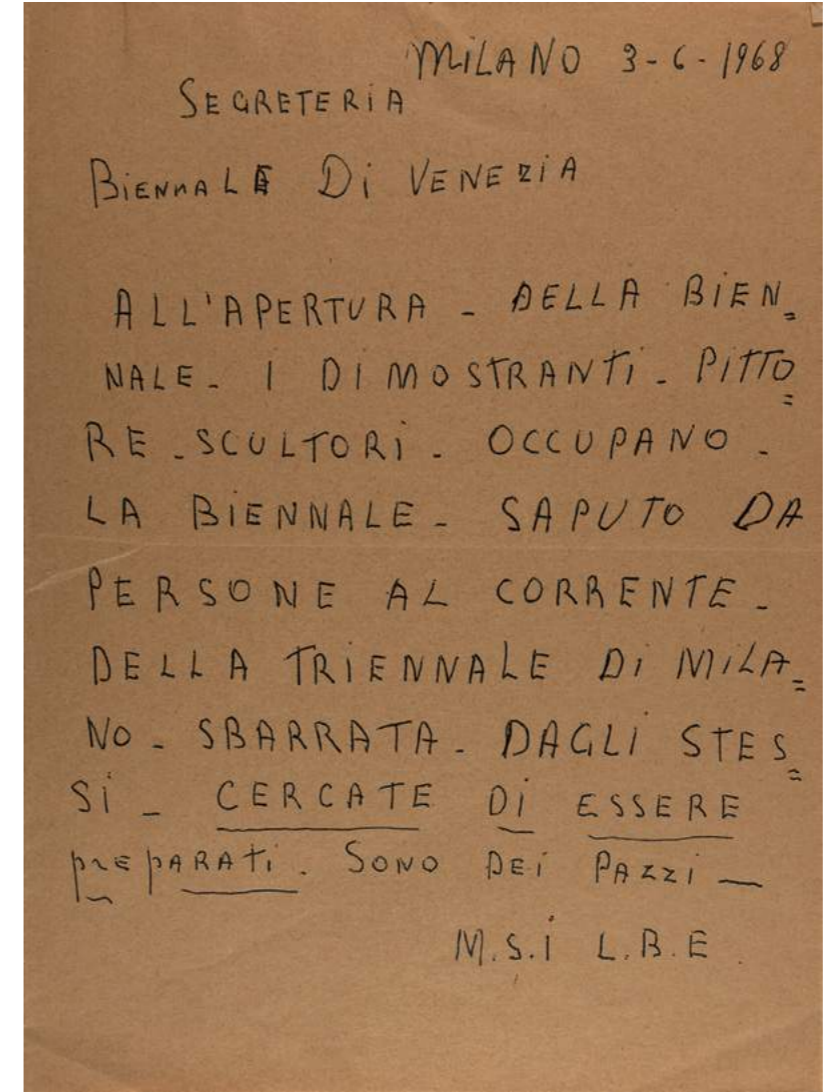


FIG. 04 – Biennale in crisi, Corriere della Sera, 21 giugno/June 1968, Dino Buzzati

FIG. 05 – Lettera alla Biennale di Venezia, 3 giugno 1968 • Letter to La Biennale di Venezia, 3 June 1968