



65. *Virgin and Child with Sts Peter Nolasco and Maria de Cevellón (the Virgin of Mercedari)*, by Giovanni Serodine. c.1625–27. Canvas, 200 by 131 cm. (Fondazione Gottfried Keller, Berne, on deposit at the Pinacoteca Cantonale Giovanni Züst, Rancate; exh. Pinacoteca Cantonale Giovanni Züst, Rancate).

One exception to the curators' policy of exhibiting works from the Canton Ticino only is a *Head of a youth* (no.3; Fig.64), which passed through the New York salerooms at the start of this year, and which the curators convincingly attribute to Serodine. The purpose of this little canvas is not, however, clear: it is more of a study than a portrait.

The catalogue,⁵ which profits from a recent photographic campaign by Roberto Pellegrini, re-establishes the artist's *œuvre* which has been muddled over the past two decades by some unsustainable attributions. Detailed catalogue entries give the history and bibliography for each work, with new material for the history of collecting; for example it is interesting that the so-called *Virgin of Mercedari* (no.4; Fig.65), perhaps datable to after 1625, at the start of the twentieth century was in the collection of Juan de la Cruz Lavalle at Cadice, where it was attributed to Zurbarán. Particular attention is paid to reconstructing the web of relationships in Rome between the Serodine clan and the community of artists from the Ticino region.⁶ This exhibition provides the occasion to recognise Giovanni Serodine as one of the most intriguing painters of seventeenth-century Europe.

¹ Catalogues: A. Crivelli, ed.: *Mostra Giovanni Serodine*, (Isole di Brissago, Locarno, 1950); R. Chiappini, ed.: *Serodine. La pittura oltre Caravaggio* (Pinacoteca di Casa Rusca, Locarno, and Musei Capitolini, Rome, 1987); R. Contini and G. Papi, eds.: *Giovanni Serodine 1594/1600–1630 e i precendenti romani* (Pinacoteca Züst, Rancate, 1993); L. Damiani Cabrini and R. Contini,

eds.: *Serodine e brezza caravaggesca sulla 'Regione dei laghi'* (Pinacoteca Züst, Rancate, 2012–13); reviewed in this Magazine, 155 (2013), pp.200–02.

² The painting was last moved in 1987 for the exhibition held at Locarno and Rome.

³ Of the works in the show, only one raises a certain doubt, the *Christ mocked* (no.5), even if the possibility of comparing the head of Christ with the same figure in the *Coronation of the Virgin* would seem to incline in favour of its autograph status, although the use of line and light is not entirely characteristic.

⁴ Conflicting documentary sources suggest that he was born in Ascona either in 1594 or 1600.

⁵ Catalogue: *Serodine nel Ticino*, edited by Giovanni Agosti and Jacopo Stoppa. 144 pp. incl. 129 col. + b. & w. ill. (Officina Libraria, Milan, 2015), €29.90. ISBN 978-88-97737-68-1.

⁶ New information about Serodine's relationship with Rocco Porcari, who worked with Borromini, and with the painter Alessandro Agazzini, can be found in M. Tabarrini: 'Le maestranze del cantiere di San Carlino', in P. Portoghesi, ed.: *Storia di San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane*, Rome 2001, p.194; and L. Mortari: 'Gerolamo Siciolante a Palazzo Spada Capodiferro', *Commentari* 25 (1975), p.97, note 24.

Venice Biennale

by MARTHA BARRATT

THE ENTRANCE OF the **Arsenale** building at this year's **56th Venice Biennale** is a dark, decidedly gothic space. Shed-like, dank and littered with the 'knife-sculptures' of Abel Abdesmed (*Nymphs*; 2015), the glow emanating from Bruce Nauman's sadomasochistic neon works – 'STICK IT IN / MY FACE / VIOLENCE / MY CHEST / RUB IT ON', 'PAIN / ANIMAL / PLEASURE' – is the only source of light. Squinting at knives in the dark, the visitor is plunged into the vision of Okwui Enwezor, the curator of the Biennale, which is somewhat euphemistically titled *All the World's Futures* (to 22nd November). Going further into the long exhibition spaces of the

Arsenale, the brutality continues: molten metal sculptures made from pickaxes, chains and knives by the African-American sculptor Melvin Edwards line the walls of the central aisle like a medieval torture chamber, submitting the visitor to a processional march which holds them in sight of a large artillery gun by Pino Pascali at the end of the aisle. In a subsidiary room, tar-drenched chainsaws by Monica Bonvicini (Fig.67) hang from the ceiling like chandeliers, and opposite, the bizarre objects in Qiu Zhijie's fantastical installation, *JingLing chronicle theatre project* (2010–15), evoke terrible imagined uses. Neither is horror to be escaped in the brighter spaces of the **Giardini**, where the visitor is met with Christian Boltanski's 1969 film *L'homme qui tousse*, in which a masked, ragged body reels backwards and forwards in the dark, vomiting blood.

Such violence, for Enwezor, is an inevitable outcome of staging an exhibition of contemporary art. In his catalogue essay, he asserts that, while artists hold the right to 'disengagement and detachment' from the world, an exhibition is principally a public forum that must 'reflect on the current state of things'; one that he believes exists in 'the terrible wakefulness of new crises, uncertainty, and a deepening insecurity across all regions of the world'.¹ This enormous central exhibition, spread across the two sites of the Arsenale and Giardini, includes works by 136 artists from 53 countries, the majority of which have been newly commissioned. In addition, 89 countries participate with their own pavilions in the Biennale sites as well as across the city – which bustles with the ever-growing number of collateral events and first-rate museum exhibitions.² Expanding on his influential curating of Documenta (1998–2002),³ Enwezor calls for a reinvigoration of contemporary art, now in 'formalist rigor mortis' (p.18), with critical theory as a means of understanding and – crucially – having an impact on what is happening around us.

Unlike the more defined themes of the previous two Biennales (Bice Curiger's focus on the collective in 2011, and Massimiliano



66. Production still from *They Come To Us Without a Word*, by Joan Jonas. 2015. (Courtesy the artist; exh. United States Pavilion, Venice).



67. *Latent combustion #1-#5*, by Monica Bonvicini. 2015. Chainsaws, black polyurethane, matt finish, steel chains, each around 300 by 130 by 130 cm. (Courtesy the artist; exh. Arsenale, Venice).

Gioni's quasi-anthropological 'encyclopaedic palace' of 2013), this year's display favours the 'plural' as espoused by Michel Foucault.⁴ Themes are thus banished and replaced by three so-called 'filters': 'Liveness: on epic duration', which sees the Biennale itself unfolding as performance; the 'Garden of disorder', interrogating the history of the Giardini as a way to explore the fragmented nature of global geopolitics; and 'Capital', posing the Biennale as a 'demonstration' to confront the failures of capitalism and the changing nature of labour.⁵

The first and last of these concerns come together in the ARENA, a new performance space in the central pavilion designed by David Adjaye, the Biennale's architect. Here, every day, actors read from Marx's *Das Kapital*. Based on the Sikh principle of the 'Akhand path' – the continuous relayed recital of the Guru Granth Sahib – these readings were conceived by Enwezor and the British artist Isaac Julien as a central axis of the exhibition, to campaign for the relevance of Marx's text today by encouraging a cover-to-cover (re)reading of it, rather than the partial, quote-bank understanding that is generally held. In performance however, the text becomes abstracted into chanced upon, contextless snippets, and the durational capacity of the piece is stunted by its incorporation into a demarcated performance programme. Any interaction with the text, therefore, is almost entirely symbolic, a contradiction that is compounded in the catalogue as thirty pages are filled with reproductions of frontispieces of *Das Kapital* in its various language editions, reasserting its status either as an impenetrable, irrelevant, historic object or a sacred relic.

More persuasive of Enwezor's assertion that 'Marx is utterly contemporary'⁶ is the amount of work that deals directly with labour, especially in terms of alienation and the social relations of production, these notions expanded through new media to a trans-historical or global perspective. Also in

the ARENA, for example, is a performance by Jason Moran and Alicia Hall Moran in which a woman sings heart-rending slavery-era work songs to a thumping drumbeat and recorded industrial sounds that battle against the singer's confident ostinato, a form passed on by and through the collective as a means of proclaiming agency and ownership over work. Nearby, photographs by Andreas Gursky (Fig.69) conduct an aestheticisation of labour, framing the patterns of global capital as if they are as determined as patterns in nature, as inevitable and beautiful as the underside of a leaf or the ridges of a fingertip.

In addition to the pages from Marx, the catalogue is heavy with documentation. Reproduced are pages from Rousseau's 1762 *Discours*; maps and photographs of the Biennale site from 1928 to 1955; Louis Althusser's and Etienne Balibar's notes from the 1964–65 seminar *Lire le Capital*; and pages from the catalogue of the 1975 Biennale, which was dedicated to Chile in protest at Pinochet's regime – an inspiration for the outward-looking Enwezor. Indeed, the unassailable

influence of the 'documentary turn' in contemporary art over the last decade – artists using the structure of documentary photography and film, the archive, and the museum or ethnographic exhibits – is one of the most visible formal threads running through the Biennale.⁷ Vitrines abound in both the Giardini and Arsenale, from Peter Friedhl's, which are compiled over decades with newspaper clippings and diaries, to those of the Cuban artist Ricardo Brey, who fills dozens of cases with his other-worldly objects in a quasi-museological display. Taryn Simon's *Paperwork, and the will of capital* (2015) investigates corrupt international trade agreements: in each display case, the terms of the agreement are summarised and illustrated with a photograph of the floral table decoration on which the agreement was signed – the flowers are then identified, pressed, and displayed alongside the texts. This potpourri of the categorisation of recent history is as moving as it is absurd, as the despicable nature of these financial abuses is belied by their pairing with a carefully dried hydrangea.



68. Installation view of *I Scream Daddio*, by Sarah Lucas. 2015. (British Council, London; exh. British Pavilion, Venice).

Contributing to the glut of information, there are also 'historical precedents' for this documentary activity, including Walker Evans's series *Let Us Praise Famous Men* (1936), and a room dedicated to the polls conducted by Hans Haacke, from his well-known *MoMA Poll* of 1971 to a new questionnaire conducted on iPads for visitors to the Biennale. Although the relevance of this work to our understanding of the fallibility of the documentary mode has been well trodden in Postmodern art and theory, its inclusion helps rather than hinders the project as a whole, providing the sprawling display with the richness of a visual essay, helping to locate new work in a more familiar narrative of (Western) thought and producing satisfying and instructive reverberations.

The real strength of Enwezor's exhibition, however, lies in individual works, in particular new film and video. A welcome release of tension comes from the video monitors in an installation by Lili Reynaud Dewar (2015), which show the French performance artist exploring the nearby Artiglerie building. Naked and painted scarlet, she poses, dances and preens in the austere halls and hushed libraries – cocking a snook, perhaps, at the academic gravity of her setting. Nearby, Sonia Leber and David Chesworth produce a masterpiece of Eisensteinian montage. The double-screen installation is surreal, funny in parts and breathtakingly on point in the choreography of images, from a tractor race set to the soundtrack of a thriller, to a couple loudly pronouncing their devotion across post-Soviet landmarks and car parks. A quasi-autobiographical video by Fatou Kandé Senghor, *Giving birth* (2015), is astounding – at once a personal testimony and an astute critique of gender in relation to the making of art in Senegal.

The national pavilions pick up on many of the threads of the main exhibition, and some do so very well: museological display informs the Australian Pavilion, with a new building inaugurated by Fiona Hall's intricate and other-worldly *Wunderkammer*, a museum of found and made objects from a fragile natural world on the brink of collapse;⁸ capitalism and its combatants are well represented (both Greece and Canada reproduce shops in their entirety); the legacy of colonialism is explored through song, sculpture and the poetry of Robert Burns in Graham Fagen's immaculate off-site pavilion for Scotland; and the social effects of shifting international borders is explored with a theoretically watertight and very beautiful display by Rashid Rana and others in the joint pavilion for India and Pakistan.

The most impressive response to Enwezor's rallying cry for theoretically inflected display and politically engaged art comes from the German Pavilion, curated by Florian Ebner, head of the photographic collection at the Museum Folkwang, Essen, which interrogates the current place of photography in relation to work, migration and protest.⁹ In one work here, Jasmina Metwaly and Philip



69. *Nha Trang*, by Andreas Gursky. 2004. C-print, diasec, 295.5 by 207 cm. (Sprüth Magers, Berlin; exh. Giardini, Venice).

Rizk turn documentary film on its head by collaborating with factory workers in Cairo to stage a cinematic re-enactment of the closure of their workplace in 2011 (one of hundreds of factories privatised and then closed under Mubarak). Growing out of frustration with the unfulfilled promise of image- and video-sharing internet culture to foster visible change – Metwaly was a co-founder of Mosireev, a Cairo-based collective that aimed to 'auto-archive' the Egyptian Spring and its aftermath by collecting and sharing footage – the film is shaped by the shared (but often conflicting) memories of its subjects to promote what the artists describe as 'empathy through empowerment'. The feelings and resentments of the actors seep through in their performances of themselves, as well as in their exaggerations of characters who were not part of the film crew. The script, which makes use of dramatising clichés, further blurs the line between documentary and fiction; the film makes for compelling viewing.

Despite some notable exceptions, however, many of the pavilions felt somewhat ill-defined and tired, repetitive in their congruence of art-world buzz words rather than representative of a Zeitgeist. In contrast to the somewhat mere group shows in many of the pavilions, both Britain and the USA stand out for their dedication to distinct and mature voices in their

well-honed single-artist shows. Joan Jonas, who received a special mention for the USA pavilion, presents an immersive installation that layers film, projection, sculpture and drawings, the whole narrated with a soundtrack of anachronistic and disquieting Nova Scotian ghost stories (Fig.66).¹⁰ A group of children, dressed in white, circle around one another with images of a beehive projected on them; dogs and horses swim across another screen; dozens of ink drawings of fish paper the walls; and mirrors throughout the gallery reflect these scenes onto and across one another. Time is equally fluid, as Jonas incorporates work from earlier in her career, creating a honeyed web of images that is a vibrant salute to the importance and beauty of the natural world.

Less subtly, Sarah Lucas has doused the British Pavilion in a Bird's-custard Colman's-mustard bright yellow paint, complete with a marigold *Maradonna* sculpture reposing in the entrance, gigantic penis raised high in the air in welcome.¹¹ Inside, black, bulbous 'tit cats' stalk among Lucas's Muses (modelled on nine of the artist's closest female friends), who wrap their plaster-cast lower halves around toilet seats, splay out on tables and lean over washing machines, most often puffing on cigarettes, which Lucas has inserted into all available orifices (Fig.68). It is a highly personal, unapologetically bawdy display of private

jokes and long-wrought friendships. It is certainly brash, but it also holds a certain classical restraint in its display, which comes perhaps from a confidence in the sculptures to speak for themselves, without the reams of information encapsulated in so much of *All the World's Futures*.

Enwezor set himself a colossal task in his ambition to reflect 'the state of things' for 'all the world', one which – quite knowingly – is bound to fail. The vagueness of the theoretical framework, however, does little to help, and much work is left swimming in a murky post-Marxist, postcolonial, post-digital pool that obscures the specific contexts of its production. Furthermore, the central exhibition, at times, feels rather old fashioned, in particular the emphasis on documentary-inflected art and 'relational' art, both trends born of the 1990s. However, Enwezor's knowledge and selection of new work, particularly that of African, Middle-Eastern and diaspora artists, is unparalleled, and an immeasurably valuable contribution to the display of international contemporary art.

¹ Catalogue: *All The World's Futures*. By Okwui Enwezor, with a foreword by Paolo Baratta. 2 vols., 635 + 315 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (Marsilio Editore, Venice, 2015), €99. ISBN 978-88-317-2128-8; pp.17-18.

² See especially *Henri Rousseau. Archaic Candour* at Palazzo Ducale (6th March to 5th July), reviewed in the June issue (no.11; pp.435-36); and *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933*, at Museo Correr (closed 30th August); to be reviewed.

³ Enwezor curated *Documenta 11*, Kassel, 8th June to 15th September 2002.

⁴ According to Foucault, the role of art is to 'free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia [...] not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization'; M. Foucault: 'Preface', in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari: *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1983, p.xiii.

⁵ Enwezor, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.94-95.

⁶ *Idem* in 'Global entry: Okwui Enwezor talks with Michelle Kuo about the 56th Venice Biennale', *Artforum* (May 2015), p.xx.

⁷ See Enwezor's exhibition *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, at the International Center of Photography, New York (18th January to 4th May 2008); for a recent survey of such work, see J. Stallabrass: *Documentary. Documents of Contemporary Art*, London 2013.

⁸ Catalogue: *Fiona Hall: Wrong Way Wrong Time*, edited by Linda Michael, with essays by Michael and David Hansen. 136 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (Australia Council for the Arts and Piper Press, Sydney, 2015), A\$39.95. ISBN 978-0-9808347-3-4.

⁹ Catalogue: *Fabrik - Jasmina Metwaly / Philip Rizk, Olaf Nicolai, Hito Steyerl, Tobias Zielony*. Edited by Florian Ebner with essays by Ebner, Marcel Beyer, Tom Holert, Elke aus dem Moore, David Riff, Sarah Rifky and Lars Willumeit. 220 pp. incl. 95 col. ills. (Walther König, Köln, 2015), €28. ISBN 978-3-86335-747-4.

¹⁰ Catalogue: *Joan Jonas: They Come to Us Without a Word*. Edited by Jane Farver, with texts by Ute Meta Bauer, Joan Jonas, Ann Reynolds and Marina Warner. 160 pp. incl. 180 col. ills. (Gregory R. Miller & Co., New York, 2015), \$50. ISBN 978-1-941366-07-3.

¹¹ Catalogue: *I Scream Daddio*, by Sarah Lucas, with texts by D.H. Lawrence and Julian Simmons. 152 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (British Council, London, 2015), £25. ISBN 978-0-86355-770-5.

Franciscan art

Florence

by JANET ROBSON

THE EXHIBITION *L'arte di Francesco: Capolavori d'arte italiana e terre d'Asia dal XIII al XV secolo* at the **Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence** (to 11th October), is a wide-ranging exhibition of some one hundred works of art, the majority made for Franciscan churches in Italy between the foundation of the Franciscan order of friars in the early thirteenth century and the end of the fifteenth century. The walls of the Accademia's temporary exhibition space, which can often seem claustrophobic, have been painted to resemble dark brown stonework, an evocative design that effectively sets off these religious works. The exhibits are thoughtfully hung and beautifully lit, affording the visitor an excellent opportunity to enjoy them at close quarters.

The opening section of the exhibition is one of its most potent. Introducing the Franciscan order and its art, these two rooms focus on duecento images of St Francis and on painted crucifixes. The curators have brought together an impressive number of the earliest Italian panel paintings of the saint. Four simple standing figures signed by Margarito d'Arezzo are a testimony to the speed with which the saint's image was disseminated after his death (cat. nos.13-16), but the highlight is the bringing together of three *vita* dossals of St Francis (of only eight surviving) from Pistoia, Pisa and Orte, the latter newly restored (no.8; Fig.72).

Panel crucifixes were fundamental visual expressions of Franciscan spirituality, and particular attention is, rightly, paid to the small *Giunta Pisano Crucifix* from S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi (no.10), the most historically significant surviving Franciscan cross. It probably replicated key features of the lost monumental crucifix painted by Giunta in 1236 for the basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi,



71. *S. Bernardino of Siena*, by a Neapolitan artist. c.1465-75. Tempera on panel, 184 by 105 cm. (Sala Capitolare, Monastero di S. Chiara in via Vitellia, Rome; exh. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence).

the Franciscan mother church, which introduced the figure of the *Christus patiens*, the suffering Christ, to Italian panel crosses.

After viewing the *Giunta Crucifix*, the visitor must choose whether to go east or west. Turning right leads into three rooms devoted to the Holy Land and China, while turning left continues the Italian chronological journey through trecento and quattrocento Franciscan art. This physical parting of the ways seems symbolic of a conceptual disconnect between the two major sections of the exhibition,



70. Nestorian crosses. Yuan dynasty, China, c.1272-1368. Bronze, from 3 to 8 cm. (University Museum and Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong; exh. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence).