

this is tomorrow, Venice Biennale 2013: oO, Text / Francesca Cavi, June 5, 2013

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Contemporary Art Magazine

Pavilions of Cyprus and Lithuania, Venice, Italy, 5 Jun 2013

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oO

Pavilions of Cyprus and Lithuania

Curated by Raimundas Malasauskas

1 June – 24 November 2013

Review by Francesca Cavallo

Just outside the Arsenale in Venice is the Palasport "Giobatta Gianquinto", a modernist 1970s piece of concrete architecture built to host any sort of sports activity. It is the 31st of May and the air is full of euphoria, just as it is before a sports competition. The smell as well, I can recognise: it reminds me of the gymnasiums where I, like many other Italians of my generation, have practiced athletics, volleyball or basketball, the openness of the space and the high ceiling contained only by concrete walls and surmounted by circular neon lights.

It is the opening day of oO, the joint Pavilion of Lithuania and Cyprus at the 55th Venice Biennale. In the words of curator Raimundas Malasauskas, oO or Oo is a concept "entailed by organizational surfing, drawing on interest in forms of organization rather than organization of forms". Spread across the floors of the *palazetto*, the show seems to be designed along the lines of a treasure hunt, inviting the visitor to freely walk around the space.

LEO XU PROJECTS

So the exhibition unfolds with improbable locations and artworks: a vacuum cleaner robot wanders around (a reprogrammed iRobot Roomba) and modernist versions of Honda Chaly and Suzuki Landie motorcycles are stacked against the walls. Allegedly designed for Cyprus' use by Le Corbusier and Mies Van Der Rohe after a trip to Nicosia (Constantinos Taliotis, Cyprus 1983) these sculptures have mimetic qualities and like chameleons morph with the concrete walls. Similarly, black and white images of gymnasts integrate themselves perfectly into the space: Algirdas Seskus (Lithuania, 1945), a well known Lithuanian photographer, took them while he was working as a cameramen for soviet TV, but they could be easily be seen as the documentation of past events at the Venetian sports hall.

There are also several choreographic works: on the lower floor Lia Haraki (Cyprus 1975) is engaged in frantic, repetitive movements in acceleration. Pushing herself to the limits of endurance she negotiates her own impulse to movement with a sort of primordial, impersonal pulsation and disembodiment. On another floor, between two flights of stairs, a group of little girls rehearses for some sort of presentation; the light in the back magnifies their movements in a delicate dance of shadows. Is this an artwork? I wonder, but I can't find it on the map.

The truth is that the organisers have negotiated an unprecedented cohabitation not just of the two pavilions but of the activities within the *palazzetto*, that will continue throughout the summer. So it is agreed: volleyball, basketball as well as calisthenics performances will bring the art to the community on a note that is finally non-rhetorical but based on coexistence and mutual overlapping.

The view from the top of the sports arena encapsulates this odd combination and explodes in all its playfulness: from a podium a number of speakers and performers entertain the crowd, the scoreboard moving like a graphic equaliser (Dexter Sinister, USA 1971, UK 1973). On the ground of the big arena is 'Cousins' (Gabriel Lester, Netherlands 1972), an installation made of walls coming from fourteen European museums forming choreographic partitions for the interaction of visitors and performers alike: later in June it will be the stage for a calisthenics festival involving 120 girls aged 4-10.

The international commission of the Venice Biennale has conferred a special mention to Lithuania and Cyprus for "an original curatorial format that brings together two countries in a singular experience". Oo is a show that, in line with the current trend of this biennale, resists national borders, but it does so in a very concrete way: by co-working, co-commissioning, co-producing an event that may not have been thought possible in uncertain economic climates. It is an exercise in collaboration, which toys with borders of nations and disciplines: if it challenges the visitor who tries to make sense of it, to categorise, it also suggests new and possible forms of organisation.

Mr Malasauskas, who is the former curator at CAC Vilnius and was part of the last dOCUMENTA research team, has put together a rather interesting format where art and sport can mirror each other's sacrifices and successes, producing endless possibilities.