

# BETWEEN FIRE AND ASHES

by Pier Luigi Tazzi

## I. Xxxxx and yyyy

I have never contemplated the idea of xxxxx. Nor have I even had an idea of it.

About four years ago, when I returned to this country from which I write, and where, since then, I have spent a good part of the year every year, was not so decisive a xxxxx, even though it happened, with the sense of loss it brought, inasmuch as, in the western culture to which I belong, what is considered its opposite, namely the expectation and the foreshadowing of a new yyyy. But even then, I was not dealing with a planned project and the will to implement it. It was a chain of events due to different and successive motions of affection and to a series of calls; calls which, although vague, were becoming increasingly persistent. Then, everything moved in unforeseen directions, not free of waste and uncertain outcomes. And now, even here, as elsewhere, the matter, the presence and the inescapable question of xxxxx, reappears to me in all its unrepressed virulence.

However, in this current state of affairs, once again the claims of yyyy prevail- the fascination of beauty and the eternal promise of happiness, the positive feeling despite the dissipation of the modern world, the surprise of the unexpected versus the vicissitudes of chance and destiny, the sense of closeness to the other, also intended as other than self - rather than the claims of xxxxx, which are not only a threat, but the predictable outcome of every human story, whatever you do or you think you are doing to avoid it. At the most, we can aspire to a state of benevolence - from poetry to ecstasy, from Apollo to Dionysus, or Pan - which would silence the terror / tremor of this inevitable fate. Sometimes this benevolence is manifested in fullness, in the density of presence, and presences, where nothing remains hidden, if not for a sort of temporary (happy) forgetfulness.

What intoxicated me was always the warmth of yyyy.

## II. Venedig Venice Venezia

Friedrich Nietzsche and not so much Richard Wagner.

Thomas Mann and not so much Luchino Visconti.

Igor Stravinsky and not so much Peggy Guggenheim.

James Lee Byars and not so much the Biennale.

And finally, Ca' Dario, and not so much Harry's Bar.

But maybe I should have started this way: Francesco Guardi and not so much Canaletto.

### III. Now

If art is a "fresh widow" (Marcel Duchamp), the site that hosts it on this "occasion" (Eugenio Montale) is a room with a big fireplace, the Sala del Camino, in an ancient building on Giudecca Island. Giudecca, as now, on this "occasion", the site of art, such as "fresh widow," has, according to different etymological hypotheses regarding its name, the following meanings, taking into account the writer's conviction that the established, historical truth of one of the hypotheses does not exclude the others: Jewish ghetto; area of imprisonment for offenders judged by trial - zudecà; site of a tannery, which made use of vegetal substances derived from brushwood - zueccam in Veneto and Trentino - for the hides. If skin is the physical instrument of eros, the limit and integument of living bodies, then tanning is a sort of embalming with the aim of producing a new material for use; or, finally, just the usual "garden of weeds" - zueccam - (Jorge Luis Borges).

The Island (originally a place for art in London created by the Italian artist Daniele Geminiani) on Giudecca reflects everything mentioned above. And it is, once again, as a distant reflection of a space in London, a windowless room in the basement of a building which was previously used as a darkroom for a photographic studio. The Venetian project is part of the biennale called 24 Month Meditation, conceived and carried out by Robert Vincent, a [1] working group which includes Daniele Geminiani and which constantly varies in the number, type and role of its components. The artists participating in the Venetian event have been linked together on this "occasion" solely by Robert Vincent and are: Haitians Andre Eugène and Jean Hérard Celeur; Mexicans Gabriel Rossell Santillán, Naomi Rincón- Gallardo and José Antonio Vega Macotella; British Matthew Stone - as well as Daniele Geminiani [short circuit]- together with two other Italians, Nico Vascellari and Remo Salvadori. Everything is located and articulated in an interior space. The relationship between light / darkness is equal to the physical occupation by the objects which constitute or create the artwork. The light emanation is a non-static development of the pieces (Antonio Vega Macotella's video and Nico Vascellari's chandeliers) or the relationship with primary light sources (sunlight entering the red screened skylight, the Red Blood typical of the darkroom, determines the time in which the exhibition is open to the public, or the light of the candles) or secondary light sources (white light lasting one minute which separates the two parts of the mentioned video). The exhibition space is a total space, Gesamtkunstwerk, which finds its foundations in ritual, meditation, and in apotropaic action.

Until this point, the writer has merely walked around in the space, before it became what it is.

From here on, but then as for every other exhibition, the foreseeable aporias.

Pier Luigi Tazzi

Bangkok between late May and early June of 2010, between fire and ashes

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1] See The Island, notes on April 18, 2010, e-mail message sent to Pier Luigi Tazzi 15:45:54 Tuesday, April 20, 2010, p.2: "I have not contemplated any choice that was not already chosen by my emotions or by the relationships existing between me and these artists.

## ALL EXHIBITS ARE SOLO SHOWS<sup>1</sup>

We met Daniel through email. He contacted us for additional information about our resident program *Spot – Studio dal Vivo* (Live Studio)

Many had written during that time: honestly it surprised us quite a bit. It didn't seem real that there were so many artists in Italy interested in attempting a collaborative project.

The agreement of Spot precludes the resident artist from directly showing his personal work; becoming instead an artistic director of one space. All of the interest made us hope in the beginning of a new era.

The enthusiasm was quickly subdued when we understood that the majority of the artists who had written to us didn't have any idea of what the premise of our project was. Almost everyone was asking, more or less explicitly, to organize personal shows at the *Sala del Camino*.

The space and the partners must have seemed inviting.

Daniel seemed different.

Hello,

I'm an Italian artist who lives in London, my name is Daniele Geminiani. I am writing to have more information about your resident program as I'm working on some research which is developing similarly to your statement. Because of this I've imagined a possible involvement for your space. The ISLAND is the name of my studio, an independent space already active with different projects and collaborations, including UNIT 7, a residence program that I am developing. I invite you to visit the website [www.islandtheisland.org](http://www.islandtheisland.org) so that you may have more complete information about my activity. Currently I'm working as artist/curator of the first bi-annual of Haiti, for which I've planned a pavilion off site in London where I present 4 sculptors from Port-Au-Prince.

From the projects that I am working on at the moment, perhaps a common ground can be found through our reciprocal positions in conceiving the usage of one space.

We started writing and speaking together. Before Christmas we were able to meet. We had hypothesized hosting Daniele, transferring The Island to the island of *Giudecca*. At the center of it all would have been his interaction with the Sculptors de la Grand Rue of Haiti. The voodoo and meditation would have been founding elements. Nothing concrete. Nothing official. Daniele had warned us, "What happens naturally when I work is the development of an idea that may form in different ways, sometimes incorporating various projects as they are presented"

Some friends had discouraged us from investing our energy in this project. "You are an association, you don't have any structure that protects you! You cannot afford to just throw yourselves into a project this random and risky."

We thought, however, that those protected by structures almost never take a risk. We wanted to trust ourselves.

On 12 January 12th 2010 the earthquake shook Haiti.

In April Daniele returned to Venice. He stayed a few days at the Armenian college where he immediately felt comfortable. Even if not oriented, he seemed to have a strange familiarity with Venice and with us. He has the ability of becoming a part of the places and situations even if they are not his. In solitude he enters into contact with the space that surrounds him. He chooses to concentrate.

His is a look of defiance. He challenges what is, he negates it, he exchanges it, he transposes it. That is how his small studio in the east end of London became The Island. And that is how The Island docked at the *Sala del Camino*.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote : Daniele Geminiani. Venice 29 May 2010

We got together in Faenza, in the section “/off” of the Contemporary Art Festival. The encounter was at the Seismic Observatory of Raffaele Bandandi. Sitting next to a seaquake simulator was Daniele. Next to him: Gabriel Rossell Santillàn. They were engrossed and awaiting their speeches.

Raffaele Bendandi (Faenza, 17 ottobre 1893 – Faenza, 3 novembre 1979) was an astronomer and Italian seismologist. Bendandi was self learned and never published a scientific exhibit of his research. He elaborated his own theory on the nature of earthquakes and their causes. His studies and his predictions were not accepted by the scientific community.

Daniele had two suitcases. His residency at “spot” would have started soon. Soon we would also be joined by André Eugène, Jean Hérard Celeur e Bazile Ronald: survivors of the quake, from Grand Rue di Port-au-Prince, they were arriving in a city that is slowly sinking because of the influx of the tides and the out-flow of the inhabitants. The end is not always furious.

Daniel and Gabriel arrived during a hot day. The suitcases had multiplied. With them there were fragments of Remo Salvadori, Matthew Stone, Antonio Vega Macotela, Naomi Rincón-Gallardo, André Eugène, Celeur Jean Hérard, Nico Vascellari. Casually and fatally together. With difficulty we took them to Giudecca.

This is The Island. It belongs to all who see it.

Francesco Ragazzi and Francesco Urbano

**André Eugène**

Born in 1959 in P-au-P, Haiti

Andre Eugène is the progenitor of the Grand Rue movement. Eugène started out as a house builder, but influenced by the creative energy of his neighbourhood, he started to learn traditional sculpting in wood. 'There was always something happening in our neighbourhood, the carnival band, Pep Samis, many sculptors and Vodou all around. This made me begin the life of an artist.' Eugène's work became increasingly influenced by contemporary Haitian artists such as Nasson. Eugène fused the fetish effigy with an apocalyptic MTV futuristic vision. Much of his work is figurative using human skulls for heads and imbued with a bold sense of irony, sexuality and humour.

**Celeur Jean Hérard**

Born in 1966 in P-au-P, Haiti

Jean Hérard Celeur was trained as a sculptor by his brother. At first he was involved in more traditional sculpture but gradually his work became more subjective. His most powerful piece to date is in the permanent collection of the Frost Art Museum. The work evokes the horsemen of the Apocalypse, three skulls crown three skeletal equine contraptions made from motor-bike chassis', the central figure thrusting a massive thick wooden carved phallus. The piece is bristling with menace, anger and a dark sexuality evoking the triple tragedies of AIDS, political oppression and poverty. 'My work has social aspects, intellectual aspects and represents the people's demands for change. I live in the reality that deals with poverty everyday which informs my work all the time.'

**Gabriel Rossell Santillán**

Mexico City, 1976. Lives in Berlin

His Huichol project is based on specific research and ethnographic work on field done in Mexico (Nayarit) in the Huichol community and at the Ethnologischen Museum in Berlin-Dahlem. In this project he developed a method in which he connects, in a delicate manner, the portrayal of rituals and cultural practices of the Huicholes with his ethnological knowledge, maintaining the characteristics of his current artistic mediums and an open and organic approach to materials.

**Naomi Rincón-Gallardo**

North Carolina, U.S.A. 1979 . Lives in Mexico City, Mexico.

Between April 2008 and July 2009, I went to Mexico City Penitentiary and to Santa Martha Acatitla Women's Prison every Monday to deliver a painting and drawing workshop for prisoners. Participants were admitted regardless of their academic level.

At the Peni, we gathered in the Scholar Center's library: a big room with bookcases holding textbooks, the five senses' posters and maps of Mexico on the walls, a Globe, a didactic anatomy's dummy with a smashed face and, inside a neon lamp, a swallow's nest. From the penitentiary entrance, after the routine inspection I used to cross by myself a corridor between the gym and the football field, passing in front of dormitories with a fence dividing us.

At the Women's Prison, we worked in the "Collage Workshop", a narrow corridor adapted to be a classroom, with two long plastic tables and chairs. To get there, a labyrinthic path must be walked through, and the lack of visual references forces you to repeat yourself "right, right, right, left, left, left" as you walk.

**J. Antonio Vega Macotella**

Born in Mexico City, 1980; Lives in Mexico City, Mexico

I have been going to jail for the past two years now, once a week. I stay for about seven hours each time. So by now I have actually spent more than 500 hours in prison. The first time I went I was truly scared. And then, shit, when the security guards stopped accompanying me inside: it was fucking frightening.

There are more than 3,500 men in this jail and when they saw this unknown outsider coming into their world, well, let us say they were not happy at first. I started going because I have been working with the concept of time for more than 6 years now. And one of the things that most impresses me is how time has been appropriated by institutions and rules outside of us. They have taken it away from us. A prison is a kind of physical representation of this idea of appropriated time, time that has been modified from without us and taken from within us, put into somebody else's hands; hands that point to the place where we have to be and what we have to do as we stand there, waiting for instructions from the pointing finger which is in fact our jailer. That is what doing time means. Doing time for others, abiding other people's instructions. So I started visiting jail. To get a better understanding of this concept..

**Matthew Stone**

Born in 1982.

Matthew Stone is an artist and shaman based in London. In the past few years he has been researching the relevance of OPTIMISM as a method for avant-garde thought and art practice. Weekly artists salons, performances and his interview-based blog "Interconnected Echoes" form the basis for a truly collaborative practice.

"Optimism is the Vital Force that Entangles itself with and then Shapes the Future"

Stone's work revolves specifically around creative interactions and community, based on the idea that individual autonomy can be successfully combined with the power of collectivity.

**Nico Vascellari**

Born in 1976. Lives in Vittorio Veneto and New York

Artist/shaman with the power to captivate and entertain, driven by the urge to shape and unite widely different forms of expression in a constant process of osmosis and redefinition of the boundaries between art and life.

Coming from the underground music scene as frontman of the punk ensemble With Love, Vascellari makes use of musical and performative experimentations, which have to be considered as the core of his operativity, this strategy always includes a space for exhibition, a public and a wide margin of improvisation and unpredictability.

The tribal, collective dimension, and the quest to create an all-embracing experience play a key role in his works. The spaces that host his performances are dense and involving, with the focus on improvisation and interaction with the public. Besides this aspect, his actions always draw on personal experience, and represent a public version of domestic situations, gestures and citations of the self, an overlapping of multicultural references that mixes the grotesque, the baroque and the commonplace.

In a never-ending exchange between entertainment, art and sculpture, artist's interventions are based upon the energy transitions that humans make possible when they gather, and at the same time is focused upon the understanding of the beastly metaphor lying underneath the attitudes of modern civilization.

**Remo Salvadori**

born in 1947. Lives in Milan.

The cycle of works, *Nel momento*, is heir to the stylistic and thematic elements evident in works such as *Disegno di luce*, 1974, and *Ordine familiare del tempo* of the same period. In a highly structured plan of a formal simplicity, the works in this latest cycle state a preference for light, a dialectic relationship between light and dark, hallmarks of Salvadori's work.

"If I remember rightly" he writes, "at the time, I simply kept folding and cutting the lead, until it was almost impossible to fold and cut any more. (...) There can be no more than a certain amount of cutting, and no more than a certain amount of folding. (...) It is like an extension, like creating a dictionary where you keep increasing the words. In short, you increase the words that circumstances allow you to increase."

His works demonstrate a perfectly balanced composition, despite the resolute strength that they enclose. The material is gently folded by the artist ready to channel new forms of light, to present itself and its context in a new way.

"Working with lead brought to memory of drawings done with lead point in the 1500s – I was entranced by its relationship to white, the white space was very obvious compared to the dark areas, which of course, bore the density of the mineral; I was aware of this from the beginning."

The material is highlighted, the artist's contribution emphasises its infinite potential, all his work is pure style of form and content. "The rhythmic circular motion of the cuts and folds transforms the surface, the sheet of lead. The areas of light and dark vibrate from the direct intervention that communicates an instant and presents itself to the observer and his waking conscience."

**Daniele Geminiani**

born in 1975. Lives in London.

Robert Vincent is a project started in 2004, in which various people collaborate from many different cultural realms and backgrounds, collectively taking part in the development of a proposed or planned piece of work or research. Robert Vincent is continually shape-shifting, expanding and contracting its nucleus of collaborations, based on each work's ultimate needs. Since 2004 it has been operating internationally, showing in group exhibitions and carrying out independent initiatives.