## LEO XU PROJECTS

Artfetch, Venetian Explorer, Text / A.J. Samuels, June 12, 2013



# /ENETIAN EXPLORER

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While Tino Seghal picked up the Golden Lion for best artist in the International Exhibition, it was Angola, participating for the first time, who won Best National Participation, with their showing of Edson Chagas. So what does that say about cultural hegemonies? A. J. Samuels picks her Top 5 Pavilions from the Un-West.

Venice itself is this remarkable museum, a city stuck in a time warp, where history laps against crumbling buildings. [Note: there's something about the city that brings out the lyrical in a person.] It seems to mark a turning point in the lineage of the West, at least to my possibly historically inaccurate imagination, where visions of the Renaissance also trudge down narrow passages, lantern in hand. That two hundred year period leading up to the so-called Enlightenment established Western Culture, art, music and humanism, as we know them today. But this year, it was the non-Western pavilions at the Biennale that struck me more: the work there seemed to make deeper connections, recognizing cultural imperialism (like the city itself), yet turning away from it in parts and surprises.





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Here are my top 5.

<u>Lithuania</u>: secured a high school gymnasium for their showcase of nine artists, including Dexter Sinister, Elena Narbutaite and Kazys Varnelis. They used the whole building, including the stadium and basketball court, for strange sculptural interventions. Domestic objects like commodes and chandeliers are inserted into surprising places, at the top of the bleachers, behind the staircase, beside the scoreboard... Loved it.

<u>Hungary</u>: in the Giardini shows a more sober collection of unexploded bombs in *Fired but unexploded*, by Zsolt Asztalos. Each is filmed with slight camera adjustments, twitchy, indicating the still live potential of these bombs. Attached to the dated TV monitors on shipping crates are headphones playing well-recorded ambient sounds — suggestive of what might exists today in the location where each bomb was found.

<u>Azerbaijan</u>: presents a group show, in which not all the work by the six artists hit the mark. However two installations were quite startling: the entry way presents the most interesting version of this year's common Venice trope: Farid Rasulov's take on wallpapering the allocated building (to cover over intrusive architecture). Meanwhile, Rashad Alakbarov's set of optical sculptures transformed twisted (war torn) metal into traditional Azerbaijani motifs.

Estonia: Dénes Farkas' Evident in advance—requires you to climb a steep staircase into an internal architectural space that houses a floor to ceiling library of books. While each is the same in content, each book is titled differently—with one word. Concrete poetry here turns to architecture, turns to infinite relations and reminds me of Kafka.

<u>Lebanon</u>: in a country still unsure of its own history, as it emerges from civil war, the future is up for grabs. This installation, *Letter to a refusing pilot*, by Akram Zaatari, pulls apart the cinema as space, and documentary as historical mode. This poetic comment on history as subjective, as a constellation, as fantasy; somehow, shook up the way I experienced the rest of Venice, changing my vision from a sense of the static, entrenched, to something slightly freer, as a malleable, multivalent city.

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Gabriel Lester, Cousins, 2013. Lithuanian Pavilion (photo by Robertas Narkus)

Farid Rasulov, Carpet Interior, 2013. Azerbaijan Pavilion

Phanos Kyriacou, *Nine Ghosts*, 2013. Lithuanian Pavilion (photo by Robertas Narkus)