



## **A Daring Dialogue Between The Present And The Past.**

### **Does It Work?**

A Qualitative Case-Study on the Venetian Art Scene

**Erasmus University Rotterdam**

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Submitted by Isabella Primicerio (478974)

Supervisor: Dr. Anna Mignosa

Second reader: Dr. Trilce Navarrete Hernandez

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis relates to the literature on museums and biennials, two cultural organizations which are scarcely juxtaposed in the existing debate on the subject of cultural events and cultural clusters. This study introduces one specific case and aims to present the art scene that revolves around the International Art Exhibition (the Venice Biennale) and, specifically, the 'old art' museums' programming. This begs the question: 'To what extent does the Venice Biennale affect the number of visitors to old art museums?'. We pose this question for a twofold reason: Venice is considered an 'open-air museum' because of its heritage and its *forma urbis* but it is also the place where the oldest Biennale in the world takes place. Moreover, in the last few decades, many old art museums have introduced contemporary art exhibitions in their programming in occasion of the Venice Biennale. Thus, we suggest that these special exhibitions are organized in order to achieve an increase in visitor numbers, leveraging the attractiveness of the temporary show. In order to analyze this phenomenon, we have chosen a qualitative study and we have conducted sixteen interviews with some of the main actors of the art scene in Venice. Our results show that the International Art Exhibition does not affect the visitor numbers; however, it has a great impact on the *quality* of them.

**Keywords:** the Venice Biennale; Contemporary and Old Art; Cultural Tourism; Audience Development; Museum Programming

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## 1. Introduction

*Francesco Sansovino sceglie una strada curiosamente erudita, quella dell'etimologia per spiegare il nome della città. secondo lui, nel nome di Venezia si nascondono le parole latine VENI ETIAM, 'vieni ancora'. Un invito per tutti: torna a Venezia e troverai sempre nuove bellezze, splendori mai visti, capolavori nascosti e monumenti gloriosi. L'etimologia è pura fantasia, ma il senso è corretto: la Serenissima ci aspetta sempre, con il grembo colmo di tesori da distribuire, offrendoci in dono inesauribili emozioni per gli occhi e sobbalzi del cuore.*

Capitali dell'arte: Venezia, 1999, Prefazione  
Stefano Zuffi

Italian cultural heritage has always been representative of the country's cultural identity. Cultural heritage is a treasure, from both economic and ideological points of view. Every historical period is characterised by a continuity between the past and the present which inevitably provides added values to the society (minimia&moralia, 2013). Cultural goods and, therefore, cultural institutions, are conveyors of social and economic values that characterize specific times and that enter in dialogue with the previous ones (minimia&moralia, 2013).

This study looks at one specific case, the International Art Exhibition (Biennale Arte) and its relationships with the museums present in the lagoon city. This research stems from the belief that Venice is not only the place where the first biennial in the world was born in 1885 and 'the art show on which all other biennales are based' but also one of the most unique Italian art cities for its *forma urbis*, lagoon environment, art collections and heritage (F. R., 2017). Therefore, it is a city where past cultural heritage and contemporary art have coexisted for a long time. This begs the question whether or not one overcomes the other, and the extent to which they dialogue.

At first glance, Venice, with its historical buildings, churches and quayside streets, the Grand Canal and St. Mark's Square, is an enchanting sight and 'when someone is against something new in Venice it is immediately justified with the bugbear of the city's fragility (Bernardi, Forza, and Rumiati, 2014). But, we do not have to forget that 'the contemporary is a challenge that the city knows well and *its* Biennale's history proves it.' (The Municipality Elderman for Culture, Paola Mar, in Giacomelli, 2016).

In light of these considerations, the daring dialogue between the past and the present is the peculiarity of the lagoon city. In this thesis, therefore, 'old art' museums in Venice, which

preserve art collections that date back to different historical periods, the Byzantine age, the Gothic age, the Renaissance, the Baroque, and the Neoclassicism up until modern times, are approached to serve as case studies for the research's main objective (Pignatti, 1993). At this point, first of all, it is important to clarify what we consider 'old art' and 'contemporary art'. 'Contemporary art' refers to art produced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century or in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but, strictly speaking, it refers to the art produced by living artists (The J. Paul Getty Museum, 'About Contemporary art'). With 'old art' we refer to all the artistic expressions which were produced before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the last few decades, during the International Art Exhibition, the Municipal museums, as well as the private and national old art museums in Venice have set up temporary contemporary art exhibitions which dialogue with their rich collections. This trend shows the importance that a temporary event such as the Biennale has in the host city and the willingness of the cultural institutions to take part in the temporary cultural fervour.

However, the journalist Enrico Tantucci, in his incisive investigation on the Venetian art scene's condition, considers that the role of the Biennale in Venice has undergone a drastic change from 'Biennale *in* Venice' to 'Biennale *of* Venice' (Tantucci, 2011). The Venice Biennale, founded by Mayor Riccardo Selvatico in 1895, was an institution *located in* Venice but still something 'foreign' and disconnected from all the art production centres of Venice; whereas, nowadays, it is seen by many as the only active and dynamic art production centre of Venice which indirectly pushes the Venetian art scene to compete with international standards and expectations (Tantucci, 2011). In the same direction are the words of the President of the Biennale, Paolo Baratta:

Se Venezia si limita a sfruttare la rendita di posizione si condanna alla mediocrità. Serve uno sforzo innovativo che deve riguardare tutta la città e i suoi settori [...]. Il modello che la sua Fondazione [La Biennale] propone sembra l'unico mirato a spostare il baricentro di Venezia da vetrina a fucina della cultura, pur senza rinunciare alle sue capacità di attrazione (Tantucci, 2011)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Translation:* If Venice limits itself to leverage its actual position, it condemns itself to mediocrity. An innovative effort that has to involve the whole city and its sectors is needed [...]. The model that the Foundation [La Biennale] proposes seems to be the only one with the aim to move the focal point of Venice from showcase to forge of culture, without renouncing to its capacity to attract.



We argue that, instead, what is happening in the private and public museums of Venice seems to contradict this statement: not only the Biennale but also museums make Venice a centre of cultural exchange and production, offering new narratives to their habitual visitors, opening their doors to contemporary art lovers who are not familiar with old art and, last but not most important, educating their public to recognise the continuous dialogue between the present and the past, that is part of the DNA of the city. This kind of temporary exhibitions, thus, reveals how a city, which could free-ride on its stunning artistic past and its unique nature, is able to look forward and continue to be a centre of international cultural production. Our hypothesis, thus, is that the old art museums leveraging the moment are able to increase their audience and to attract part of the visitors of the International Art Exhibition; therefore, our research question is:

*To what extent does the Venice Biennale affect the number of visitors to the old art museums?*

The structure of this study is as follows. First, in Chapter 2. relevant streams of literature are critically reviewed in order to provide a theoretical framework to the analysis. Secondly, in Chapter 3. the research design of the thesis and the methodology used are presented. Third, Chapter 4. discusses the main findings derived from the theoretical framework. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the main highlights and related final considerations.

### 1.1. Motivation

Prior to this research, I realised that the conflict between different art forms and different historical periods is extremely evident, especially in the visual art world. When I consider my close acquaintances from my bachelor course, which mainly are people who studied Arts Management or History of Art at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, I noticed that all of us, myself included, saw art from only one perspective. We divided it into different historical periods, without considering the universal value that art has. Art is, in fact, able to overcome the strict frameworks we use to look at it (art form, technique, period, etc.).

A demonstration of this is given by the old art museums' programming in Venice during the International Art Exhibition, which proposes contemporary art exhibition in old

contexts. This year, for example, I went to the site-specific exhibition *Velme* of the Italian artist Marzia Migliora, at Ca' Rezzonico, the museum of 18<sup>th</sup> century Venice, which is part of the program *Muve Contemporaneo* of the Municipal museums of Venice. As stated in the press release of the exhibition, Marzia Migliora aimed at the same time to create a dialogue and show conflicts between the museum's collection and her own artworks. In order to do this, she selected interesting elements of the masterpieces of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, presenting them in her works under a new light. Doing so, she gave them 'back to us and to our age' (Press release, *Velme* – Marzia Migliora). Cornerstone of her research was the book *Se Venezia muore* by Salvatore Settis:

It is the urgent requirements of the present that drive us to review the events of the past not as a mere accumulation of erudite data, not as a dusty archive, but as the living and critical memory of human communities (Settis, 2014, p. 141).

This exhibition made me think about the potential and the strength that art has. I had never visited Ca' Rezzonico before and, what is more, I would never have expected to visit it for a contemporary art exhibition. This intriguing exhibition allowed me to start appreciating the historical building and getting to know some of the masterpieces of its collection, such as the painting *Il Rinoceronte* (The Rhinoceros) by Pietro Longhi and the fresco *Il mondo nuovo* (The New World) by Gian Battista Tiepolo. These considerations pushed me to examine in depth this phenomenon, enlarging it to the entire lagoon city, so rich of history but also the scene of the contemporary art event *par excellence*. Setting up contemporary art exhibitions, are old art museums actually able to reach a broader audience? Does the Venice Biennale actually have an impact on the Venetian art scene and the visitor numbers of the local museums?

## **2. Building a Theoretical Framework**

This chapter attempts to pull together a rather scattered literature on biennials and museums, two cultural organizations which have scarcely been analyzed together in the existing literature, and their relationships with the host city. First, Chapter 2.1. deals with ‘mass-’ and ‘cultural tourism’: given the focus of our thesis being Venice, we believe necessary mentioning tourism, as the case we are analysing is a very specific example of a destination which attracts ‘cultural tourism’ but is paradoxically also affected by ‘mass tourism’. In Chapter 2.2., cultural events, and, specifically, biennials are presented. Finally, in Chapter 2.3., the current challenges museums are facing and their strategies to cope with them are briefly illustrated. All these are related topics whose theoretical background is needed to proceed with the case-study analysis.

### **2.1. Cultural Tourism and Art Cities**

The relationship between tourism and art cities is highly sensitive. The spread of tourism as a leisure activity dates back to the mid-1970s, when it started to become wide-spread, due to overall higher salaries, increase in leisure time, and improvement of transport services (Richards, 1996). Tourism has become a pivotal economic asset for the development of a city. In our modern society, thus, tourism is one of the greatest conveyors of economic and cultural values but, at the same time, it is often becoming a disruptive element damaging our cultural heritage due to its external costs (Ortalli, 2007; Towse, 2010). At worst, tourism damages the city to the point that it repels other sorts of activities and creates imbalances and daily difficulties for the inhabitants; it pollutes the streets and leads to an increase in the prices of movable and immovable assets (Ortalli, 2007; Towse, 2010). Congestion from tourism might be another tragically negative consequence, which, in some cases, forces residents to move out to other areas to live (Towse, 2010; Russo, 2000). Part of these costs, therefore, should be charged to tourists themselves, paying tourist taxes or as a charge on travel facilities (Towse, 2010). An example is the case of Venice, where tourists pay a higher price for travelling by public transports (the ‘vaporetti’) than residents. To summarise, in many cases, tourism has short-term positive effects on the market but, most of all, long-term social costs.

Tourism may be even more disruptive when occurring in art cities, which require special care and which, often, may present unique structural peculiarities. Culture is

increasingly becoming an important asset used in local development ‘cultural-driven’ strategies in order to create added economic value (Sacco et al., 2007). At this point, we consider it necessary to highlight what a city (whether it is an art city or not) is made of: cities are not just physical spaces nor tourist attractions; as Ortalli (2007) argues in his work, cities are, first of all, ‘living cities’, formed by the citizens living in it. What the author expresses is that, unfortunately, even if tourism will overcome other forms of service addressed to the citizens, the ‘stone city’ will not die: the ‘living city’ will (Ortalli, 2007, p. 5).

Chi sa se un giorno vi capiterà di vedere della gente in una gabbia in Piazza San Marco con un cartello che dice *veneziani originali*. E potrebbe accadere, allora, che un turista passi al residente qualche avanzo del sacchetto/pasto fornitogli insieme al suo biglietto d’ingresso al museo vivente (Marvin and Davis, 2004, p. 299).<sup>2</sup>

With this quotation, we want to highlight the imminent need to take sustainability into account more. We need to consider social and cultural values. If we consider them, we will realize that tourism is extremely expensive, in term of social and cultural costs. But, as Marvin and Davis titled the afterword of their book, *Chi ciapa schei xe contento*, in today’s society, who earns money is happy (Marvin and Daris, 2004, p. 299). Focusing more specifically on art cities, it is interesting to mention what Losavio (2007) highlights: it emerges that art cities are labelled as ‘tourist places’ in the Italian law (D. Lgs. 1998 no. 114), even if marginally. Business owners are even allowed to extend their weekly opening hours and shops can be open 7/7: art cities are like ‘widespread shopping malls’ (Losavio, 2007, p. 9). There are many cases which we could bring as examples: but as Venice is the focus of this thesis, we make particular reference to it.

### 2.1.1. The Case of Venice

Venice is possibly the most famous touristic city in the world and, paradoxally, this has led its historical centre to become a ‘problem area’ (Russo, 2000, p. 9). In Venice there are over

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<sup>2</sup> *Translation:* Who knows whether one day you will see people put in a cage in St. Mark’s Square with a cardboard sign: ‘Original Venetians’. It could happen, then, that a tourist gives to the caged inhabitant some food, which was given to the tourist together with the ticket to the living museum.

thirty million tourists<sup>3</sup> every year, despite its total load capacity of a maximum of thirteen million tourist (Report, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2018); the average stay is lower than 2,26 days (City of Venice, Tourism Yearbook 2015; Russo, 2000).

Moreover, as Marvin and Davis highlight: the lagoon city ‘contains the totality of that Venice which is present in tourists’ imaginary’ (Marvin and Davis, 2007, p. 15). Therefore, tourists wander around the lagoon city, an art city which does not have ‘neutral spaces’ and where the discovery of every single corner is relevant for a real ‘cultural experience’ (Marvin and Davis, 2007, p. 16). Other cities usually have the ‘behind the scenes’, which allows citizens to get separated from tourists. This is not the case of Venice, where tourists inevitably bump into citizens, as the Venetian writer Tiziano Scarpa (2018) argues:

È vero. Noi veneziani non abbiamo scappatoie sotterranee. Siamo senza inconscio. Venezia è costruita tutta in superficie, è appoggiata sul fango, i suoi abitanti sono le persone più superficiali del mondo: non vuol dire che siano frivoli, ma sono costretti a fare i conti con la realtà esteriore, senza nicchie dove rintanarsi a preservare la loro identità. Le altre città hanno metropolitane, cantine, catacombe, bunker. Qui non ci sono rifugi antituristi per proteggersi dai bombardamenti aerei di comitive low cost. E nemmeno quartieri di decompressione intorno al centro, come a Firenze o a Roma. Venezia è un centro storico ritagliato con le forbici e piazzato in mezzo all’acqua. Non c’è scampo. Trenta milioni di turisti all’anno, in una post-città in cui tutto è sempre di più in funzione loro. Gli abitanti sono sempre di meno. Oggi siamo cinquantatremila (Scarpa, 2018)<sup>4</sup>.

As Marvin and Davis (2007) noticed in their research, many Venetians felt driven away from the public spaces of Venice, whose the prime example is St. Mark’s Square, and often are forced to move out to other areas to live. Nowadays, the visitor to resident ratio, now reaching

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<sup>3</sup> Among the thirty million tourist that Venice counts every year there are high-budget tourists, counting only for the 35% of stays, and day trippers, whose category is formed of ‘false’ day trippers (‘indirect’ excursionists) and ‘real’ day trippers. The former consists of visitors who stay in Venice’s outskirts due to the higher prices of the historical centre (Russo, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> *Translation:* It is true. We, Venetians, do not have underground ways out. We are without subconscious. Venice is all built on surface, it leans against mud, its inhabitants are the most superficial people in the world: it does not mean that they are frivolous, but they are forced to face the reality, without any place to hide themselves to preserve their identity. Other cities have tubes, basements, catacombs, and bunkers. Here, in Venice, there are no refuges against tourism. It is impossible to protect themselves from tourists arriving in Venice with low cost flights. In Venice there are no places where we can go, like in Florence or Rome. Venice is an historical centre cut with scissors and put in the middle of water. There is no escape. Thirty million tourists a year, in a ‘post-city’ where everything is increasingly addressed to them. Inhabitants are always fewer. Today, we are 53,000.

73 to 1 in the historical centre, makes clear that Venice lives off tourism (Report, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2018). Therefore, it is clear that Venice is suffering from one-dimensional mono-culture, which has led to ‘mass tourism’, that is described as ‘the epitome of aggressively large-scale sold standardized packages’ (Dehoorne and Theng, 2015). This disruptive form of tourism in Venice is also due to the physical dimensions of the city: indeed, ‘dangers seem to be inversely proportional to the actual dimension of the art city’ (Ortalli, 2007, p. 4).

Moreover, at a first glance, someone could argue that tourists in Venice visit the city because of its heritage and the stunning art works conserved in its countless museums (*Table 1*) and that, therefore, they are ‘cultural tourists’.

*Table 1: Museums Overview in Venice.*

<b>Municipal Museums</b>	Doge’s Palace
	Museo Correr
	Ca’ Rezzonico
	Ca’ Pesaro
	Glass Museum
	Natural History Museum
	Mocenigo Palace
	Fortuny Palace
	Lace Museum
	Carlo Goldoni’s house
	Clock Tower
<b>State Museums</b>	Gallerie dell’Accademia
	Galleria Franchetti Alla Ca d’Oro
	Palazzo Grimani
	Museo Archeologico
	Museo d’Arte Orientale
<b>Private Museums</b>	Peggy Guggenheim Foundation
	Querini Stampalia Foundation

	Palazzo Cini
	Pinault Foundation
	Torcello island (Provincial Museum)
	Naval Museum
	Other museums
<b>Ecclesiastical museums</b>	St. Mark museum
	Diocesan museum
	Chorus-circuit churches <sup>5</sup>
	Other free admission and ticket admission churches

*Source: Own Elaboration.*

It is common knowledge, indeed, that one of the biggest ‘problems’ of Venice is its heritage (Marvin and Davis, 2007). There is an infinite amount of art and culture, conserved in Venetian museums, galleries, and churches and, because of this, Venice might be considered as a ‘cultural cluster’<sup>6</sup> (Sacco et al., 2007; Towse, 2010). Moreover, the city hosts the Venice Biennale, the oldest biennial in the art world, which can attract more than half million visitors per year. In addition to that, Venice itself is considered by many people as a ‘global artwork’: there are no places which are insignificant and wandering around is presented by tourist agents as the best way to fully experience Venice (Sasso et al., 2007, p. 15). As Angela Vettese (2017) writes in her book ‘Venezia Viva’, visitors should not follow the touristic tracks but get lost: Venice is one of the best place to let your senses go. It is small, you will find it again’ (Vettese, 2017, p. 10).

<sup>5</sup> *Chorus* is a cultural association which aims to contribute to the conserving, restoring and valorising of the architectural and artistic heritage of the churches in Venice. Chorus manages eighteen churches: Santa Maria del Giglio, Santa Maria Formosa, Santa Maria dei Miracoli, San Giovanni Elemosinario, San Polo, San Giacomo dell’Orto, San Stae, Sant’ Alvise, Madonna dell’Orto, San Pietro, SS Redentore, Gesuati, San Sebastiano, San Giobbe, San Giuseppe di Castello, San Vidal, San Giacomo di Rialto. For more information, see: <https://www.chorusvenezia.org/en>.

<sup>6</sup> The concept ‘cultural cluster’ derives from the concept of industrial clusters (Silicon Valley is the prime example). In Cultural Economics, this term refers to creative enterprises which locate close to each other in order to benefit from networking and external economies (Towse, 2010).

Are, thus, all visitors to Venice cultural tourists? How many of them are willing to pay to visit a cultural attraction in Venice? These questions were posed by Di Maria (2004) in his work: he found out that only 3% of the total budget for the trip is spent on cultural activities (Di Maria, 2004). From an economic point of view, instead, we would expect that cultural tourists' willingness to pay for cultural experiences would be higher than that of ordinary tourists. The 3% of spending for culture seems to contradict this assumption (Towse, 2010). Therefore, we can deduce that 'this cultural tourism is still mass tourism, after all' (Marvin and Davis, 2007, p. 19).

Things need to be changed and one way is to intervene in the psychology of tourists. Before doing so, however, it is fundamental to take into account the 'socio-economic carrying capacity'<sup>7</sup> of Venice and understanding how citizens and tourists use the space and what their needs are to intervene, bearing in mind fundamental sustainable principles (Marvin and Davis, 2007; Russo, 2000). To conclude, a mass-market oriented demand needs to be partly replaced by a demand truly interested in a cultured and deep visit of the lagoon city. As it is right now, tourism is a source of net income which Venice lives off but its result is a progressive degeneration of the heritage and the 'living city', whose use is mainly addressed to the touristic market (Sacco et al., 2007; Towse, 2010). Museums, cultural events, and other cultural organizations could be a great mean in order to enhance tourism in Venice: literature on cultural tourism, indeed, highlights a link existing between cultural activities, the attractiveness of a destination, and the length of a trip (Russo, 2000; Richards, 1996). Visitors need to be informed and motivated to combine city visits with visits to museums and other cultural institutions. In Venice this is possible also thanks to the vast Venetian cultural supply which truly could satisfy the demand of a broad audience (Russo, 2000). As Russo (2000) suggests with his research on the case of Venice: cultural resources need to work as a true 'system' (Russo, 2000, p. 13).

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<sup>7</sup> The so-called 'Tourism Carrying Capacity' is defined by the World Tourism Organisation as 'the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction' (UNWTO, 1981).



## 2.2. Cultural Events – Art biennials

UNESCO defines cultural industries as those goods and services that ‘combine creation, production and commercialization of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature.’ (UNESCO, n.d.). The term ‘cultural industries’ was coined in 1947 by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, in the work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The authors argued that cultural products are tailored for consumption by masses and that they are, therefore, manufactured according to plan and produced in a similar way to any other consumer goods (Adorno, 1991: 85); hence, the term ‘industry’. In the mid-1990s, the term ‘cultural industry’ was joined by the broader notion of ‘creative industries’: industries where creativity is an input, no matter whether the output is cultural (Smith, 2015). Although the two terms are distinct, they are often used interchangeably. In the present paper, we refer to the term ‘cultural industries’, as we mainly deal with museums and the art sector.

Some of the ways cultural industries have reached the masses are fairs, festivals, and biennials, which have become important global centres of art production but, most of all, of ‘knowledge production’, increasingly engaging in extra-visual dialogues within the community (Kompatsiaris, 2014). With a particular reference to biennials, the term ‘biennial’ is derived from Latin and designates a period of two years. Nowadays, due to the prestige of the first Venice Biennale (1895), the term ‘biennial’ is used interchangeably with the Italian ‘biennale’ and specifically refers to large-scale, high-budget exhibitions of contemporary art (Vogel, 2010; Tang, 2007). Only in the mid-‘90s, other biennials started to be founded. In 1951, for the first time, the original model of the Venice Biennale was adopted at the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil. Since the 1990s, there has been a boom and, in our modern society, it is quite impossible to count all the biennials and similar events worldwide (Vogel, 2010; Bonami and Esche, 2005). Bonami and Esche (2005) compare the contemporary art world, including biennials, fairs and auctions, to a profiterole, which is made from a number of small éclairs filled with vanilla and which ‘can be as big as King Arthur’s Round Table or as small as a bowl, depending on the number of people who are going to eat it’: the same goes for cultural events, which started out small and are expanding to fill demand. Moreover, nowadays, it is literally impossible going to every biennials and art fairs because of the sheer amount of time and money it would take (Bonami and Esche, 2005).

In a speech he gave on April 6, 1894 to announce the foundation of the Venice Biennale, the Mayor Riccardo Selvatico stated:

The City Council of Venice has taken on the initiative [of the Exhibition], since it is convinced that art as one of the most valuable elements of civilization offers both an unbiased development of the intellect and the fraternal association of *all* peoples' (Vogel, 2010, p. 14).

These are the words that mark the beginning of the history of biennials. 'An unbiased development of the intellect and the fraternal association of all peoples', two basic principles of European Enlightenment, are presented as closely linked in these exhibitions (Vogel, 2010). Despite these main aims, biennials can hardly be defined as a homogeneous phenomenon as they can vary in themes, aims, politics, and other sorts of context (Kompatsiaris, 2014). However, what today basically marks the 'event-like' structure of biennials is that they are not commercial platforms and they are financed by public or private sources – despite the fact that until 1968 the Venice Biennale was also an exchange occasion<sup>8</sup> (Tang, 2007; Kompatsiaris, 2014). It entails that they are places where experimentation and risk-taking is much more present and appreciated rather than in art fairs, which can be considered as the commercial format of recurrent art exhibitions depending on art investors. Biennials, therefore, become a proper 'hub' where prominent trends within contemporary art are established, artistic movements are officially recognized, and emerging artists are launched (Kompatsiaris, 2014; Bonami and Esche, 2005; Bagdadli and Arrigoni, 2005). Therefore, biennials are 'cultural intermediaries', 'selectors' and 'tastemakers', which are positioned between the production and the consumption of goods and services (Lavanga, 2017). Through their mediation, cultural intermediaries contribute to value formation, presenting themselves as experts in a particular sector (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2014).

In addition, biennials are places where debates about contemporary issues, 'not only of the art world but also of behaviour and thought' take place every year (Vettese, 2017):

Fu qui [Biennale di Venezia] che, nel 1964, con l'incoronazione della Pop Art, vennero laureati al contempo sia il consumismo come stile di vita, sia la supremazia culturale americana. Fu qui

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<sup>8</sup> In 1968, students and intellectuals occupied the Giardini against Bourgeois. They used the slogans 'Biennale di capitalisti, bruceremo i vostri padiglioni!' ('Biennial of capitalists, we are gonna burn your pavilion!') and 'No alla Biennale dei potenti!' ('No to the Biennial of the rich and mighty!'). Therefore, the Venice Biennale took the decision to delete the sale offices (Gambillara, 2011).

che, nel 1980, si presentò chiaramente a mondo la voga di un pensiero postmoderno [...]. Fu qui che, nel 1993, si mise l'accento sull'aspetto relazionale, quindi di condivisione, che connota la cultura postcoloniale e globalizzata. Ed è qui che, negli anni Duemila, si sono visti esperimenti con nuove tecnologie [...]. (Vettese, 2017, p. 147)<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, what associates biennials with art fairs is that they normally are 'functionally unbounded', as they are a moment where visitors gather together for a variety of purposes, such as trading – even if biennials do not explicitly take on this role – and obtaining financial support, building networks or just expressing their own membership to a certain social group and getting to know new trends and investment opportunities in the contemporary art field (Velthuis, 2011; Moeran and Pedersen, 2011). These shows are also 'socially bounded' as they bring together a niche of wealthy art lovers, critics, curators, museum directors and gallerists and other participants that are involved in the production and distribution of art and culture, such as sponsors, journalists and retailers (Tang, 2007; Moeran and Pedersen, 2011). Therefore, it goes without saying that these platforms are proper 'contact zones' where communication is facilitated (Skov, 2006). Moreover, despite this limited circus of people considering themselves the art world being the key actors, also locals and other people less informed about the art world are increasingly taking part into these art events (Bonami and Esche, 2006). In addition, biennials generally are 'spatially and temporary bounded' as multiple actors meet together in a specific location for a specific time span (Moeran and Pedersen, 2011). To this regard, there are a few exceptions, such as *Manifesta* which takes place in a different European city every two years<sup>10</sup>.

Whatever form they take, biennials are often considered to be a well-recognised 'brand' which gives added value to the works of art that are exhibited there (Sassatelli, 2017; Kompatsiaris, 2014). Furthermore, they contribute to the improvement of the host city where collectors, sponsors and firms are indirectly encouraged to invest and the local art scene gets to be a part of the global art circuit (Kompatsiaris, 2014). Thus, they provide the city with a specific image and cultural identity (Towse, 2010). In addition, not only local actors but also many foreign organizations co-locate in the host city and, therefore, contribute to form

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<sup>9</sup> *Translation:* It is here that in 1964 consumerism as lifestyle and the American supremacy emerged. It is here that in 1980 a post-modern thought emerged [...]. It is here that the postcolonial practice of sharing and relating took form. And it is here that we tested new technologies and art practices.

<sup>10</sup> Last years, *Manifesta* took place in Rotterdam, Luxembourg, Ljubljana, Frankfurt, San Sebastian, Trentino-South Tyrol, and Murcia). This year it will be hosted in Palermo, Sicily (Kompatsiaris, 2014; Moeran and Pedersen, 2011).

temporary spatial clusters, where external economic benefits, ‘knowledge inputs and growth impulses’ are shared (Maskell, Bathelt, and Malmberg, 2006; Towse, 2010). Cultural events, then, may also attract non-cultural businesses (Towse, 2010). To this regard, we must not forget that these temporary clusters have a great potential also within a broader economic discourse. A typical spillover effect is the improvement of the city as a tourist attraction, as ‘the more successful the festival becomes the more firmly it is expected to improve touristic flows’ (Kompatsiaris, 2014, p. 78; Towse, 2010). Art festivals and other sorts of big events, indeed, are often means for urban regeneration and city marketing strategies, as the European City of Culture programme shows (Quinn, 2005). This is such an increasing phenomenon that in recent years researchers have started to use the term ‘festival tourism’ (Quinn, 2005).

However, tourists are only a part of the broad audience attending such exhibitions; residents, indeed, are another large group involved in biennials and they express the need for an equilibrium between commercial marketing, persuasive city branding and the stability of their daily life (Quinn, 2005).

### 2.3. Cultural Institutions: The Museum

Similarly to biennials, traditional cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres and libraries, are places where practices and habits result in the production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods and services (Baumol and Bowen, 1993). However, while biennials are characterized by a temporary ‘event-like’ structure, cultural institutions are often associated with an immutable physical location (Kompatsiaris, 2014). Therefore, they are part of a city and create enduring ties with its citizens (Kompatsiaris, 2014). As such, they are essential actors in the promotion of cultural understanding and intercultural dialogue across generations (UNESCO World Report, 2009). They incorporate ‘not only objects but, more importantly, the intellectual heritage, the history, values and traditions of society’ (Department of Finance – Australia, 1989, p. 24).

Museums are traditional art institutions, which, according to the Statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), adopted by the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (Vienna, Austria - August 24, 2007), are described as follows:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates

and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM, 2007, art. 3 para. 1)

Moreover, museums emphasise continuity by suggesting the requirements to preserve ‘what is valued from previous generations so that this may be inherited by the descendants of present members of society’ (Department of Finance – Australia, 1989, p. 24). The link between the present and the past and both the intellectual and tangible heritage are at the heart of museums’ actions and programming; this awareness is central to museums fulfilling their educational role in society with public programs, especially exhibitions. Museums thus may differ in the types of collections they hold but they do not differ in their principal aim: education (Seagram, Patten and Lockett, 1993). The central role of education has been clear since the beginning of the museum’s history, when, back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., the University of Alexandria, in Egypt opened the first well-known museum in the world (Arinze, 1999). As Arinze argues (1999), museums still have a primary role in modern society and they should be fully integrated in the education system as they possess the tools and stories that are needed to understand the collective heritage. He also adds that museums contribute to cultural diplomacy and understanding between nations, pivotal aspects in today’s society (Arinze, 1999). In addition, the literature on museums considers these cultural institutions ‘merit goods’, which give rise to diverse values, such as existence, option, bequest, and prestige values (Fernández-Blanco and Prieto-Rodríguez, 2011; Frey and Meier, 2006). Along with these externalities, museums may also function as local development factors and the prime example of this is the case of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Fernández-Blanco and Prieto-Rodríguez, 2011).

### 2.3.1. Today’s Museum Challenges

As explained above, originally, museums were places where works of art and objects of historical, scientific or cultural interest used to be stored and displayed. Nowadays, instead, museums are being asked ‘to communicate’ multiple narratives and experiences ‘for ever hungrier and more fickle leisure consumers’ (Burton and Scott, 2003, p. 60). Therefore, the preservation of single narratives is not enough anymore and museums are requested to change their status of ‘museum-monument’ (Cataldo and Paraventi, 2007), evolving into something ‘more responsive to the dynamics of modern society and urban change’ (Arinze, 1999).

What has been drastically changed from the past is their audience. Museums were elitist institutions and only educated people used to visit them; nowadays, museums aim for a collective involvement, getting the general public interested in issues which are strictly related to the past and the present (Arinze, 1999). This larger involvement of the public entails that museums have to satisfy a vast range of new needs and expectations, which are sensitive to an individual's preferences, her utility function, and budget, time or other kinds of constraints (Fernández-Blanco and Prieto-Rodríguez, 2011). This new demand for museums, in the 1970's led to an unprecedented museum 'boom' in the Western industrialized world to the point that museums have become a global concept and it is quite impossible to find a country which has no museums (Arinze, 1999). This boom, therefore, led to a saturation of the market and to a very high competition. Moreover, the presence of the so-called 'superstar museums' increases even more the challenges a smaller or lesser-known museum has to face. Superstars, like the Louvre Museum (Paris), the Hermitage (St. Petersburg), and Prado (Madrid), are such because either they can attract a large number of visitors or they own world-famous artists and artworks or even because of their stunning architectural design or their major impact on the local economy (Frey and Meier, 2006).

This phenomenon, however, goes beyond numbers: museums have become a symbol of quality and now occupy a high position in our society (Burton and Scott, 2003). Despite this enhancement in their social position, the array of alternative visitor attractions is increasing: cinemas, theatres, and shopping are just a few options available (Colbert, 2009). Unfortunately, we cannot consume all of them to the same extent because today's work patterns and socio-economic factors have drastically changed. We have a 'fast and fractured existence' and less free time than in the past; therefore, many attractions (within and outside the cultural sector) are competing for attention. In conclusion, we are forced to carefully select how to spend our time, 'from the serious to the superficial' daily actions (Burton and Scott, 2003, p. 59).

### 2.3.2. Today's Museum Strategies

All the challenges museums are facing lead them to innovate their offer and plan new strategies (Burton and Scott, 2003). First of all, understanding visitors is the key to ensuring the museum a sustainable long-term future (Elkasrawy, 2016). Market research is essential to effectively position the product: 'audiences have much to say that's valuable' ('Service to

People’, n.d.). Museums cannot only focus on their ‘content’ but they also need to engage visitors with narratives. Hence, museums should aim at ‘audience engagement’, taking into consideration that visitors are not uniform. Families, art lovers, students and insiders are not all the same and it means that museums should vary their offer according to the demand, which often varies throughout the year: art collectors are likely to gather in town during temporary art events, whereas students and families are more likely to visit museums during public holidays (Murphy, 2016). Despite ‘audience engagement’ being very important, museums always need to consider new possible strategies in order to gain new ‘audiences’ (the so-called ‘audience development’), such as making collaborations with other cultural institutions or artists, investing in staff and enhancing their own service (‘Service to People’, n.d.). Museum visitors are in fact only a relative small part of the entire population and, therefore, museums need to attract those part of the entire population who do not visit museums (Fernández-Blanco and Prieto-Rodríguez, 2011). Other strategies are possible thanks to the investment in digitization, which allows museums to offer a broader range of activities or innovate their usual ones, such as with the introduction of audio-guides, touch-screens, interactive whiteboards or 3D-technologies (Ridge and Birchall, 2015). Finally, a further strategy commonly taken into account by museums is the running of special events and exhibitions. Special events, such as art nights, evenings at the museum, and museum days with free-tickets, are among the most common strategies employed by the institution to attract visitors (Frey and Meier, 2006). Along with special events, special exhibitions are also seen as a successful means of attracting attention because of their newsworthiness, gaining a high demand from the general public, and guaranteeing a high-income effect as empirical evidence shows that consumers tend to spend an increasing amount of their income on visiting special exhibitions (Frey and Meier, 2006). Because of all these positive effects, special exhibitions are also a great feat in order to attract sponsors, publishers and advertisers (Frey and Meier, 2006).

To conclude, whatever strategy museums decide to take, they have to be careful to avoid entertainment overtaking education, their primary authentic role. As Smith (2015) critically argues, ‘it is certainly becoming difficult to distinguish between museums and other kinds of visitor or tourist attractions, especially given the advent of interactive technology and multimedia’ (Smith, 2015, p. 226). She adds that some scholars regard to museums as experience factories which are likely on the path of becoming future theme parks, focused mostly on entertainment, income generation and marketing (Smith, 2015). One of the prime

examples of this phenomenon is the ‘American Museum of Ice Cream’, an interactive museum with ice cream and candy themed shows. After its surprising success, many other so-called ‘Instagram-inspired food exhibits’ started to mushroom, such as the Pizza Museum and the ‘9 Cans of LaCroix’, labelled as ‘selfie factories’ (Pardes, 2017).



### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research Design

The overall aim of the present study is to answer the following research question:

*To what extent does the Venice Biennale affect the number of visitors to the old art museums?*

This subject is explored with the help of a qualitative research method and uses both primary and, to a minor extent, secondary data. Besides the analysis of the ‘Yearbooks of Tourism’ published by the Municipality of Venice and other published materials (e.g. press releases, magazines and websites), this thesis uses data collected from open interviews with professionals active in the Venice cultural scene, such as museum directors, curators, artists and politicians. The analysis of the interviews aims to give an overall picture of the Venetian art scene from the eyes of those who supply culture and art in Venice, highlighting the diverse perspectives and contradictions of the participants (Molteni and Troilo, 2003). We consider a qualitative research method the most suitable because it allows the identification and interpretation of the meanings that people create in a specific social and cultural process and in a physical context (Payne and Payne, 2004). Moreover, thanks to its flexibility, we were allowed to adjust the sampling and strategy throughout the study (Bryman, 2012).

The present work situates the case of the old art museums in Venice within the framework of cultural economics and it is informed by studies on biennials, studies on museums’ challenges and strategies, and information on the history of the Biennale and the museums in Venice. Only at a later stage, we decided to improve our theoretical framework, extending the scope of this thesis to include studies on tourism and its impact on the art city of Venice. We extended the literature review only after the analysis of the findings: we realized that an important part of the theoretical framework was missing for a understanding of our research. During the interviews, we realized how tourism has direct and indirect effects on the cultural scene of Venice. Aware of the phenomenon of mass tourism in Venice, our first belief was that it would not need to be included in our research, as it analyzes cultural institutions and the city as a cultural cluster. Throughout our research, however, we were convinced that tourism could not be excluded because of the aforementioned reasons. Thus,

we made use of an iterative process, as it often happens when dealing with qualitative data analysis (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009).

This thesis aims to situate itself within the existing literature and debates on these subjects. Indeed, what lacks understanding is the role of biennials as ‘cultural events’; many of the existing studies are focused on specific editions of biennials, therefore considering them as ‘art exhibitions’ (Sassatelli, 2017). The present work aims to present the art scene that revolves around the temporary show. Doing so, we try to highlight the impact that the Venice Biennale has as on the host city and its permanent cultural institutions. Furthermore, alongside this main theme, being Venice a worldwide known city not only because of the Biennale but, most of all, because of its stunning cultural and natural heritage, our focus on old art museums puts the present work into the current debate about the relationships between the present and the past.

## 3.2. Methodology

### 3.2.1. Data Collection

The research was undertaken between April and May 2018, when both primary and secondary data were collected. The interviews were supposed to be semi-structured but they ended up being open interviews because after a few interviews we preferred to give the respondents more freedom to talk. Nevertheless, some guide-lines were followed using open-ended questions. The questions we were interested in exploring were based on three main broad topics. The first part of the interviews dealt with the art scene in Venice, with particular reference to the role of the Biennale and its relationship with the local art scene. The second part was aimed at delineating the relationships between the Biennale and old art museums and the museums’ advantages to operate in this temporary dynamic environment. The final part recalled the second one, analysing the importance of a relationship between the present and the past in the art world (see *Table 2*). All the interviews were supposed to follow these three themed sections. Nevertheless, slight differences depending on the respondents’ working position and previous experiences occurred.

**Table 2: General Set-Up of the Interview Guide.**

<p><b>Block 1:</b> Art scene in Venice and the relationship between Biennale and the host city.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the prestige of Venice due to?</li> <li>• How does the Biennale fit within the local art scene?</li> <li>• How do the Biennale and the city dialogue?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Block 2:</b> Contemporary exhibitions in old art museums.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the role of a museum?</li> <li>• Why do old art museums organise contemporary art exhibitions during the Biennale? Since when?</li> <li>• What are the aims of these exhibitions?</li> <li>• According to you, what is the perception of visitors?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Block 3:</b> Dialogue between the present and the past in the art world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the relationship between contemporary art and old art?</li> <li>• Why are old art museums more visited than contemporary art museums (see ranking from <i>TheArtNewspaper</i> – <i>Figure 1</i>)?</li> </ul>

Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 1: The World's Most Popular Museums: Top 10.**



Source: theArtNewspaper.com.

A total of 16 open interviews were carried out, whereby 15 interviews took place Face-To-Face and one interview was conducted via Skype due to time and place constraints. The respondents were first contacted by e-mail and the initial sample included 20 interviewees. Therefore, the response rate was 80%. The interviews were conducted in Italian and lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. In two cases, two interviewees were met together: the Italian artist Elisabetta di Maggio and the curator of the Foundation Querini Stampalia, Chiara Bertola<sup>11</sup> and the Director of the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Paola Marini, and the curator of the museum, Michele Tavola.

Secondary data about private and public institutions in Venice were retrieved from the section 'Cultural numbers' of the annual 'Yearbooks of Tourism' from 2011 to 2016, produced by the Municipality of Venice and published on the Municipality's website (<https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/studi>). We chose to analyze these reports in order to get some quantitative data to compare with the results derived from the interviews. Additionally, the analysis of these figures was needed in preparation of our personal meetings with the Municipality Elderman for tourism, Paola Mar, and the Chair of the Culture Committee, Giorgia Pea, as we questioned them about museum attendance's numbers, tourists' number in Venice and whether specific trend are visible.

### 3.2.2. Data Sampling

The sample comprised 16 units, which was considered an optimal size allowing the development of a deep case-oriented analysis (Bryman 2012). In addition, the research categories were roughly established before the analysis (non-probability samples). The overall criteria for the selection of the starting sample were the respondent's involvement in contemporary art exhibitions in old art museums; their being directors, artists or curators; and their knowledge of the social and cultural context of Venice. Therefore, we contacted by e-mail many possible respondents who were thought to fit with the profile: first, we contacted most of the directors of the old art museums in Venice, considered as the key respondents for the present analysis; then, we wrote to the artists Elisabetta di Maggio and Maria Morganti, who are well-known artists in the Venetian art scene and were exhibited during the International Art Exhibition of 2017, and the artist Marzia Migliora, because after the visit of

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<sup>11</sup> They were working together for *Greetings from Venice*, a solo exhibition of Elisabetta di Maggio at Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice.

her solo show *Velme* at Ca' Rezzonico we got the inspiration for this thesis. In addition, on the advice of personal acquaintances, we contacted the contemporary artists Michelangelo Penso and Gaston Ramirez. Furthermore, we thought to include also politicians in order to provide a 360° analysis of the phenomenon. Initially, we believed worthwhile including the Municipality Elderman of Culture; when we found out that he is the Mayor Luigi Brugnaro, we opted for contacting the Chair of the Culture Committee, Giorgia Pea. Along with her, we contacted also the Municipality Elderman for Tourism, Paola Mar. Finally, only at a later stage, we managed to have an interview with the Director of La Biennale di Venezia, Andrea Del Mercato.

Interestingly, the initial sample was expanded through snowball sampling, as a few respondents suggested colleagues and acquaintances from their professional network. In conclusion, the research categories were formed of three groups of key informants representing a deliberate selection of diverse positions: the first one was formed of artists who told us about their own exhibitions and artistic research as well as the goals and the challenges of contemporary artists and art institutions in Venice; the second category was the central and largest one and was formed of professionals in the art sector, such as museum directors and curators, who provided pivotal information about museums and how they operate in the dynamic environment provided by the Biennale; the third group, finally, was formed of two council members: Paola Mar, the Municipality Elderman for tourism and Giorgia Pea, the Chair of the Culture Committee, who provided interesting information and figures about the Venetian economic development, tourism flows and cultural activities, as well as on the impact that Biennale has on the city and the reciprocal exchange of values. On top of this, we met the Director of the Venice Biennale, Andrea Del Mercato, who gave us important clarifications about the Biennale, its achievements and its action. *Table 3* depicts an overview of all the interviewees.

**Table 3:** *Interviewees' Overview.*

<b>Category 1:</b> Artists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Elisabetta di Maggio</i> (Fondazione Querini Stampalia)</li> <li>• <i>Marzia Migliora</i> (Ca' Rezzonico)</li> <li>• <i>Maria Morganti</i> (Fondazione Querini Stampalia)</li> <li>• <i>Gaston Ramirez</i></li> <li>• <i>Michelangelo Penso</i></li> </ul>
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<p><b>Category 2:</b> Museum professionals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Daniela Ferretti</i>, Palazzo Fortuny director</li> <li>• <i>Paola Marini</i>, Gallerie dell' Accademia director</li> <li>• <i>Michele Tavola</i>, Gallerie dell'Accademia curator</li> <li>• <i>Chiara Squarcina</i>, coordinator of Mocenigo Palace (Museum of Textiles and Costumes), the Burano Lace Museum and the Murano glass museum</li> <li>• <i>Daniele D'Anza</i>, Ca' Rezzonico curator</li> <li>• <i>Angela Vettese</i>, art critic, curator and the director of the graduate programme in Visual Arts of IUAV University</li> <li>• <i>Chiara Bertola</i>, the curator of Fondazione Querini Stampalia and creator of the program <i>Conserve the future</i></li> <li>• <i>Massimiliano Zane</i>, cultural designer</li> </ul>
<p><b>Category 3:</b> Municipality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality Elderman for tourism, <i>Paola Mar</i></li> <li>• Chair of the Culture Committee, <i>Giorgia Pea</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Category 4:</b> The Venice Biennale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, <i>Andrea del Mercato</i></li> </ul>

*Source: Own elaboration.*

### 3.2.3. Data Analysis

All the interviews were recorded and literally transcribed. Based on the guide-lines which were prepared before the interviews, each interview was coded, labelled and organised. Therefore, the basic considerations in developing these codes were the following (*Box 1*):

**Box 1: The 3 Dimensions During the Interviews.**

**Dimension 1: Venice**

- Reasons why Venice is an ‘art city’
- The relationships between the present and the past in the city

**Dimension 2: The International Art Exhibition**

- The societal, cultural and economic impacts of the Biennale on the city
- The societal, cultural and economic impacts of the Biennale on the museums in Venice

**Dimension 3: Museums**

- The role of museums
- The growing trend to do exhibitions in which the contemporary dialogues with the past
- Visitors’ reactions to contemporary art and the faculty to understand it

Secondary data were consulted with the aim of comparing the interviews with objective data. However, the number of visitors to a museum is clearly influenced by some museum specific (observed and unobserved) variables, such as the ticket price, the presence of a temporary exposition, the location in Venice, the advertising effort of the museum, the opening times and so forth. For these reasons, the analysis of the number of visitors by itself could not provide meaningful insights on the effect that the presence of the Biennale has on museums. We considered that a quantitative analysis that did not consider these specific variables could be potentially very misleading. Therefore, we used the data only to provide some interesting highlights in order to support or not what emerged from the qualitative analysis. In conclusion, we believe that the analysis of primary and secondary data together formed an empirical anchorage which provided a clear answer to the research question.

3.3. Validity

The validity of the present paper is given by the rich and varied information collected during the 16 interviews, which presented diverse points of views, common perspectives and some

disagreement and enabled us to come up with a reliable analysis. In addition, we argue that the present research is, to some extent, partially adaptable and reproducible to other Italian or foreign cities which present similar features to Venice, such as the presence of an incredible heritage to conserve and enhance, the willingness to be open to the contemporary and the presence of a cultural event that makes the city a temporary cluster as Biennale does in Venice. However, we are aware that the research cannot be reproduced totally due to the actual peculiarity of the lagoon city which makes the city itself a museum and which can drastically contribute to the development of the art scene.

### *Ethical issues*

The treatment of research participants was taken into account: they were asked whether or not they wanted to be identifiable (or whether they would prefer to be identified as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etc.). All of them agreed to be mentioned.



## 4. Results and Discussion

According to the literature review, a temporary art event and the host city are inevitably connected (Moeran and Pedersen, 2011; Kompatsiaris, 2014). Moreover, the permanent cultural institutions which are located in that city have an interest in putting themselves in dialogue with the temporary event, leveraging the cultural fervour created in that period (Kompatsiaris, 2014; Bonami and Esche, 2005). Below, these aspects are studied referring to the case-study and, specifically, the analysis and results of the empirical research on the influence that the International Art Exhibition has on Venice and the old art museums is presented. The findings are structured along three major themes to answer the research question: *To what extent does the Venice Biennale affect the number of visitors to the old art museums?* The three themes mentioned in Subsection 3.2.1. constitute the overarching narrative that should assess if the Biennale is an important presence in Venice and how it contributes to the production of art and culture. First, Section 4.1. provides an illustration of the social and cultural impacts that tourism has in Venice and its residents and attempts to put the Venice Biennale in this context. Even without being asked, almost all interviewees mentioned tourism because of its great impact not only on the economy of the city but also on its social and cultural identity. Thus, we considered worthwhile adding the analysis a section dedicated to tourism. Later, in Section 4.2. we analyze the old art museums' programming during the International Art Exhibition. Hence, the focus in this chapter is on the process of embedding the empirical findings in the previously analyzed theoretical chapter. These findings are based on the interviewees' interpretations and a partial analysis of annual reports retrieved from the website of the Municipality of Venice.

### 4.1. Culture of Tourism in Venice

As mentioned, though it was not included in the questions, tourism was a topic that emerged during our interviews. All respondents agreed about the lack of time tourists devote to the 'real' Venice. Congestion occurs around the Doge's Palace, the Basilica di San Marco, St. Mark's Square and Rialto Bridge; therefore, tourists often limit their visit to the major touristic attractions. Considering that the tourists' average stay is less than 3 days, as analyzed in the literature review (Yearbook of Tourism 2015, Venice; Russo, 2000), it is clear that visitors, during their stay, do not even consider the 'Venice of community ties, dark *osterie*,

and a slower lifestyle’, as described by the Venice-based British writer Skye McAlpine in her blog *From My Dining Table* (Walhout, 2018). Moreover, in line with the image of Venice as a ‘global artwork’, given by Marvin and Davis (2007), during our meeting, the curator of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Chiara Bertola, argued, ‘there is not a millimetre of Venice that is not art’ and for a visitor it is impossible to see everything (Marvin and Davis, 2007, p. 15).

In light of these considerations, we can introduce the term ‘open air museum’. A few interviewees positively referred to Venice as an ‘open air museum’, thanks to its incredible cultural and heritage and its history. However, this term’s meaning is debatable as someone could refer to it with a negative nuance. Quoting Angela Vettese, for instance, during the interview she told us:

Venice is a city that grows up on itself and that perpetually requires injections of *present*, or it will become a *postcard*. Biennale is the only thing that brings the present to the city. Venice has an incredible heritage but if we would rely only on it, the city would die and would become an *open air museum*.

We argue that these controversial interpretations follow the development that the word ‘museum’ itself has in the theoretical literature. Nowadays, museums are asked to be more responsive and dynamic and to create new narratives rather than being static ‘museum-monument’ (Cataldo and Paraventi, 2007; Arinze, 1999). Thus, the notion of ‘open air museum’ can have a twofold meaning: on the one hand, it can be considered as static and stuck in time; on the other hand, it is something which continuously enhances and evolves its heritage. The same goes for the ‘museum’ Venice.

Considering the phenomenon of congestion, more evident nearby the main touristic attractions, the curator Daniele D’Anza, noted that the Ca’ Rezzonico museum does not get big visitor numbers and that is partly caused by the location of the palace, which is out of the mass tourism’s track (Towse, 2010; Russo, 2000). This is proved by the feedbacks visitors leave on TripAdvisor, where, as suggested by the curator Daniele D’Anza, often you read ‘Ca’ Rezzonico is a great museum with a stunning collection which is worth to see only if you spend more than a couple of days in Venice’. This shows, again, how mass tourists check things off from the abused list of ‘The 10 Best Things to Do in Venice’ and visit ‘minor’ museums only in case of longer stays. It entails that the great flow of tourists does not show

interest in discovering specific areas of the city. According to the cultural designer Massimiliano Zane, this is the reason why Venice is not culturally productive: ‘since Venice already attracts big crowds of people, why should it invest in culture and art production?’ To a certain extent, Angela Vettese confirmed this statement arguing that it seems that Venice can live off itself because ‘the Doge’s Palace and St. Mark’s Square do not need to be promoted, as they already are successful’ and therefore many wrongly think that Venice is cultural enough.

#### 4.1.1. The Consequences of Mass Tourism on Venetian Citizens

‘Venice has been a victim of its own popularity, with an onslaught of tourism that has clogged the city’s narrow waterways and seen many of its residents depart’ (Marris, 2018). This is proved by the figures which indicate that the depopulation rate in Venice is an average of 3 residents per day (VeneziaToday, 2017). Again, this is partly due to the particular Venetian building structure that cannot cope with the total weight of tourists and inhabitants. But, it is, most of all, due to the development of mass tourism, ‘which has forgotten about *the living city*’, formed by its residents and considers the lagoon city just as a ‘stone city’, made of streets, canals and historical buildings (Ortalli, 2007, p. 5). Hence, Venice has lost its authentic cultural spirit typical of the island and it is exploited, two of the often inevitable consequences of mass tourism (Smith, 2015).

At this point, it is clear that Venice is one of the prime examples of the sensitive and contradictory relationship between tourism and art cities, as clearly emerged from the study Russo conducted (2000). From an important economic asset, tourism has become the greatest mean for the economic development of the city (Ortalli, 2007). According to the cultural designer Massimiliano Zane, in Venice there are high rent costs because ‘everything has become a commercial business, rather than a cultural activity’, as it used to be and still should be if managed correctly. According to him, the mass tourism led to a remarkable reduction of the ‘cultural citizenship’ and therefore it caused a progressive disappearance of an art market in Venice. Of the same opinion is the curator Luca Massimo Barbero who in an interview released to *Artribune Magazine* considered Venice to be ‘completely separate’ from the market (Giacomelli, 2016). This proved what was explained in the theoretical framework: mass tourism in Venice has led to the repulsion of other sorts of activities, which previously characterized the Venetian lifestyle (Ortalli 2007; Towse, 2010). It is evident that the tourist

infrastructures are taking over and driving out all the services for the citizens: among the three thousand commercial activities located in Venice, only 450 are exclusively addressed to residents (Report, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2018). Therefore, many leave Venice also because of lack of work opportunities, high prices and high rent for estates, high cost of living, and daily difficulties, because Venice is a ‘strenuous’, ‘demanding’, and ‘uncomfortable’ city due to unique *forma urbis* (Zwingle, 2007). As Massimiliano Zane suggested, a proper art market would be possible only if ‘visitors stay in Venice for at least ten days’ but this is not possible anymore due to the high prices which, in many cases, force visitors to stay in the Venetian outskirts<sup>12</sup> (Russo, 2000). It follows that mass tourism overcame the ‘real’ cultural tourism, which should be desirable in such an art city as Venice. To conclude, Massimiliano Zane during the interview pointed out two opposed solutions: ‘the alternatives are: either we create a cultural and social basis, linked to the artistic and historic appreciation or we are forced to take a drastic measure, we *rape* the city and close it down.’

#### 4.1.2. The Venice Biennale Within This Framework

What Massimiliano Zane argued becomes even clearer during Biennale, when everyone who owns a place and, in many cases, do not live in it, rent her properties out to take advantage of the unlimited demand by foreign art dealers, art lovers and the general public. ‘If you ask a Venetian to use his garden to set-up an exhibition in occasion of the Biennale’, said Zane, ‘in most cases he will see it just as an occasion to speculate’. Temporary official and unofficial exhibitions are housed by museums, art galleries and cultural associations but also by private buildings which open their spaces only in occasion of the show in return for restoration works or high rental prices (Vettese, 2017). As the artist Lucia Veronesi says: ‘During the Biennale there is a real space panic’ ([VICE], 2013). What we consider pretty impressive is that, as was argued also by Angela Vettese, residents are likely to be uninformed whether either the Biennale of Visual Arts or Architecture is occurring. What we must not forget is that at the Venice Biennale, as many other cultural events, tourists should be only a minor portion of the audience and that residents are also possible users (Quinn, 2005). Therefore, as Quinn (2005) argues, residents need to feel part of the process and not to be interrupted in their daily

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<sup>12</sup> Visitors often prefer to spend the nights in the Venetian environs because it is economically more convenient (Rispoli and Van der Borg, 1988): hotel and rental prices constantly decrease with the distance from the historical centre (Van der Borg, Russo, 1997). Therefore, tourists prefer to stay in Mestre, Marghera or even Padua (40 km from Venice’s historical centre).

routine. This is the only way they will appreciate the show and take part in it (Quinn, 2005). Right now, instead, it is this ‘intrusion’ in the daily spaces the biggest issue which does not let locals feel part of the vibrant Venetian cultural scene (Marvin and Davis, 2007, p. 16). When inhabitants notice something which is ‘weird’ to their eyes, they affirm ‘xe roba dea bienal’, which literally means ‘it is Biennale’s stuff’ (Vettese, 2017, p. 145). The VICE channel<sup>13</sup> on Youtube presented the Venice Biennale in a series of three episodes, ‘Italy’s Most Important Art Fair: The Venice Biennale’ ([VICE], 2013). Despite the error in the title of the series, where the Biennale is considered an art fair and, thus, a commercial platform, we consider it meaningful to highlight a scene in the third episode: an old woman walks into a temporary art installation and does not understand the sense of the piece:

*Signora:* E che è?

*VICE:* Un’isola.

*Signora:* Ma ne abbiamo già tante di isole noi.

*Woman:* What is it?

*VICE:* An island.

*Woman:* We’ve got enough islands already.



Italy's Most Important Art Fair: The Venice Biennale (Part 3/3)

37.544 visualizzazioni

216 56 CONDIVIDI



Italy's Most Important Art Fair: The Venice Biennale (Part 3/3)

37.544 visualizzazioni

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At this point, it has to be mentioned that people need to distinguish between what is contemporary art and what is not. Biennale is an excellence in the art world, but this does not justify all the art initiatives that turn out during the six months. However, as the curator Chiara Bertola noted during our meeting, people can judge only if they are used to visiting art exhibitions, know art history and are informed about artistic trends; Venetians, instead, often are critical only because they consider the Biennale and everything that surrounds it as an event stranger to the city. This is a failure of one of the goals of biennials which, according to the literature review, should aim a bigger involvement of locals (Quinn, 2005; Kompatsiaris,

<sup>13</sup> VICE is a digital media and broadcasting company. It creates content daily about different topics, such as arts, culture and news. It distributes written articles and video on its YouTube channel.

2014). Biennials, hence, are, first of all, a global centre of art production where artists have the opportunity to exhibit their works but, as suggested by Kompatsiaris (2014), the Venice Biennale has to engage with a diversified community, which involves both local and foreign visitors. What emerged from some of the interviews, instead, is that the Venice Biennale engages with a public of art lovers but it does not create such a direct and strong contact with the host community as we would expect according to the theoretical literature (Quinn, 2005; Kompatsiaris, 2014). A proof of this statement is given in the pages of the article-investigation by the journalist Enrico Tantucci, where the author argues that the citizens' considerations of this event has always been as a prestigious but 'extraneous' event, an international cultural institution located in Venice (Tantucci, 2011). This is a shame if we consider that the Biennale is an institution that has given a lot to the city, from a social and cultural but also an economic point of view. The temporary show has contributed to the improvement of the cultural sphere of the host city (Kompatsiaris, 2014; Bonami and Esche, 2005). Indeed, since its early stages, the Venice Biennale has attracted many international artists: in 1910, Gustav Klimt, Gustave Courbet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir were exhibited and in 1907 the first international pavilion, the Belgian Pavilion, was built (La Biennale di Venezia, 'History'). At the same time, this great international participation led to the construction of the 'Padiglione Venezia' as a counterpart of the international presence to the exhibition. In 1899 the Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa decided to leave her house, Ca' Pesaro, in bequest to the Venetian artists, where they could study and work<sup>14</sup>. Because of the International Exhibition, then, many other cultural institutions opened in Venice; among the most successful cases, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection<sup>15</sup>, which opened to the public in 1980 and which is still now one of the most visited museums in the lagoon city. In recent years, then, well-known international collectors decided to open their spaces in Venice: at the beginning of the 2000s, Francois Pinault opened the Pinault Foundation (Palazzo Grassi in 2006 and Punta della Dogana in 2009) and the Prada Foundation and the Louis Vuitton Foundation opened their spaces respectively in 2011 and 2013. As the writer Tiziano Scarpa (2018) argues, 'Venice gives prestige' and that is why new foreign cultural institutions

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<sup>14</sup> The Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, which, nowadays, is located at Palazzetto Tito, is still operative and offers twelve studios to artists, in Palazzo Carminati (Santa Croce, Venice) and Chioostro di SS. Cosma e Damiano (Giudecca, Venice), along with an exhibition space in St. Mark's Square. For more information, see: <http://www.comune.venezia.it/content/fondazionebevilacqua-la-masa>.

<sup>15</sup> The collector Peggy Guggenheim bought the Palace Venier dei Leoni in 1948, when she brought some artists exhibited at the Greece Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In 1951, Peggy Guggenheim decided to open her collection to the public and only in 1980 the Collection opened under the Foundation Solomon R. Guggenheim (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, <http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/default.html>).

continuously base in the lagoon city. In addition to cultural institutions, also private citizens and artists have taken the initiative to create valuable occasions to take advantage of the cultural fervour. Among our interviewees, the artist Maria Morganti told us about her initiative, 'Il mercoledì degli artisti', which were weekly meetings that she used to organize in her studio, where local artists met and presented their art works and research to other artists. Thanks to the Biennale, many foreign artists have started to participate to these private events, making them a real success in Venice and marking the local art scene's history. Along with artists, the Biennale attracts also well-known international art historians and critics. The curator of Palazzo Fortuny, Daniela Ferretti, told us about her collaborations with Michel Laclotte, David Sylvester, Giulio Carlo Argan, Germano Celant, Bonito Oliva and Jean Clair, who were in Venice in occasion of the international show. Among the carry-over effects that Biennale has, we must mention the operations of the Ca' Foscari University and IUAV University which every year organize important professionals gathering in Venice in occasion of the Biennale and organize interesting shows in the Universities' exhibition spaces, which, as argues Vettese (2017), have possibly been built because of the of the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions (Vettese, 2017; Giacomelli, 2016).

To conclude, Venice and its residents should be grateful towards the Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia which makes Italy taking pride in its achievements in the world's stage (Vettese, 2017; Bagdadli and Arrigoni, 2005). Same the other way around, the Biennale owes much to the host city. The Biennale, indeed, is not only indebted to Venice for its 'fascinating settings and the charming Venetian ambiance', as Bagdadli and Arrigoni suggest (2005, p. 22), but also mainly because for more than one hundred years every year it has provided the Biennale with infrastructures, cleaning services, and public transport, as confirmed by the Chair of the Culture Committee, Giorgia Pea, during our personal meeting. Those services are essential to ensure the smooth and effective operation of the Biennale, as the Municipality Elderman for Culture of Palermo, Andrea Cusumano, affirmed in view of the next edition of Manifesta, hoping that Palermo will be soon ready to guarantee an efficient system of transport and housing (Cusumano, personal meeting during MA fieldtrip to Palermo, April 2018).

## ***Box 2: The Venice Biennale: An Historical Description***

The first Venice Biennale dates back to 1895, even though the decision to set up a biennial exhibition of Italian art from the Venetian City Council and Mayor Riccardo Selvatico had already been taken in 1893. The Mayor's decision was due to his strong desire to transform the artists' evening gatherings at Caffè Florian (the oldest 'Caffè Italiano' established in 1720), located in St. Mark's Square, into a prestigious art show.

In 1894, the city built the Palazzo dell'Esposizione (Exhibition Venue), called 'Padiglione Italia', to host the first exhibition in the public gardens, the so-called Giardini in Castello, one of the six neighbourhoods of Venice. In 1895, the 1<sup>st</sup> International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice was opened in the presence of King Umberto I and Queen Margherita di Savoia and met with a great public acclaim of over 224,000 visitors. Originally, the Biennale hosted major foreign and Italian artists by invitation and also included works of uninvited Italian painters and sculptors, who could exhibit two works maximum, previously unexhibited in Italy. Moreover, a smaller section was dedicated to foreign artists. The Biennale was from its very inception an international forum, in contrast to the national oriented bourgeois art associations, public institutions, salons and secessions during those years (Vogel, 2010).

In 1930, the Biennale passed from the control of the Venice City Council to that of the State and was transformed into an Autonomous Board by Royal Decree with law no. 33 of January 13, 1930. The Biennale, thus, during the Fascist regime, became a National entity. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1988, the Biennale was transformed into a private autonomous institution and renamed 'Società di Cultura La Biennale di Venezia' by the legislative decree no. 19/98. Since that moment, the President of the Biennale has been nominated by the Minister for Cultural Affairs and the Board of directors consists of the President, the Mayor of Venice, and three other members. Later, in 2004, the Biennale was renamed 'Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia' by the legislative decree no. 1, January 8, 2004.

Back in the 1930s, the Biennale introduced other kinds of exhibition: the annual International Festival of Contemporary Music (1930), the International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art (1932), and the annual International Theatre Festival (1934). Later, in 1980, the first International Architecture Exhibition took place and nowadays it occurs every two years, alternating with the International Art Exhibition (Biennale Arte). In 1999, finally, dance made its debut.

The same year, the exhibition area of the Biennale was enlarged to the historical spaces of the Arsenale, which still hosts the national pavilions. This intervention was one



of the biggest examples of an urban area that has been restored (in 1980 and later in 1999) to be ready to host the Biennale due to the huge attractiveness it was starting to have. Later in the 1990s, the attractiveness of the Venice Biennale notably increased to the point that Biennale's spaces at Giardini and Arsenale were not enough anymore and from that point in time, national pavilions have been set up all over the city (Vettese, 2017).

#### 4.2. Old Art Museums' Programming During Biennale

According to our interviews, many museum directors and curators believe that a way to involve residents to the contemporary art scene in Venice is through their museum programming. During the Venice Biennale, most of the museums in Venice launch temporary shows during the entire length of the temporary show or even on the same days of the Biennale's vernissage, during which all those important in the art world are in Venice (Vettese, 2017). All the collateral events of the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition (2017), for instance, inaugurated their exhibitions in mid-May, when the Biennale's vernissage occurred<sup>16</sup>. To this regard, it is worth mentioning how even old art museums are involved in this phenomenon and it makes it evident how the Biennale is a great temporary event which has a positive impact on the whole city and the cultural institutions which operate in it. The Venice Biennale and the host city, therefore, may be considered as a clear example of temporary cultural cluster (Mask, Bathelt, and Malmberg, 2007; Towse, 2010). Last year, during the International Art Exhibition, titled *Viva Arte Viva* (13 May – 26 November, 2017), there were up to 23 official events, which involved contemporary art museums but also many old art ones, such as Gallerie dell'Accademia with *Philip Guston and the Poets*, and Museo Correr which housed *The Home of My Eyes*, an art exhibition by the contemporary artist Shirin Neshat (La Biennale di Venezia, October 24, 2017).

According to the curator of the Querini Stampalia, Chiara Bertola, Venice is so rich of art, architecture and history that it risks appearing to be stuck in the past. Therefore, contemporary artists are called to create new narratives giving value to its past. We interviewed the contemporary artist Elisabetta di Maggio, whose exhibition *Almost Transparent Nature* was hosted by the Fondazione Querini Stampalia during the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition. During the interview, the artist introduced her exhibition,

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<sup>16</sup> With the exception of the Fondazione Bevilacqua la Masa, which inaugurated the show *Alberto Biasi, Sara Campesan, Bruno Munari e altri amici di Verifica 8+1* only on the 28<sup>th</sup> July.

arguing the role of museums: ‘the museum is always a place where everything is crystallized and fixed and, therefore, my will was to bring something living to it, germinating element.’ With her daring work, *Almost Transparent Nature* (9<sup>th</sup> May, 2017 – 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2017), the artist challenged the Foundation Querini Stampalia and the role of museums, introducing ivy plants in the central salon of the palace and letting them invade the room entering into dialogue with the stuccos of leaves and flowers decorating the walls, seen as ‘plant simulacrums’, the frescos and the volutes<sup>17</sup>. During the entire exhibition, the plants grew inside the room, emphasising the passing of time: the inhabitants have abandoned the house-museum, leaving it at the mercy of nature and time. Moreover, parts of the ivy plants were made stable with a solution of water and glycerol and she carved and transformed the dried branches into magnificent art works. Nothing better than a real plant could symbolize the vitality and the essence that a museum has to have in our society. Elisabetta di Maggio perfectly interpreted the aim of the project *Conserving the Future*, promoted by the curator Chiara Bertola, which asks Italian and international contemporary artists to interact with the history of the Querini family, the library, the museum and the art gallery. Among them, works by Joseph Kossuth, Jimmie Durham, Kiki Smith, Monacuma, and Giovanni Anselmo, were exhibited. This project was born from the awareness of the curator that there is not a unique interpretation of those spaces and, therefore, she challenged the artists to bring new meanings and directions, considering the art works as ‘intruders’ into the existing spaces.

The Querini Stampalia is only an example of old art museum whose exhibitions’ program during Biennale enhances the collection and introduces contemporary art. Another valuable case is the National museum of the Gallerie dell’Accademia. In 2015 it hosted the exhibition *Città Irreale* by Mario Mertz<sup>18</sup>, which was an incredible show that entered in dialogue with the restoration works – that were just finished and which had lasted for more than 10 years – for the enlargement of the museum exhibition area. Once again, we can notice how the exhibitions are always carefully considered to create a bridge with the institution bringing value and valuable meanings to it. Last year, under the direction of the new Director, Paola Marini, the museum housed the show *Philip Guston and the Poets*, which was a collateral event of the Biennale. The painter Philip Guston was chosen because of his love for

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<sup>17</sup> The curator of the exhibition, Chiara Bertola, presented the work as a revocation of the myth of Pygmalion: Elisabetta di Maggio gave life to the stuccos as Aphrodite, the goodness of love, did with the marble effigy of the woman loved by the king of Cyprus, Pygmalion.

<sup>18</sup> Despite the success of the exhibition *Città Irreale* by Mario Mertz, the new director told us that from now on the Gallerie dell’Accademia will prefer to host contemporary art exhibitions which consist of paintings, as the museum has one of the biggest painting collections of pre-19<sup>th</sup> century art of Venice.

the Venetian culture. For next year, the respondents revealed that they have already received many proposals and already signed the contract for an exhibition of a successful living painter. The Gallerie dell'Accademia will propose this project as a collateral event for the Biennale; however, the interviewees declared that the exhibition will be set-up regardless of whether it will be accepted as a collateral event of the Biennale or not: 'the presence of Biennale is an incentive, not a bond', the curator Michele Tavola told us, 'and our visitors could visit it with the normal ticket for the collection with an increase of 3 euro.' During the interview, the curator added 'the substance of the exhibition does not change. We organize it anyway. It is worth it; it is a fact. Everyone will be here for the *vernissage* of the Biennale'. To conclude, this confirms the theoretical framework that was provided both for cultural events and museums. On one hand, thus, the Biennale gives added values to the ones taking part into it and makes Venice a powerful temporary 'artistic hub' (Kompatsiaris, 2014; Bonami and Esche, 2005; Sassatelli, 2017). On the other hand, local museums are willing to take advantage of it (despite offering official or unofficial shows), getting part of the global art circuit and presenting their art productions to an international audience (Murphy, 2016; Frey and Meier, 2006; Kompatsiaris, 2014). With reference to old art museums, in the last decades, they employed the strategies to adapt their offer to the demand, which, in this period of the year, is likely to be formed by contemporary art lovers, and to make collaborations with well-known international artists or local ones (Murphy, 2016; Frey and Meier, 2006; Service to People, n.d.). At this point, it is necessary to pose a few questions: how these shows are perceived by the general public? Which is the overall appreciation of regular public? During our meetings, we questioned the interviewees about visitors' perceptions and they all believe that this kind of exhibition mainly attracts contemporary art lovers rather than old art ones. However, the curator Daniele D'Anza told us that it often happens that many visitors go to Ca' Rezzonico Museum during Biennale to see the original collection and, therefore, 'the first reaction in front of contemporary art pieces is repulsion'. The same was shared by the Director of Palazzo Fortuny, Daniela Ferretti, who told us about the museum's 'comment book', in which the 90% of visitors expresses its widespread appreciation towards the temporary exhibitions. The negative comments, instead, are from visitors who have been disappointed because they could not appreciate the real collection of Palazzo Fortuny. Despite this initial negative reaction to contemporary art collections, as the curator Daniele D'Anza suggested, 'when you offer them the key to understand the work, almost everyone is astonished'. This confirms what the curator Chiara Bertola told us: 'the work is open to

everyone as Umberto Eco writes in his work *La poetica dell'opera aperta*. Everyone is welcome to understand a piece of art, but not everyone has the skills and understanding to do so.' All the artists interviewed, indeed, confirmed that contemporary art needs knowledge and information as everything else in our life: 'contemporary art is a visual language and therefore people pretend that it is easy, but who can speak a language without knowing its alphabet?' asked us the artist Elisabetta di Maggio<sup>19</sup>.

To conclude, these initiatives decline the common nuance that:

Città romantica e nostalgica, nell'immaginario collettivo Venezia non è proprio sinonimo di arte contemporanea. E questo, nonostante la città lagunare sia sede della più importante Biennale del mondo (Maggi, 2014).<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, as Maggi (2014) suggests, in the past few years, thanks to Biennale, the art network in town is improving. Even now, the influence of Venice as an 'art city' is indisputable and this is not only thanks to its heritage but also thanks to many well-known contemporary art institutions, which were founded in Venice because of the presence of the Biennale and that nowadays are well-positioned in the international scene, such as Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana, Fondazione Prada and the Peggy Guggenheim Museum. During our meeting, the curator Chiara Bertola suggested that, in this way, 'Venice is responding to what is happening on an international level'. A demonstration of this statement is the latest initiative *Venice Galleries View* which was launched last year, in Venice, in occasion of the *finissage* of the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, in the wake of 'what already exists in all the contemporary art capitals of the world' (Maggi, 2018; Testino, 2017).<sup>21</sup> Despite these contemporary art presences, we must not forget, once again, that 'Venice is not an art city *because of* contemporary art, even if its role is increasing: according to the artist Elisabetta di

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<sup>19</sup> Curiosity and research are essential. What distinguishes contemporary art and old art is that art was born as a means of communication but nowadays it has a more introspective nature; therefore, as suggested by Chiara Squarcina, in a piece of art from the 1700s the *proportio* between meanings and visual immediacy is different than the one in a piece of our times. This progress is part of our modern society and we cannot neglect it. From this belief, we can conclude by quoting the Director of the Municipal Museums, Gabriella Belli, who argues that: 'Everything is needed in order to project the city in the future, taking the past with it.' (Giacomelli, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Romantic and nostalgic city, in the collective imagination, Venice is not synonymous with contemporary art. And this happens despite the lagoon city is the location of the most important Biennale in the world.

<sup>21</sup> This joint project was conceived with the aim of building connections and diverse collaborations among nine woman-run galleries of contemporary art in the lagoon city (A plus A, Alberta Pane, Beatrice Burati Anderson, Caterina Tognon, Ikona, Marignana Arte, Massimodeluca, Michela Rizzo, and Victoria Miro) and to enhance contemporary art in Venice (Maggi, 2018).

Maggio, indeed, the Biennale has still a much smaller role than the Venetian heritage. From this consideration, we have chosen to focus our research on the old art museums in Venice and their role during the temporary cultural event.

#### 4.2.1. The Municipal Museums – *Muve Contemporaneo*

Venice has eleven Municipal museums<sup>22</sup> which meet the interests of a broad audience, from the ones who love visual arts to the ones who show interest in Venetian heritage and craft, such as the processing of glass and lace making, as the person responsible for the Palazzo Mocenigo, Chiara Squarcina, suggested during our meeting, and was also discussed in Russo (2000). Since 2008, the Municipal museums are managed by the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia (MUVE), founded the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008 and in operation since September 1<sup>st</sup> following the resolution passed by the Municipality of Venice in order to manage and enhance the Venetian heritage. Since 2011, the Director of the Fondazione is Gabriella Belli<sup>23</sup>, who, in 2013, proposed the contemporary art program to be held during the International Art Exhibition. *Muve Contemporaneo* is a curatorial project with the ambitious aim of enhancing the Municipal museums, which are in stunning historical buildings, by organising contemporary art exhibitions in dialogue with the permanent collection or with the building itself (MUVE, [www.visitmuve.it](http://www.visitmuve.it)). However, before this program was proposed by Gabriella Belli, many museums were already organizing different exhibitions during the International show. During the interview, the person responsible for the Palazzo Mocenigo, Chiara Squarcina, mentioned the exhibition *Miniartextil*, an annual contemporary art review of artists working with Textile Art or Fiber Art. This program started in 2000 showing that the museum was open to contemporary art even before the arrival of Gabriella Belli: ‘of course, with the arrival of the new Director of the Fondazione Musei Civici, our shows are better-organized’, said Chiara Squarcina. To use the words of the Director of Palazzo Fortuny, Daniela Ferretti,

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<sup>22</sup> For more information about MUVE see: <http://www.veneziaunica.it/en/content/musei-civici-venezia>.

<sup>23</sup> In 2011, the Director Gabriella Belli was nominated ‘museumologist of the year’ by ICOM Italy (ICOM Italia, Premio ICOM Italia). The main reason of her nomination was her capacity to enhance MART in Rovereto thanks to her ‘innovative approach’, making the museum a ‘museum machine’ of international importance. Nevertheless, in the nomination her work at the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia is mentioned as follows: *Oggi la sua professionalità e la sua passione sono di fronte all’ennesima sfida: la direzione della Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, ovvero una delle realtà museali più articolate e complesse al mondo che permeano con la loro presenza la città d’arte più visitata al mondo.* (ICOM Italia, Premio ICOM Italia – Musei dell’anno 2011: motivazioni della giuria). Translation: Today, her profession and passion are facing another challenge: the direction of the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, that is one of the most complex foundations in the world which is located in the most visited art city in the world.

*Muve Contemporaneo* is a sort of label that the Director of the Foundation wanted to give us'. Therefore, with the program *Muve Contemporaneo*, the Municipal museums want to pay homage to the Biennale but they are two different entities which coexist in Venice and which, according to Chiara Squarcina, are comparable to two different trains which travel on parallel tracks which never meet: 'they speak the same language but they rarely communicate with each others'. This goes also for the tickets-system: the Biennale visitors can visit all the collateral events with the same ticket of the International Art Exhibition but they cannot visit the Municipal museums. The Municipal museums offer a pass which is valid exclusively for all the eleven museums: in this way, as suggested by the curator Daniele D'Anza during our interview, the museums of Venice 'make system'.

**Box 3:** *The Municipal Museums of Venice During the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition.*

- **Doge's Palace:** Douglas Gordon, *Gente di Palermo!*, 13 May – 26 November 2017
- **Museo Correr:** Shirin Neshat. *The Home of My Eyes*, 13 May – 26 November 2017 and Roger De Montebello. *Ritratti di Venezia e altri ritratti* 13 May – 1 October 2017
- **Ca' Rezzonico:** Marzia Migliora, *Velme*, 13 May – 26 November 2017 and *Ritratto / copia – Ebenbild / Abbild*, 1 July – 30 October 2017
- **Ca' Pesaro:** David Hockney. *82 Portraits and 1 Still-life*, 24 June – 22 October 2017
- **Glass Museum:** Gaetano Pesce. *Cinque tecniche col vetro*, 13 May – 17 September 2017 and Dino Martens, pittore e designer, 13 May – 30 September 2017
- **Mocenigo Palace:** Transformation. Sei artisti svedesi, 13 May – 1 October 2017
- **Fortuny Palace:** Intuition, 13 May – 26 November 2017
- **Lace Museum:** Maria Bissacco, 13 May – 7 January 2018

*Source: Own Elaboration based on 'Programma Attività 2017', [www.visitmuve.it](http://www.visitmuve.it)*

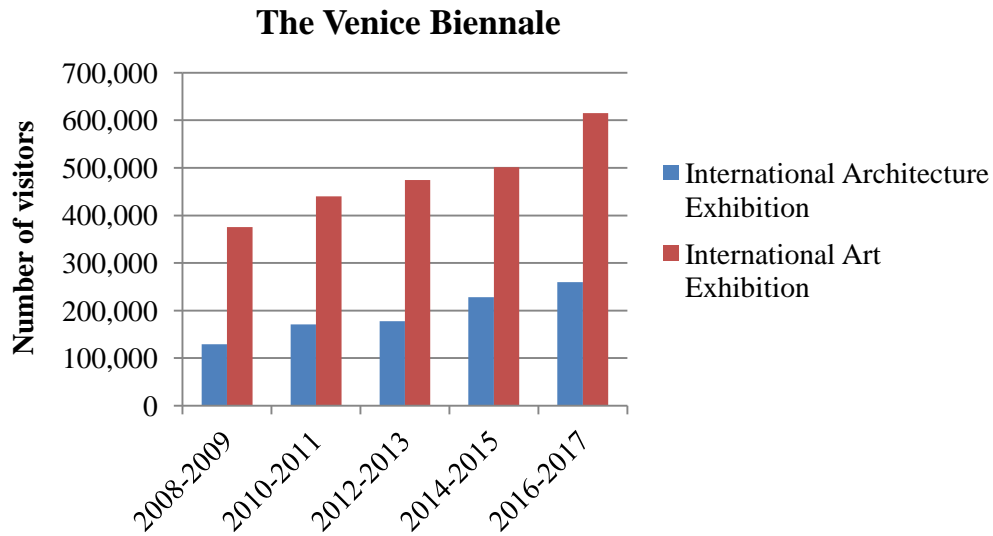
#### 4.2.2. Some figures... for what they are worth

As everyone agreed, the abundance and variety of Municipal, State and private museums make evident that Venice is a unique art city: it does not only host one of the oldest biennial in the art world but it also boasts an incredible heritage and unparalleled artistic treasures conserved in breathtaking museums (Russo, 2000; Marvin and Davis, 2007; Sacco et al., 2007, Towse, 2010). However, as explained in Chapter 2., today's museums are cultural

institutions that are being increasingly asked to communicate original contents and narratives, along with their primary original role of conserving and displaying the tangible and intangible heritage (Burton and Scott, 2003; Cataldo and Paraventi, 2007; Arinze, 1999): ‘conservation efforts are incomplete if they do not involve and lead to the enhancement of public awareness of the cultural heritage preservation’ (Elkasrawy, 2016). What emerged from the interviews is that museums are potentially able to communicate to everyone but that they need to be challenged and interpreted, which is in line with the literature on museums’ challenges and strategies (Cataldo and Paraventi, 2007; Burton and Scott, 2003). Therefore, old art museums in Venice leverage the moment of cultural fervour and open themselves to novelty, giving new meanings to their art collections (Frey and Meier, 2006).

According to the literature on museums and cultural clusters, we would expect that these actions would be very fruitful in terms of audience development (‘Service to People, n.d.; Murphy, 2016; Maskell, Bathelt, and Malmberg, 2007; Towse, 2010). Moreover, in a city that is over-visited by mass tourism this outcome is even more pressing. As Russo (2010) argues, tourism is a source of net income but it has to be managed correctly and museums are a great instrument to enhance tourist flows (Russo, 2010). Thus, we would expect that the Venetian cultural supply, which is already able to satisfy a broad audience due to its variety and which opens itself to contemporary art for the occasion of the Venice Biennale, should be able to enlarge and enhance its offer and serve even broader audiences. Hence, our research question is: *To what extent does the Venice Biennale affect the number of visitors to the old art museums?* In order to answer it, we analyzed the data distinguishing even- and odd-numbered years, respectively the years of the International Architecture Exhibition and of the International Art Exhibition. A quick look to the data reveals that the Biennale increases its visitors every year. The last edition of the International Art Exhibition attracted 615,000 visitors, up by nearly a quarter from 500,000 two years before. The same goes for the International Architecture Exhibition, which is increasing its visitors and which from 2014 is lasting six months rather than three, as it previously was. The last edition of the International Architecture Exhibition attracted more than 250,000 visitors. Thus, both are increasingly growing year after year (Yearbooks of Tourism, [www.comune.venezia.it](http://www.comune.venezia.it)).

*Chart 1: The Venice Biennale – Number of visitors 2008-2017.*



*Source: Own Elaboration based on the Yearbooks of Tourism, 2011-2016, Municipality of Venice.*

Despite this constant increase in the Biennale’s numbers, however, from the analysis of the ‘cultural numbers’, published in the Yearbooks of Tourism from 2011 to 2016 by the Municipality of Venice, we cannot see evidence of a corresponding increase in museums’ visitor numbers<sup>24</sup>. Yet we still attempt to highlight some trends, aware that we would need many more variables in order to give an objective and comprehensive overview of the current situation, such as price and length of the exhibition, artist’s name, and so on.

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<sup>24</sup> Going for a slight tangent, from the analysis of the data, it is clear that the Doge’s Palace, the superstar museum of Venice, attracts more than one million visitors per year, whereas all the other museums do not reach more than 300,000 visitors each. Therefore, 65% of the entrances are guaranteed by the Doge’s Palace, ‘the treasure trove of the Municipal Museums’ (Tantucci, 2011). This data confirms the evidence of congestion problems in St. Mark’s Square surroundings and the prevail of mass tourism on cultural tourism (Russo, 2000; Marvin and Davis, 2007; Towse, 2010).



**Table 4a: Municipal Museums – Attendance 2008-2016.**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Fondazione Musei Civici:</b>									
Doge's Palace	1,358,186	1,216,799	1,303,438	1,403,524	1,319,527	1,307,230	1,343,123	1,276,127	1,333,559
Museo Correr	248,318	219,863	214,912	230,435	249,122	246,691	269,509	286,454	337,648
Glass Museum	136,774	129,193	139,411	152,099	157,372	149,740	126,467	142,855	161,977
Ca' Rezzonico	108,592	95,132	97,530	112,519	111,867	112,282	106,996	99,601	102,779
Ca' Pesaro	74,231	61,783	76,882	78,209	75,881	68,765	74,832	76,286	90,142
Natural History Museum	22,979	23,181	42,467	59,675	70,922	70,588	68,388	70,639	78,945
Mocenigo Palace	26,127	26,415	31,336	35,945	41,982	9,213	48,026	44,887	49,251
Carlo Goldoni's house	16,240	14,346	17,453	18,869	21,654	19,520	17,682	17,592	20,180
Clock Tower	5,601	5,844	6,908	8,936	8,746	9,136	8,844	10,032	11,972
Lace Museum	1,002	X	X	14,815	30,362	29,157	31,683	32,825	37,503
Fortuny Palace	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,998,050</b>	<b>1,792,556</b>	<b>1,930,337</b>	<b>2,115,026</b>	<b>2,087,435</b>	<b>2,022,322</b>	<b>2,095,550</b>	<b>2,057,298</b>	<b>2,223,956</b>

**Table 4b: State Museums Attendance – 2008-2016.**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>State Museums:</b>									
Gallerie dell'Accademia	...	334,931	320,779	329,822	312,787	325,026	272,052	286,821	312,014
Galleria Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro	...	72,778	71,209	79,588	71,036	70,255	69,510	71,084	68,632
Palazzo Grimani	...	9,155	21,302	46,803	31,783	22,112	24,533	22,305	17,561
Museo Archeologico	...	223,121	219,738	234,830	253,615	265,034	271,542	298,380	344,904
Museo d'Arte Orientale	...	61,694	77,105	80,941	78,564	70,255	75,758	81,000	92,137
<b>Total</b>	<b>...</b>	<b>701,679</b>	<b>710,133</b>	<b>771,984</b>	<b>747,785</b>	<b>752,682</b>	<b>713,395</b>	<b>759,590</b>	<b>835,248</b>

**Table 4c: Fondazione Querini Stampalia – Attendance 2008-2016.**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Fondazione Querini Stampalia</b>	32,531	37,805	21,591	24,108	31,297	32,070	36,365	35,747	43,408

*Key:*

Even-numbered years: International Architecture Exhibition

Odd-numbered years: International Art Exhibition

*Source: Own Elaboration based on the Yearbooks of Tourism, 2011 – 2016, Municipality of Venice.*

Considering the Museo Ca' Rezzonico as an example, when we asked the artist Marzia Migliora whether in her opinion, her solo show *Velme*, during the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, was visited by the Biennale's visitors, she replied 'Of course, the Venice Biennale brings so many visitors'. If we take a look at the figures, instead, we cannot confirm her opinion, as the data do not show higher numbers of visitors in the years of the International Art Exhibition. Therefore, we can conclude that the Venice Biennale does not bring as many visitors as we would expect from the literature analyzed in Chapter 2.

The increase of visitors during the International Art Exhibition is minimal or even null. A possible explanation, which we believe quite evident, derives from the abundance of the cultural events that arise around the temporary show. As the curator of the exhibition, Daniele D'Anza, told us, 'clearly, in that period, there are infinite cultural exhibitions'. During our interviews, the director of the Galleria dell'Accademia, agreed on that: in Venice there are so many initiatives that inevitably 'obstacle' each other, in the sense that visitors need to choose which one to visit. A second explanation to the lack of a clear correlation between the Biennale's attendances and the visitor numbers to old art museums is that Venice itself already is an attractor of tourists, throughout the entire year. As a consequence, the presence of a temporary exhibition in the lagoon city does not show a big quantitative impact on its cultural scene, which is already visited by mass tourism.

To summarize, from a partial analysis of the data, we can argue that the International Art Exhibition does not have significant quantitative benefits on local museums, which, instead, attempt to take part to and benefit from the cultural fervour<sup>25</sup>. Even though these results, all our interviewees totally agreed on that: the exhibition basically improves the quality of visitors and this is what insiders really need and aim for when organizing temporary exhibitions during the International Art Exhibition. As confirmed by Angela Vettese during the interview:

It doesn't matter whether or not the Venice Biennale improves the number of visitors of the museums. It is a matter of the museums to being able to become more attractive. What matters is that the Biennale brings the world's cultural elite to Venice. Figures do not say enough: we need to make qualitative reflections and not only quantitative observations.

In addition to that, from the artists' point of view, as Maria Morganti expressed, there is an interest in a more restrained group of a wealthy cultured public rather than big numbers of general public, as the latter improves the visibility and the name of the artist but does not contribute to the artist's career. The general public is less likely to buy the piece of art and, more importantly, does not contribute to fostering a productive debate around the piece as much as educated art lovers would do. During our personal meeting, the artist Michelangelo

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<sup>25</sup> During the International Art Exhibitions, we can only observe a slight increase in the figures of the Gallerie dell'Accademia and the Galleria Franchetti. The private Fondazione Querini Stampalia also presents slight increases during the Biennale. However, it emerges that in 2016 (year of the International Architecture Exhibition), both the Gallerie dell'Accademia and the Fondazione Querini Stampalia respectively attracted a quarter and 7,500 visitors more than in 2015, year of the International Art Exhibition.

Penso shared the same thoughts: ‘Artists partly need the general public but, most of all, they would need just three or four right art collectors’.

To summarize, despite a minimal increase in visitor numbers, it is clear that old art museums with the setting-up of special exhibitions on occasion of the Biennale reaches a twofold goal. On one hand, museums take advantage of these potentialities to involve and endear themselves to a more cultured public and, also, to local people who are drifting apart from their culture and treasures due to the aforementioned problems that nowadays distress Venice (Marvin and Davis, 2007, Quinn, 2005; Vettese, 2017). On the other hand, museums build an alternative to mass tourism, proposing a cultural program which is likely to attract the so-called ‘cultural tourists’, which spend substantially more than the usual tourists and which, therefore, become an engine of economic growth (Elkasrawy, 2016; Smith, 2015; Russo, 2007; Towse, 2010). A proof of this last statement is the slight increase in the cultural tourist’ numbers of the last two years, as the Municipality Elderman for Tourism, Paola Mar, revealed us. It was noticed an increase in the figures of tourists visiting the city and its ‘minor’ museums in the quarters January-March and October-December, which are the off-season for mass tourism. Thus, museums, especially the local Fondazione Musei Civici, are increasingly functioning as intermediaries between the inhabitants and the Venetian heritage and are contributing to the safeguarding of Venetian culture and citizens’ needs and attitudes (Elkasrawy, 2016). In addition, museums, by leveraging the international presence in Venice, consisting of both the many permanent art and cultural institutions in the lagoon city and the almost limitless temporary exhibitions and gatherings of art lovers in occasion of the International Art Exhibition, have the opportunity to get foreign people familiar with the Venetian cultural heritage, and perhaps to create bridges and collaborations with foreign institutions (Elkasrawy, 2016). An example of this precious connection which is possible in Venice is given by Palazzo Fortuny, which for ten consecutive years, starting in 2007, collaborated with the Belgian Axel and May Vervoordt Foundation whose collection’s pieces were exposed in dialogue with the Fortuny Palace. To conclude, the case of the Venetian museums shows that cultural institutions are conveyors of cultural content but, most of all, are able to provide significant socio-economic benefits (Russo, 2000; Towse, 2010).

## 5. Conclusions

This study set out to analyze the impact of a temporary event on the cultural institutions present in the host city by means of a qualitative case study. We chose the case of the International Art Exhibition (La Biennale) as it is a temporary exhibition which has a great impact on the entire host city, Venice. Moreover, this case study was chosen because of the dialogue which necessarily comes to light between one of the biggest shows of contemporary art and the art city which is already a museum itself because of its *forma urbis* and its heritage. Therefore, we chose to focus the analysis on the impact of the Venice Biennale on old art museums.

Hence, we present the question: *To what extent does the Venice Biennale affect the number of visitors to the old art museums?* The answer of this research question is somehow twofold. On the one hand, from a quantitative point of view, the International Art Exhibition does not have a notable effect on visitor numbers to old art museums. Despite the sharp increase of the International Art Exhibition's attendance figures which last year attracted 615,000 visitors, up by nearly a quarter from the previous edition, the overall museum attendances do not present a similar tendency. On the other hand, from our qualitative interviews we found out that all the respondents agree on the importance that the Venice Biennale has in Venice and the positive impact it has on the cultural institutions and their visitors. Therefore, we can conclude that the analysis of the figures alone cannot show an objective trend: many other observable and unobservable variables could influence the results. Despite the figures, in fact, even old art museums find it worthwhile to adapt their exhibition program to the Biennale's calendar. Thus, the International Art Show adds value to the cultural scene, despite it seems not to be one of its primary goals: the Biennale operates in Venice because it was born there but it does not have the willingness to enter in dialogue with and coordinate the Venetian art scene.

In addition, a number of further conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. Firstly, it is common knowledge that mass tourism, along with high prices and daily difficulties due to the peculiarity of the city structure, is dramatically affecting the lagoon city and it has consequences on its inhabitants and its cultural scene (Ortalli, 2007). Thus, the main problem is the *quality* of the tourists, not the *quantity*. Mass tourists typically spend only 2.2 nights in Venice and typically have a very busy schedule. Smaller institutions and museums 'suffer' from this, since they do not have the opportunity to be noticed as they are

not on the tourists' track. During the Biennale, instead, even 'minor' museums do consider the Venice Biennale as an opportune moment to set-up special temporary exhibitions despite their position. Thus, it is clear that the temporary show makes a unique impact not only on the cultural sphere but also on the social sphere and the economy of the city: Biennale catalyses 'cultural tourism' (which has to be fundamentally distinct from the low-cost short-break 'mass tourism') which involves foreign tourists, domestic tourists and local citizens (Tang, 2007). Therefore, in the wake of this temporary show, cultural institutions leverage their resources in order to attract art tourists.

Secondly, we believe that our findings clearly show how Venice is an incredible centre of production, contrary to what many people think. Many – even a few respondents to this research – indeed, consider the lagoon city as an 'open air museum', where everything is stuck in time and where many exhibitions are proposed only in order to get big numbers: 'Venice is already dead, as a city. It has risen again, as a showcase' (Cazzullo, 2012). Hopefully, this study reveals that this is not the case of Venice. The present work shows how the Venice Biennale is the major engine of art production in the lagoon city, which makes Venice an 'artistic hub' covered by spots of artistic fervour (Kompatsiaris, 2014, Bonami and Esche, 2005). Cultural actors present in the city spend a lot of time in the organization of the temporary shows. Many respondents, indeed, revealed that a museum needs more than a year to organize an exhibition. When we met them, all of the interviewees affirmed that they were already working on their exhibitions and had already chosen the artist to be shown. From this, we argue that Venice is a centre of art production and that it is an artistic hub which owes much to the place-bounded Biennale, rather than just a 'temporary cluster', whereby all the cultural institutions are getting prepared for the year of the biennial in order to gain an advantage from the cultural 'buzz' (Maskell, Bathelt, and Malmberg, 2006). However, we do not have to commit the mistake of considering Venice alive only during the Biennale. In Venice there is an endless number of permanent cultural institutions, and not only in the visual art sector, which produce culture, give prestige to the lagoon city, and, most importantly, are open to novelty: 'in this city many important world premieres have taken place. For instance, the Fenice theatre has housed the *Madama Butterfly*, revisited by the Japanese artist Mariko Mori, and shows by Kara Walker, William Kentridge, and Rebecca Horn.' As Angela Vettese argued during our meeting: 'this is meaningful: also the world of the lyrics, that in Milan or Parma is very conservative, in Venice is avant-garde'. What we cannot answer, however, is the question: would Venice be so productive without the presence

of the Biennale? As Chiara Squarcina told us, ‘If it was not here? It is impossible to say. It is here and it works very well.’ Of course, Biennale had a pivotal role in the creation of the city’s identity: as Sassatelli (2017) writes, nowadays, the Biennale is a ‘brand’ and it gives added values both to artworks and the host city (Sassatelli, 2017). ‘The Venice Biennale was born and still survives in Venice’, says Angela Vettese, ‘because of the genetic code of the city: it would be a paradox if Venice would not embrace contemporary art events’ (Vettese, 2017, p. 154). The Venice Biennale had a great impact on the Venetian art scene and contemporary art is getting a high position in the island thanks to the endless entities involved in contemporary art production in Venice. Nowadays, the Biennale is so prestigious thanks to these cultural institutions which reciprocally challenge themselves and aim for contemporary ‘continuous upgrades’ (The Director Gabriella Belli, in Giacomelli, 2016). All of this ‘is happening not against the past and the secular artistic tradition, but together’ (Programme of activities 2017, Muve). A further proof of the statement that Venice is an artistic hub and that this is mostly due to the presence of the International Art Exhibition, is the initiative that has been running since the 2010s, *il Carnevale dei ragazzi*<sup>26</sup>, a program addressed to schools which takes place during the Venice Carnival (during which there are not the International Art Exhibition nor the International Architecture one), promoted by the Foundation La Biennale di Venezia, as a clear homage to Venice.

Going back to the focus of our research, during the Biennale, again, the majority of art institutions propose research exhibitions whereby contemporary artists are called to bring unexpected meanings and significant directions and to provide added value to the Venetian art collections and art heritage. Doing so, moreover, these sort of exhibitions reveal the willingness of the lagoon city to respond to what is happening on an international level. The combination of old art and contemporary art, in fact, is a mutual aspect which is taken into consideration by many important museums and institutions worldwide. Even superstar museums, such as the Hermitage (St. Petersburg), the Louvre (Paris), the Uffizi (Florence), and the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna), organize such exhibitions, putting contemporary art in dialogue with their collections and buildings. Art fairs and festivals, such as the section *Frieze Masters*<sup>27</sup> at the Frieze Art Fair, are considering<sup>27</sup> this important interaction between the

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<sup>26</sup> For more information see: <http://www.labiennale.org/it/news/il-carnevale-dei-ragazzi>.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, in 2012, Frieze Art Fair in London, the International annual four-day contemporary art fair which features more than 170 contemporary art galleries from all over the world, introduced the section *Frieze Masters* which allows visitors to discover thousand years of art history, from the ancient era to Old Masters to the late 20th century, in a unique contemporary context.

past and the present; acquisitions and commissions of this sort are increasingly being asked by cultural institutions<sup>28</sup>. This is meaningful: despite the fact that superstar museums already attract large numbers of visitors, they still organize special exhibitions and diversify their offer.

On a policy level, this study shows the pivotal role that museums and cultural institutions should have in local development strategies. With reference to art cities, cultural-driven strategies are needed. Cultural institutions should make systems and act together as economic assets and conveyors of economic, social and cultural values (Russo, 2000). In addition, cities should leverage temporary cultural events, such as fairs, festivals and biennials, and their spillover effects to provide themselves with an image and cultural identity and get to be part of the international cultural fervour (Towse, 2010). Our case-study clearly shows an attempt to do this by the city of Venice, which has many museums and hosts the oldest Biennale in the art world. This is borne out by the importance of the synergy that it is being among the Biennale, the Municipality and the whole cultural sector operating in Venice, as highlighted by the Chair of the Culture Committee, Giorgia Pea, during our interview. Nonetheless, contrary to what we learned from the literature review on temporary events, data about Biennale and tourist flows in Venice through the years seem to show that the International Art Exhibition has not had a big impact on museum visitor numbers. Despite a constant increase in Biennale's attendance and touristic flows, we cannot detect a significant respective increase for the museums. Therefore, we could conclude that Venice and the cultural institutions are not able to leverage that moment. Instead, our qualitative analysis shows that museum directors consider special exhibitions in occasion of the Venice Biennale appreciable and even working well: despite the numbers, still old art museums' directors and curator believe that through their contemporary art programming they are able to meet a more qualified audience. In this regard, this result shows the relevance of qualitative in-depth interviews as it allowed us to analyse the phenomenon and not only limit our analysis to quantitative data. However, unfortunately, from our data we cannot detect the quality of visitors and, therefore, we recommend museums to carry out a survey to visitors in order to show whether or not an effective changes in visitor quality occurs (e.g. asking them their profession, we could detect whether or not, during the Venice Biennale, the museums attract

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<sup>28</sup> The Louvre is an example: the permanent installation of 21st century works and the introduction of new elements in the décor and architecture of the palace are the cornerstone of the museum's policy relating to contemporary art. The museum invited Anselm Kiefer in 2007, François Morellet in 2010, and, later in 2010, Cy Twombly who was asked to design a painted ceiling for the Salle des Bronzes ([www.artdaily.org](http://www.artdaily.org)).

more culture-related professionals). To this regard, we take this consideration as a starting point for further studies, analyzing this phenomenon from the demand side.

Despite having showed interesting findings on the relationships between the International Art Exhibition and the old museums in Venice, and thus having provided related insights on cultural events and tourism's effects on the lagoon city, this study is not free of limitations, which in turn open avenues for future research. Of course, the first limitation is due to time constraints. Most of the respondents, indeed, were met between March 28<sup>th</sup> and April 5<sup>th</sup> 2018 and therefore we were not able to elaborate on the information while doing the interviews. It entails that many important questions which arose in our minds from the interviews and that could have been posed to the next respondents were not brought up. Moreover, the present qualitative interview research is based on a small-scale set of interviews because it is focused on a specific case and the main actors' insights are considered more valuable than a larger set of data. The chosen sample certainly does not include all the actors involved in this process but we have reasons to believe that they are among the most essential ones in the Venetian art scene. However, interviewing museum directors, curators and artists on today's art scene in Venice is not completely reliable as they are responsible for it. Certainly, they show pride and satisfaction and thus this might lead to a non-objective vision of the current situation. To this regard, we are aware that a bigger sample, involving also the demand side and experts from outside Venice might have revealed other important insights, showing, perhaps, disagreement or a contrasting view of Venice's ability to deal with both its contemporary and past heritage. Unfortunately, we were not able to do: on the one hand, a bigger involvement of international art experts would have been impracticable in terms of time and therefore it could have fruitlessly generalised the research instead of making it clearer; on the other hand, the demand side has been put aside because in this year, 2018, the International Art Exhibition does not take place (there is, instead, the 16<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition) and, therefore, interviewing the International Art Exhibition's visitors was not feasible. These considerations may be an input for further research with the aim of understanding the visitors' perceptions and attitude towards such exhibitions: do Biennale's visitors take the opportunity to explore the Venetian art scene? And, instead, how many of them gather in Venice just for the temporary show? Do they need contemporary art to attract them to enter in old art museums? Do they consider the museums in Venice attractive? What is their overall perception about the lagoon city? Furthermore, we are aware that another way to approach this topic would be an in-depth quantitative analysis.



Having seen the results this study led us, we argue that a bigger use of numerical data would be productive. Last, but most important, as stated above, the reasons for choosing the impact of the Venice Biennale on old art museums are justified by the DNA of the lagoon city which has always been characterized by a mix between the past and the present. Despite this choice, we believe that this research could be applied to study the impact that the Biennale has on contemporary art museums. Visitors are likely to visit contemporary art when gathered in the city in occasion of the Venice Biennale and, therefore, we believe that a bigger change in visitor number could be slightly more evident. Nonetheless, we considered focusing our research on old art more challenging.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Interviewees' Overview.

#	Name	Position	Date/Location	Min.
1	Marzia Migliora	Artist	March 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Skype Interview	40 min.
2	Maria Morganti	Artist	March 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Artist studio (VE)	90 min.
3	Paola Mar	Municipality Elderman for Tourism	March 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Municipality, Mestre (VE)	30 min.
4	Gaston Ramirez	Artist	March 31 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Corso del Popolo, Mestre (VE)	30 min.
5	Elisabetta di Maggio	Artist	April 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2018	60 min.
6	Chiara Bertola	Curator	Fondaco dei Tedeschi (VE)	
7	Daniele D'Anza	Curator	April 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2018 Ca' Rezzonico	45 min.
8	Michelangelo Penso	Artist	April 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Liceo Guggenheim, Mestre (VE)	30 min.
9	Chiara Squarcina	Museum Coordinator	April 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Palazzo Mocenigo	30 min.
10	Giorgia Pea	Chair of the Culture Committee	April 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Office, Mestre (VE)	40 min.
11	Angela Vettese	Professor IUAV	April 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 IUAV University	45 min.
12	Paola Marini	Museum Director	April 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	45 min.
13	Michele Tavola	Curator	Gallerie dell'Accademia	
14	Daniela Ferretti	Museum Director	April 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Palazzo Fortuny	45 min.
15	Massimiliano Zane	Cultural Designer	April 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 Strada Nuova, Venice	60 min.
16	Andrea Del Mercato	Venice Biennale's Director	May 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2018 La Biennale di Venezia	45 min.

**Total:** 635 min.



**Appendix B: Coding List.**

	<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Code Definition</b>
<b>Block 1</b>	The Role of Venice in the Art World	Venice as an art city (in the contemporary art world?) Notion of ‘open-air museum’ Centre of production The presence of the Biennale The role of Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia
	The Role of the Biennale in Venice	Temporary cluster Venice as permanent art hub Cultural tourism Conveyor of social, artistic and economic values In dialogue with MUVE ? In dialogue with the Municipality?
<b>Block 2</b>	Visitors to the Biennale = or ≠ to Visitors to Museums	Mass tourism or cultural tourism? Touristic tracks and congestion Visitor numbers to the Biennale Visitor numbers to old art museums Superstar museum (Doge’s Palace)
	The Role of a Museum	The changes in the role of today’s museums (static → dynamic) The aims of a museum (qualitative and quantitative impacts)
	Visitor’ Perceptions Towards Contemporary Art Pieces in Old Art Museums	First visitors’ perception: repulsion Need of keys of interpretation

	<p>Meanings of Contemporary Art Exhibitions in Old Art Museums</p>	<p>Reinterpretation of the art collections = added value  Creation of new narratives  The aim to act in relation to the times  The limits of these projects</p>
<p><b>Block 3</b></p>	<p>Dialogue Between the Present and the Past</p>	<p>The role of Italian heritage  The need of an equilibrium between contemporary art and art from the past  Undeniable comparison between the present and the past in all the disciplines</p>

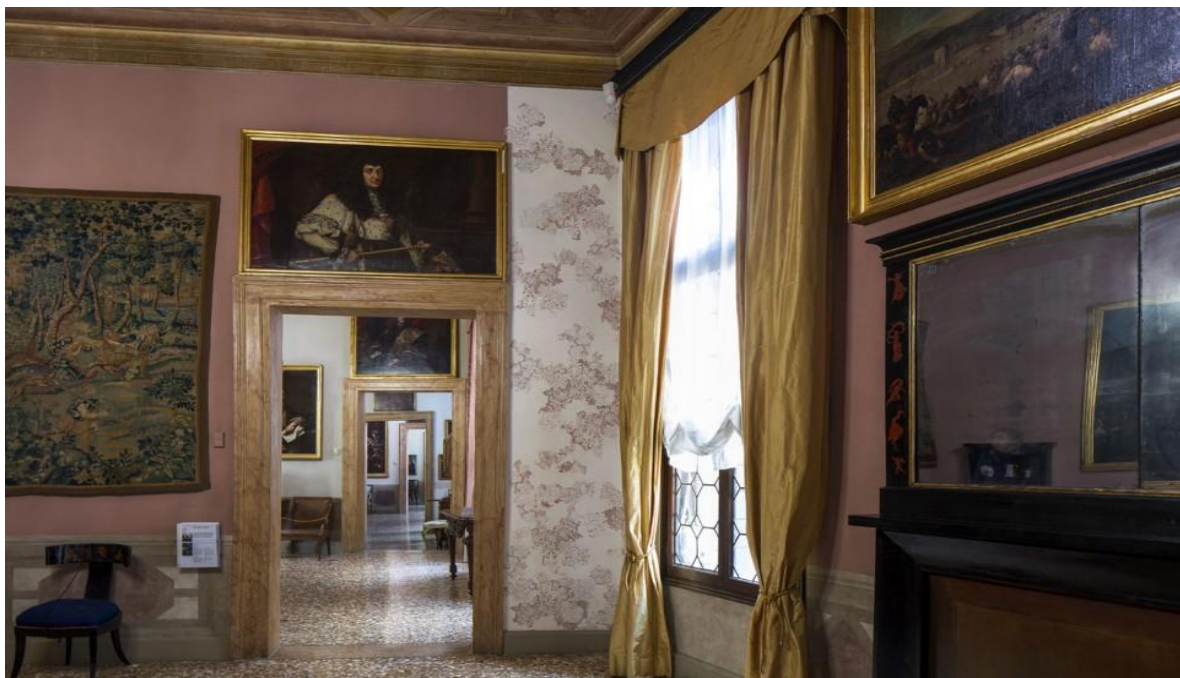
**Appendix C: Exhibits**

*Appendix C1: Elisabetta di Maggio, Almost Transparent Nature* (10 May – 24 September 2017, Fondazione Querini Stampalia).

Curated by Chiara Bertola

in collaboration with T Fondaco dei Tedeschi — DFS

and Laura Bulian Gallery



Elisabetta Di Maggio, *Natura quasi trasparente*, veduta della mostra, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venezia, 2017. Courtesy Fondazione Querini Stampa

*Appendix C2: Maria Morganti, Development of a Painting, project for the Mario Botta Café at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, from 10 May 2017.*

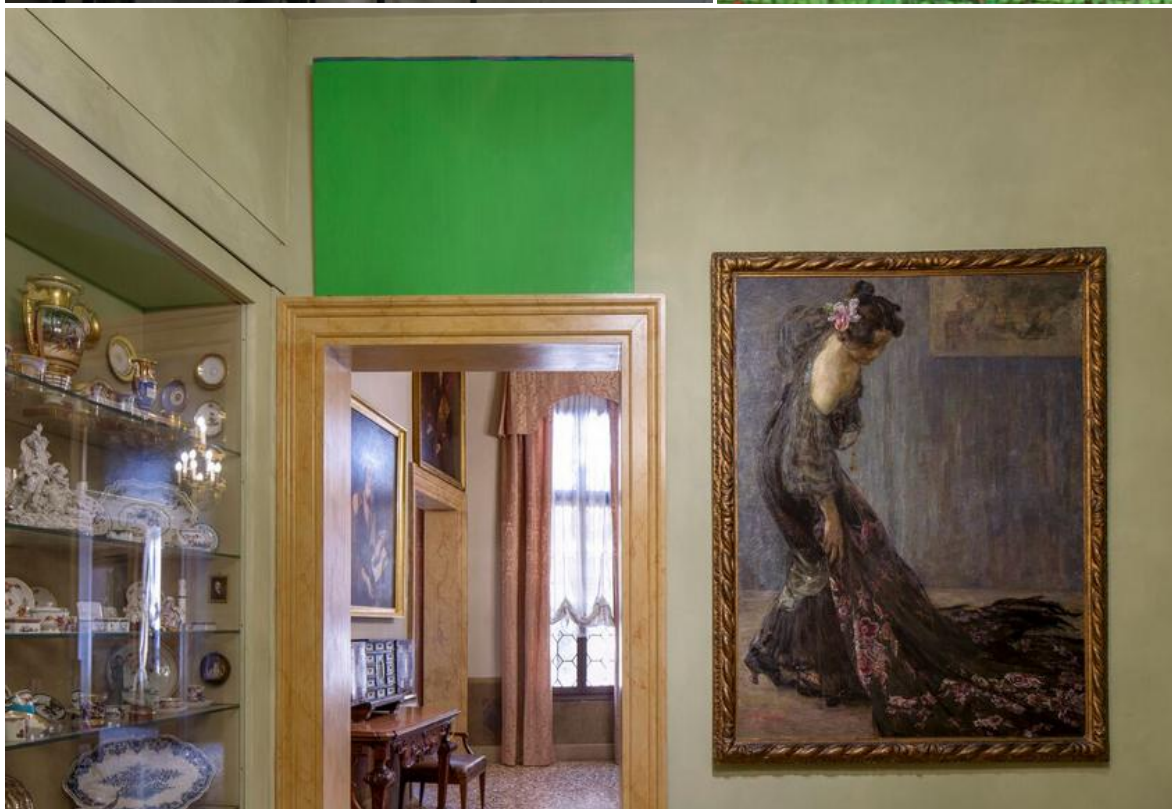
Curated by Chiara Bertola

*Development of a Painting* is the permanent installation created for the Fondazione Querini Stampalia café, designed by the architect Mario Botta, by the artist Maria Morganti.

The permanent installation involves the walls of the cafeteria, which are covered in fabric created and developed in collaboration with the textile manufacturer Bonotto (Press release, *Development of a Painting*).

We met the artist in her own studios, she presented her work to us. *Development of a Painting* has an incredible value within the context because it refers to *Quadro per la Sala dell'800* (Painting for the Nineteenth-Century Room), a previous piece painted by the artist in occasion of the exhibition *Diario cromatico* (Chromatic Diary), held at the Museum in 2008 and which is now part of the Querini's collection as the artist decided to leave it as an authentic proof of the interaction between the past and the present. The *Quadro per la Sala dell'800* was originated by the gathering of the colours seen in the painting *La Modella* (1910), a Alessandro Milesi painting of the Querini's collection and, reproduced in her studio, creating, layer upon layer, her work. Her intention was not a faithful reproduction of the colours, she wanted to experience the colours and bring it into her own studios, moving towards and giving birth to something new on her canvas. More specifically, Maria Morganti took inspiration from the colours of the flower in the hair of the woman of the Milesi, which she envisaged as the palette on which the artist contemplates her colours, cleans her brushes and thinks 'in colours instead of in words'.

The reference to this project within the thesis is meaningful because it is one of the art projects developed by the Querini Stampalia and for the Foundation's spaces. *Development of a Painting* is a work which takes inspiration from our heritage and makes connections with the present, showing the ability of an old art museum to act in relation to its time.



Maria Morganti. *Svolgimento di un quadro*. Fondazione Querini Stampalia, caffetteria, Venezia 2017. Photo: F. Allegretto

Maria Morganti. *Quadro per la Sala dell'800*. Fondazione Querini Stampalia, caffetteria, Venezia 2017. Photo: F. Allegretto

*Appendix C3: Marzia Migliora, Velme (13 May – 26 November 2017, Ca' Rezzonico).*

Curated by Beatrice Merz

The Fondazione Merz and MUVE presented *Velme*, a site-specific installation by Marzia Migliora. The works were on display in several rooms of the Museo del Settecento Veneziano, Ca' Rezzonico Palace. The show was characterised by forms of expression that are recurrent in Marzia Migliora's research and production (Press Release, *Velme*). As the artist told us during our discussion, part of her research is addressed to the study of the urge to possession and enrichment and the exploitation of natural resources which are strictly linked to each other and related to destruction and egoism. With this project, the artist aimed 'to discover something new. Everyone knows what it is happening. The exhibition wants to *reveal* something.' The exhibition was preceded by a research which lasted more than one year and which consisted of site-visits and readings of research papers and original documents. With this exhibition, the artist was able to introduce her work in the museum and put it in a constructive dialogue with the space and the space's history, making clear the connections between our present society and the past.

One of our favourite pieces of the installation was the work *Il mondo nuovo* ('The New World') inspired by the sculptures by Andrea Brustolon, *Etiopi porta vaso*. From chained 'bringers of vases', the artists transformed part of the sculptures in slaves, 'bringers of salt'. Doing this, she evoked the fortune of rich Venetian families thanks to the Venetian saltworks. The sculptures are part of the collection but she moved and turned them facing the wall by the willingness to humanize them. Thanks to these changes, the sculptures metaphorically step forward to 'a new world' (*Il mondo nuovo*).

The reference to this work within the present analysis is the evidence that nowadays museums' collections are often requested to be dynamic (Cataldo and Paraventi, 2007). Nowadays, we have reached the awareness that past collections carry significant meanings related to specific times but that they can also be challenged and bear new meanings, without forgetting the original ones. Thus, our heritage is a precious resource that brings social and cultural values and that raises awareness about the past and the present (Arinze, 1999; Burton and Scott, 2003).



Marzia Migliora, *Quis contra nos*, 2017. *Mondo nuovo*  
Ca' Rezzonico, Sala da ballo, Venice







