



associazione culturale
RO.SA.M.
Santa Croce 1094, Venezia 30135
C.F. 040050700279

Presents:

The Vanity of Vanities All is Vanity di Anne Katrine Stenstad

curated by Roberta Semeraro,

El Magazen dell'Arte

Dorsoduro 1375, Venezia

May 9 – June 30, 2015

On the occasion of the 56th Biennale, the Norwegian artist Anne Katrine Stenstad returns to Venice with *The Vanity of Vanities*, a brand new exhibition linked to *Aquae*, the theme of the Expo Venice 2015.

The exhibition, consisting of two video-installations, takes place in an old warehouse for gondolas, where water rises fortyfive inches.

Stenstad's video *The Swamp* is an ode to the flourishing landscape of the Mississippi Delta; an immersive video installation with mirrors surrounding the viewer. Swamps are natural habitats, with numerous rivers and brackish lagoons. Here the two distant locations Baton Rouge in Louisiana (where the video was shot) and the Venetian lagoon are related, giving the viewer an amalgamated sensation of anticipation. The reflected elements on the surface of the water, slightly rippled by the humid and heavy air blowing in the swamp, evokes a vision of the ecstatic.

In her verses, Emily Dickinson describes boredom as a pleasure akin to the stagnant water of a swamp. In the contemplative state, boredom befalls melancholy.

The swamp becomes a *Sanctum Sanctorum*, as the philosopher and writer Henry David Thoreau articulated in *Life in the Woods*.

Water, a source of pure energy, can save man from the infinite void we stand at the threshold of in a purely technologically controlled world.

In *The Swamp* you can hear the distant notes of gospels and spirituals, sung by the slaves of Louisiana. These ancient voices are in Venice mixed with voices of the gondoliers, transporting travelers through the labyrinthian channels, liberating their hearts with song.

In Leopardi's misanthropy of nature as the bad stepmother, Nature reflects herself in the mirror of vanities, asserting her timeless beauty. Beings can only admire and respect her in order to preserve life on the planet. Yet the vanity of vanities commiserates with the nature of man, notwithstanding caveats of man's limits, the son of David preaches that "one generation goes and the other comes", while the earth remains, just like the century old stone walls perched on poles in the muddy floors of the lagoon.

In the video, *The Vanity of Vanities*, the vibrant colors of *The Swamp* disappear and water is transformed to a deep, dark ocean of destructive and chaotically forceful waves.

The crashing waves against the rocks are representative of societal arrogance; the Ego inflates to the point where the wings of ascensionism cause its own destruction, burn and crash to earth.

In *The Tao of Physics* Fritjof Capra writes: "I was sitting by the ocean one late summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance... I 'saw' cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I 'heard' its sound, and at that moment I knew that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers worshiped by the Hindus."

Sparkling molecules of the sea visible in light of the sun or the moon, shine like stars in the heavens. *The Vanity of Vanities* perpetuates this exaltation.

Senstad's installation invites the viewer to submerge in the cosmic eternal properties of water and evocative soundscape.

Reflected in the canals for centuries, the beautiful city of Venice, embraced by the sea, her unfaithful lover, has nothing but disregard for the constant flow of the oblivious, like fish in a lagoon, predatorily prepared to devour each other for a further jiff of life.

Roberta Semeraro