

STORIA DELLA NOTTE
E DESTINO DELLE COMETE
HISTORY OF NIGHT AND DESTINY OF COMETS

Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion Onofrio Cutaita

Curator Eugenio Viola

An artwork by Gian Maria Tosatti

Press release

Italian Pavilion
59th International Art Exhibition

La Biennale di Venezia

April 23, 2022 - November 27, 2022

Tese delle Vergini, Arsenale

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Venice, 19 April 2022 - History of Night and Destiny of Comets (Storia della Notte e Destino delle Comete) is the title of the exhibition project of the **Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia** (23 April - 27 November 2022), promoted by the **Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity - Ministry of Culture**. Curated by **Eugenio Viola**, the exhibition presents the work of a single artist for the first time in the history of the Italian Pavilion: **Gian Maria Tosatti**. The curator chose a project that would act as a powerful statement of contemporaneity, capable of restoring a bold reading of the present and giving Italy a unique voice.

The Italian Pavilion will be inaugurated Friday April 22 at 4.30pm. Will participate: the Minister of Culture **Dario Franceschini**, the President of La Biennale di Venezia **Roberto Cicutto**, the Major of the City of Venice **Luigi Brugnaro**, the Director-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Ministry of Culture and Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion **Onofrio Cutaia**, the curator **Eugenio Viola** and the artist **Gian Maria Tosatti**.

History of Night and Destiny of Comets is conceived as a vast environmental site-specific installation that occupies the whole space of the Tese delle Vergini. It proposes a vision of the current state of humanity and its future prospects. The work is conceived as an intermediary device that contains and mixes a variety of languages, as usual in

Tosatti's research, which integrates literary references and visual art, with stimuli from theatre, music, and performance. A complex, experiential narrative machine that leads the visitor along a sensitive, sometimes familiar and sometimes unsettling path, with the aim of creating a new awareness and concrete reflections on the possible destiny of human civilisation, which fluctuates between the dreams and errors of the past and the promises of a future that has yet to be written in part.

History of Night and Destiny of Comets tells of the difficult balance between man and nature, between sustainable development and territory, between ethics and profit, proposing an aesthetic reading of this scenario and offering an unprecedented platform to develop a comprehensive and profound debate on these issues. The exhibition is envisioned **according to a theatrical ratio that articulates the narrative into a prologue and two acts:** *History of Night* and *Destiny of Comets*.

Italy, with its particular historical background as a young nation recovering from two world wars and affected by an extraordinary economic growth, the so-called "Italian miracle", provides the scenario for this exhibition. The space of the first room is a **journey into the 'Bel Paese'** and coincides with the *Story of Night* or rather the symbolic story of the rise and fall of the Italian industrial dream.

A series of industrial spaces, originally used for various productions, silently guard obsolete and disused machines, abandoned and lonely objects, in which there is no trace of the human presence that once made them useful and functional. Disturbing scenarios prepares for a final vision in which the imagination is overturned in a true epiphany.

The settings recall *La Dimissione (The Dismissal)* by Ermanno Rea (Feltrinelli, 2002) and the expanse of warehouses that stretch across the landscape between Ragusa and Cremona, the only paradoxically homogeneous panorama of a hypothetical provincial Italian journey.

The ***Destiny of Comets* is the final vision**, which reminds us that indignant nature has not forgiven man since the time of the Flood. Through this image emerges a powerful and unsettling epilogue, an inverted disturbing element, the sign of a possible peace. Therefore, the exhibition ends with a message of hope about the destiny awaiting this humanity that, like a comet, has crossed the universe with a great luminous trail.

The last room opens to a nocturnal and troubled sea beating against its walls. A row of half-sunken street lamps indicates that until recently there must have been a square and a street in front of us, where now only dark water flows.

On the threatening surface of this dark and inscrutable sea there unexpectedly rises an inversely disturbing element, the sign of a possible peace: a swarm of hundreds of fireflies flying over a world where nature has regained its dominion and restored its cruel law of supreme beauty and harmony. It is a vertigo that transforms desolation into painful compassion and hope.

«I would give the whole of Montedison for a firefly», writes Pier Paolo Pasolini at the end of a famous article "The Vacuum of Power" (*Corriere della Sera*, 1 February 1975) about an epochal passage told through the metaphor of the disappearance of fireflies, understood as the final and heinous crime of the new fascism: neo-capitalism.

Today, with Montedison gone, perhaps the *Destiny of Comets* can be symbolic of this firefly hovering on the great dark expanse of water with which the work concludes. It alludes to the consequences of ecological catastrophes, but also makes them explode, as in the tradition of Greek tragedy, the cathartic element of the work.

The Italian Pavilion will be a continuous forum throughout the exhibition - in person and online - thanks to a **calendar of scientific-informative meetings** that will bring together professionals and experts from the eco-ecological field and protagonists from the world of culture on the themes of the exhibition. The conference programme will extend from Venice to the rest of the world, thanks to a number of international institutions that will organise debates on the themes addressed by the Pavilion, real embassies of the *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* abroad. All the themes dealt with, the ideas generated and the reflections developed will be collected on a website available to anyone wishing to deepen their research into alternative models of life and development. In parallel, an extensive corpus of audiovisual documents of the work will be created, from its creation to its presentation to the public.

History of Night and Destiny of Comets explicitly refers to the **United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** (signed by 193 member countries in September 2015 UN) by stimulating a public debate about the environment, the urban landscape, and sustainable ecologies. The project touches the whole themes explained in the 17 goals signed by the United Nations, related to the health and education of future generations, the protection of nature, sustainable development in terms of territory and rethinking ethical models of production, consumption and profit.

The Italian pavilion has also been realized thanks to the support of Sanlorenzo and Valentino, the main sponsors of the exhibition. Thanks also to the sponsor Xiaomi, the main technical sponsors Folio, Italstage, FPT Industrial, and the technical sponsors Bonotto, Fondazione Morra, Laterlite, Marcegaglia and Mosaico Studio. Special thanks also

to all the donors whose names appear in the colophon who have made a fundamental contribution to this project and to the media partner Il Giornale dell'Arte.

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Minister of Culture

Italian Pavilion 2022

59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

by Dario Franceschini

Minister of Culture

The exhibition project presented this year by Eugenio Viola and Gian Maria Tosatti is fascinating and crosses different artistic languages, investigating the contradictions of the contemporary world and the relationship between man and nature.

The Italian Pavilion, entrusted for the first time in its history to a single artist, is thus conceived in the principle of creativity and innovation and is fully in tune with the general themes desired by the curator of the 59. International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, Cecilia Alemani.

Tosatti proposes a profound reflection on the current historical moment of humanity, a complicated time that a two-year pandemic is being followed by a war scenario in the middle of Europe, with repercussions also for the world of culture and for the Biennale itself. The artist has conceived a spiritual journey, capable of enlightening consciences. This is an intention that fully responds to the mission of the International Art Exhibition, which has always been a centre of resonance of creative energies in full harmony with the demands of the present time.

Contemporary art is experiencing a moment of great vivacity and adherence to the urgencies of today.

Thanks to *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* and to the important work of the Biennale, which has been able to guarantee the realisation of the first International Art Exhibition directed by an Italian curator with *The Milk of Dreams*, it will be possible to take another important step in this direction.

Text of the President

Italian Pavilion 2022

59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

by Roberto Cicutto

President La Biennale di Venezia

The history of the Biennale tells us that in the beginning the Central Pavilion at the Giardini was called 'Pro Arte' and hosted the International Exhibition in which Italian and foreign artists participated. With the advent of Fascism the Pavilion changed its name to Padiglione Italia, but not its intended use.

At the beginning of the 20th century, national pavilions began to be built (the first was Belgian Pavilion in 1907). From 2001 to 2005 the Italian representation was exhibited at the Padiglione Venezia at the Giardini (with an appendix at the Sala Marceglia in 2005). In 2005 the President of the Biennale Davide Croff decided with the Directorate-General for Contemporary Art and Architecture of the Ministry of Culture to dedicate a space to Italy at the Tese delle Vergini in the Arsenale, where the exhibition curated by Franco Purini at the 10th International Architecture Exhibition was held for the first time in 2006.

This brief history of the Italian Pavilion as it is today (and which was never the Italian Pavilion in the Giardini as many believe) is meant to tell the story of the origin of the place where artist Gian Maria Tosatti (whose project was presented by curator Eugenio Viola, after being nominated by Minister Dario Franceschini from a shortlist presented by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Ministry of Culture) will have to face a very ambitious challenge: to fill an indoor and outdoor area of 3,000 square metres, larger than the Cinecittà's Teatro 5 Novembre where Fellini created his fantastic worlds, with art, thought, work and creativity. And he will have to do it alone, being the first time that a single artist has been called upon to represent our country.

I have already said that as a former cinema man I would have been happy to produce a film with the title *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* because it is full of promise and mystery. Yet, as Tosatti explains, his tale will be steeped in much reality and divided

into two chapters. The first recounts "the rise and fall of the Italian industrial dream", the second "how nature, outraged since the time of the flood, does not forgive man". Two chapters that tell us an important part of our country's history, and a macroscopic theme - that of outraged nature - on which we have reached a point of no return. These themes perhaps share the hope that human beings will find the strength and ability to recognise their mistakes and try to put them right with political and intellectual honesty.

We don't yet know what that will be, but we do know that the end of the journey will deliver a message of optimism and, I imagine, of responsibility on the part of all. I wish Eugenio Viola e Gian Maria Tosatti a great and affectionate 'good luck', and I hope that all of us, after visiting the Pavilion, will leave with a sense of gratitude for their work.

Commissioner Text

Italian Pavilion 2022

59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

by Onofrio Cutaia

Director-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Ministry of Culture

Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion

The Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Ministry of Culture organises national participation in the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, hosting, in the Italian Pavilion, the project *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* curated by Eugenio Viola which, for the first time in its history, presents the work of a single artist, Gian Maria Tosatti.

Art can highlight the complexity of the contemporary world, its contradictions and short-circuits, but it can also propose imagery capable of reinterpreting reality, stimulating visionary glances that open up to the future. With this in mind, the Directorate-General promotes, for the Italian Pavilion 2022, a project capable of constructing worlds that are both real and imaginary, that look at the present and its critical aspects, but also at its potential, projecting towards a tomorrow with undefined connotations that are still to be constructed.

The theme indicated by the curator of the Biennale Arte 2022, Cecilia Alemani, *The Milk of Dreams*, inspired by the book of the same name by the surrealist artist Leonora Carrington, is based on the idea that the instruments made available to art can produce systems capable of reinventing existence through an incessant process of metamorphosis and rethinking, which can question the very concept of the human being and the notions of identity, diversity and responsibility towards the planet.

Eugenio Viola's curatorial proposal also refers to worlds in transformation and to a sensitive attention to the ecosystem. Also the title - *History of the Night and Destiny of Comets* - evokes the possibility of looking at the repercussions that the political and economic systems of the contemporary age have on today's world with a decidedly critical, but at the same time extremely poetic, eye. So, the Italian Pavilion 2022 aims to present - through a multifocal vision of the languages of contemporaneity - not an exhibition, but

an immersive experience within the spaces of the Tese delle Vergini at the Arsenale, strongly transformed by the artist's work into a visionary and at times dystopian path.

The Italian Pavilion, inaugurated in 2006 at the Arsenale, consists of the two large spaces of the Tese delle Vergini, with a total area of 1,900 square metres, and the Giardino delle Vergini, an outdoor area of about 1,000 square metres. Gian Maria Tosatti's artistic project will occupy the entire space of the Tese.

Also this year, the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity will offer a programme of initiatives for the public of the Italian Pavilion, exploring some of the themes introduced by Eugenio Viola and Gian Maria Tosatti's project.

Form

Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity Ministry of Culture

The Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity is the office of the Ministry of Culture that deals with contemporary creativity. In the last ministerial organizational decree of 2019, one of the main objectives was to strengthen the actions for contemporary creativity with a view to the future and a greater investment in competences for the contemporary and digital world. In addition to the activities consolidated and implemented on the three historical axes, the Directorate-General foresees a strong integration between all these themes and between the different languages, as there are no separate sectors in the present, but a connection between the different creative fields.

For years, the Directorate-General has been working - in different ways and at different levels - with foundations, museums, cultural centres, associations and other public and private bodies involved in contemporary creativity in Italy. In this collaboration, public and private entities alike contribute to the realisation of important intervention actions. The main objectives of the Directorate-General also include the promotion of all its areas of competence through a coordination action that can network, from a system perspective, the experiences and activities of those who have been working for years in the fields of research and promotion of creativity, education, relations with the public and with local communities, developing joint, innovative and sustainable projects and opening an effective channel for dialogue between the public and private sectors.

The promotion of talent in the visual arts (including photography, video and performance), design and architecture is one of the Directorate-General's strategic objectives, which it develops and implements through targeted programmes. Among the structural measures to support contemporary art is the *Italian Council*, an international programme specifically dedicated to promoting Italian talent abroad, now in its tenth year. With the aim of promoting the international mobility of Italian artists, curators and creators, the Directorate-General has strengthened its collaboration with MAECI and the Italian cultural institutes in recent years and, in addition to the synergy in supporting the *Giornata del Contemporaneo (Contemporary Day)* promoted by AMACI, has launched various foreign residency awards and scholarships such as the *Premio New York (New York Award)*, the *Premio Berlino (Berlin Award)*, the *Premio Barcellona (Barcelona Award)* and the *Premio Mosca (Moscow Award)*. Also in collaboration with MAECI, the Directorate-General has launched the *Cantica21* project, an initiative to promote and enhance Italian

contemporary art by supporting the production of works by emerging or established artists and exhibiting them in Italian cultural institutes. Support for contemporary art continues with the public notice *PAC - Piano per l'Arte Contemporanea (Plan for Contemporary Art)*, now in its second edition. This planning has also been confirmed in a specific plan for photography, the *Strategia Fotografica (Strategy for the Photography)*.

The Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity also exercises a management and monitoring function for the Foundations for Contemporary Creativity established with ministerial participation: La Biennale di Venezia (limited to the Italian Pavilion during Biennale Arte and Biennale Architettura), the Triennale Milano, La Quadriennale di Roma and MAXXI in Rome.

Ministry of Culture | Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity

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History of Night and Destiny of Comets

Edited by Eugenio Viola

(Excerpts from the exhibition catalogue, published by Treccani)

[...] The correlation between epidemics and progress has been scientifically proven. Today there is a lot of talk about spill-over infections between species as the cause of the most terrible epidemics of recent years: Ebola, SARS, bird flu, AIDS, and COVID-19. These phenomena remind us how urbanization and the effects of human expansion have profoundly altered ecosystems on a planetary scale.

Given the present situation, how can we step back and think about the environment? What sort of public debate do we need to engage in concerning the urban landscape and sustainable ecologies? What role can art play in building a better world once the crisis is over? And, lastly, what is its real potential in bringing about change in society?

Over the past twenty years, Tosatti has created a consistent corpus of works that is unique on the Italian artistic scene, and one that interacts with the contemporary international experiences that are redefining a whole approach to environmental installations. In actual fact, Tosatti's works are more than just environmental installations. They come in the form of complex inter-media devices that combine the destinies of Angelo Trimarco's *L'arte e l'abitare* [Art and Living], 2001, with an intricate web of historical, artistic, social, political, literary and theatrical references.

Looking at his works from a retrospective point of view, it is clear that Tosatti has created a whole constellation of works in which each one paves the way and is the reason for the next. It is no coincidence that he likes to work in cycles. What these cycles have in common is an ambitious synthesis of the arts, in which aspects involving environmental art and performance art come together to destabilise the visitor's spatial and temporal coordinates. They are also conceived to bring about physical and emotional interaction and participation, and to challenge the utopian-avant-garde tradition of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "synthesis of the arts".

History of Night and Destiny of Comets is in some ways unique in Tosatti's oeuvre, who is accustomed to skilfully using minimal slippages to give new meaning to pre-existing spaces. In this case, considering the nature of the venue - the Tese delle Vergini at the Venice Arsenal, which are protected and therefore untouchable - the work was designed to be built entirely from scratch within the space. *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* reflects the difficult balance between Man and Nature, sustainable development and territory, ethics and profit. These elements already appeared in condensed form on the first page of the diary that Tosatti sent me when responding to the invitation to present a project for the Italian Pavilion. Like literary sources, writing has

after all inspired, informed and assisted all his artistic research. I had become accustomed to this habit of Tosatti's ever since the days of *The Seven Seasons of the Spirit* (2013-2016), a project whose "visions" he had always told me about in advance in the pages of his diary, in a disorienting redrafting of Horace's ideal: *Ut pictura poësis*.

History of Night and Destiny of Comets is an experiential device in an essentially theatrical format that splits the story into two acts, which are the two parts that form the evocative title of this project.

The *History of Night* is introduced by a muted prologue: an abusive superfetation, a tumorous growth that offends the grandiloquent entrance to the Tese, ushering the visitor, in spite of himself, into a different space-time dimension, inhabited by just a few desolate objects. A bulletin board, and an obsolete machine that gives rhythm to the monotonous lives of factory employees, who are forced to clock in and out, preparing the visitor for the sight of a whole string of factory interiors.

Act I shows us silent blocks of buildings. Any human presence is banished. The first interior contains piles of machines inexorably condemned to technological obsolescence. In the second, huge extractors that are no longer connected to anything hang in surrender from the ceiling, like the lives of many jobless victims of the merciless law of industrial profit. From this industrial shed, one can also go into an apartment built into a portion of it. It was once home to the caretaker of the factory, or to its owner, if the output of the factory was on a family scale. An eerie, bare, minimal atmosphere pervades these petitbourgeois interiors, which are violated in their false intimacy by the visitor, who finds himself, almost unconsciously, turned into a voyeur by proxy. The third shed is inhabited by textile machines illuminated by a dim light hanging from high. They are still there, neatly arranged, as if the workers who operate them have momentarily gone off for their lunch break. A series of folders on the walls remind us that lives were once lived in this place, given rhythm by the entry and exit registers, and by the files of invoices and budgets.

These alienating, empty settings appear like scenes from a postindustrial metaphysics that metaphorically retraces the rise and fall of the great Italian industrial dream, from the mid-1960s to the present day.

[...] the settings that Tosatti evokes actually refer to a later historical moment, pushing the hands of time further forward, to between the twilight of the past millennium and the dawn of the new. They are truly dystopian scenarios, far removed from the optimism and drive of the Italian "miracle" and much closer to the atmospheres so dear to Ermanno Rea's *La dismissione* [*The Demise*]¹.

¹ E. Rea, *La dismissione*, Rizzoli, 2002.

And here we are reminded of the dark side of industrialization: the leak of dioxin between Seveso and Meda, the cloud of arsenic in Manfredonia, the tumours and leukaemia in the areas of Taranto and Bagnoli, and the toxic waste, buried for years and burnt in the so-called "land of fires" described by Roberto Saviano.² The endless expanse of warehouses from Ragusa to Cremona comes to mind - the only paradoxically consistent panorama on a hypothetical trip across all provincial Italy, which now shows us the idle muscles of machines that "would still like to work", reflecting all the frustrations of a working class that has reached the end of the line, with its unemployment benefits and difficult relocations. Because behind the surrender of industrial civilisation there is also a human side. There is the uncertainty among the families and the workers in Taranto who have to choose between dying of cancer or dying of starvation.

The spatial ambiguity and the sense of instability, which have always accompanied Tosatti's interstitial spaces, come together here in a reflection on time, in a way that is destructured and brought back to a continuous, incoercible present that has the power of memory and the potential for remembering lives. As Hans Belting points out, it is no coincidence that "images live thanks to the paradox they illustrate, which is the presence of an absence".³ Tosatti acts as a seasoned archaeologist of the present, and here it seems he enjoys cannibalising the debris of Italian industry, skilfully studying its abandoned objects in order to give them a new context. By doing so, he brings about an initial semantic shift, transforming old, disused machines into sculptures, and then showing them once again for what they really are: helpless industrial machines and equipment, no longer used and ready to be stored away or discarded. These machines, modestly offering up their curves and volumes, looking stunning in the dim light cast on their twists and turns, are thus celebrated for their sculptural qualities. In actual fact, they have an ambivalent, melancholy power, for, despite themselves, they still retain traces of their past, of the materials they have churned out, of the parts they have assembled, of the fabrics they have sewn together.

The sewing machines, silent protagonists of the epilogue of Act I, at the culmination of the *History of Night*, give off a pungent, oily smell that evokes the idea of a still functioning textile factory. These machines are simply not yet ready to stop working. They scream out micro-stories of their past existence, before Tosatti immolates them on the sacred altar of art. He does this as part of a vision that transforms the solemn aisles of the Tese - which are themselves a powerful example of industrial archaeology - into a restless, involuntary museum of memory that belongs to a dystopian vision of reality. While the work takes shape, I realize how the silence of the machines and of the empty factories not only alludes to the great underlying theme of the Pavilion, but also seems to convey - with agonizing precision - the atmosphere of a war that has caught us off guard. It is as if the work were transcending the artist's intentions, looking even farther ahead and telling the story of what even the artist himself did not know at the time. Finding oneself inside the work, in the battered remains of idle industries, with work benches left empty and the oppressive

² R. Saviano, *Gomorra: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples' Organized Crime System*, English ed., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

³ H. Belting, *Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology*, English ed., The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

absence of men and women, gives one the impression that one is in the closest possible place to Kyiv under attack or Odessa under the bombs (two cities that are dear to Tosatti, who lived there in 2019 and 2020), with their work places empty as people fled. And all of this without the need for a single reference, a single indication. But then again, as Beatriz González, one of the greatest living Colombian artists, likes to say, "Art says things that history cannot".

In the light of what is going on today, *History of Night* reverberates as a painful metaphor for a "sleep of reason" that goes far beyond industrial Italy and has harsh words to say about the defeat of an entire civilisation that is unable to become better.

This vision consumes what is left of Act I, setting the stage for the final epiphany: the *Destiny of Comets*, in which the world of the imagination turns into an authentic, hallucinatory and cathartic vision. Indeed, the last industrial shed unexpectedly opens the shutters of its huge loading bay onto a wild, nocturnal sea that crashes against its walls. A row of semi-submerged street lamps suggests that, until quite recently, out there in front of us, there must have been a city square and a road. But now there is only dark water, which has invaded everything, and its power reminds us how abused Nature never forgives Man. Since the dawn of time.

The Flood is a recurring theme in many mythological traditions. It is a cyclical, destructive and palingenetic event⁴ of universal rebirth.

As is the figure of the biblical Noah.⁵ This is no coincidence, for water has always been both a necessity and a danger, for all peoples, of all times and at all latitudes. Mircea Eliade warns that the waters preceded every creation and periodically they reinstate each one, remaking it in itself 'to purify it', contemporaneously enriching it with new latencies and regenerating it⁶. The Flood is therefore the periodic return of the primordial waters that cleanse the cosmos and renew its foundations.

The *Destiny of Comets* looks at what the future of mankind may be and it directly calls us into question as visitors of this monumental work. We are now undeniably faced with a shift in values, and we are brought down to size and made to feel part of nature, to fall in love with its laws, and discouraged from ever wanting to lord it over them again. *Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia*

⁴ The term "palingenesis" appears in Stoic philosophy to indicate the rebirth of the universe after its destruction by fire. The concept, which had already appeared in Hellenistic literature, with different meanings, was taken up by the Stoics to refer to the cyclical "restitution" or "reestablishment" of the cosmos after its periodical destruction. In the finalistic vision of the kingdom of God in Christianity, palingenesis concerns both the individual, who is given new life and made Christian, and the rebirth that, at the end of time, will come about with the "parousia", or Second Coming of Christ in glory

⁵ The characteristics of which also appear in *Utnapishtim* in the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, in the Sumerian Ziusudra, and in the Aztec Coxcox. But also in Powaco, dear to the native Americans in Delaware, and in the Celtic Dwytach, the Chinese Nuwah, and the Patagonian Sze Kha, as well as in Noa, revered by some indigenous peoples of the Amazon.

⁶ M. Eliade, translated from *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, ed. P. Angelini, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008, p. 192.

tangunt ("There are tears of things and mortal things touch the mind"),⁷ recites a famous verse of the *Aeneid*, in which, through the mouth of the Trojan hero, Virgil reminds us of our mortality, of our ephemeral and fleeting existence, to banish any arrogant illusion we may have of inextinguishable and imperishable eternity.

This is Aeneas' lament about the impotence of man, who sinks into the sea of existence without ever being able to re-emerge.

And yet an inversely disturbing element - a sign of a potential peace - unexpectedly appears over the menacing surface of this dark, inscrutable sea: a swarm of hundreds of fireflies rises up over a world where Nature has regained the upper hand and restored her cruel laws of supreme beauty and harmony. This vertiginous swarm turns desolation into agonizing compassion, into hope for the *Destiny of Comets*, which is to say, the destiny of humanity that has swept brightly and rapidly across the Earth, while never really being guaranteed the right to inhabit this planet forever.

"I would give all of Montedison for a single firefly", writes Pier Paolo Pasolini at the end of a controversial article entitled *Il vuoto del potere in Italia* ("The power vacuum in Italy").⁸ In February 1975, a few months before his brutal murder, the Italian intellectual denounced the disappearance of fireflies, which acquired emblematic value as the sign of an epochal change in Italian history: "Fireflies began to disappear in the early 1960s, due to air pollution, and, especially, in the countryside, due to water pollution (the blue rivers and transparent canals)..."⁹

The disappearance of the fireflies is thus a metaphor for a dramatic change that Pasolini refers to as (yet another) cultural genocide: neocapitalism. Now that Montedison is gone, maybe the *Destiny of Comets* can symbolically represent that firefly, poised in the air above the vast expanse of dark water that ends the work. It alludes to the consequences of ecological catastrophes, but it also makes the cathartic element of the work explode, as was the tradition in Greek tragedy, at least from Aristotle onwards.

In Survivance des lucioles [*Survival of the Fireflies*], which - conveniently in these uncertain times - aims to ensure "a politics of survival",¹⁰ Georges Didi-Huberman offers a more possibilistic twist to the oracular pessimism of the later Pasolini. Is it really true that fireflies have

⁷ Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book I, verse 462. Aeneas has arrived near Carthage, before meeting Dido, when he sees the frescoes of the temple of Juno with scenes of the Trojan war, and pronounces the famous phrase to his faithful Achates. Aeneas has arrived near Carthage, before meeting Dido, when he sees the frescoes of the temple of Juno with scenes of the Trojan war, and pronounces the famous phrase to his faithful Achates.

⁸ The article first appeared in the *Corriere della Sera* on 1 February 1975 and was later republished in a book, *Scritti corsari* (Garzanti, 1975) as *L'articolo delle lucciole*. Didi-Huberman's references are to P.P. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e la società*, ed. W. Siti and S. De Laude, Mondadori, 1999.

⁹ P.P. Pasolini, *Il vuoto del potere in Italia* [*The power vacuum in Italy*], cit.

¹⁰ G. Didi-Huberman, orig. ed. *Survivance des lucioles*, Éditions de Minuit, 2009.

disappeared? Has the genocide of fireflies that Pasolini denounced over forty years ago really taken place?

The French philosopher suggests that fireflies emit a discreet light that can be seen even in times of horror and apocalypse. "To understand fireflies you need to see them in the present moment of their survival: you need to see them dancing alive in the middle of the night, even if that night is swept away by some fierce spotlight".¹¹

Believing in the erratic glow of fireflies means trusting in one's own times and in the possible epiphany of the image. "It is up to us to make sure fireflies do not disappear [...]. We ourselves - to one side in relation to the kingdom and glory, in the gap that opens up between past and future - must transform ourselves into fireflies and thus reform a community of desire, a community of glowing, of dances in spite of everything, of thoughts to be conveyed. We must say yes in the night filled with flashes, and never be satisfied with describing the no of the light that blinds us".¹²

The intermittent light of the fireflies reminds us of the effort and joy of cultivating, malgré tout, a view of our time that is neither distracted nor sclerotic in its despair. For Didi-Huberman, images are fireflies that continue to dwell in the dark. They have not disappeared. On the contrary, they survive in their intermittency, ready to rise up again and regain possession of the future.

This same intermittency brings to life Tosatti's aesthetic device, which is based on the contrast between light and darkness: on the one hand, the street lamps of mass culture that illuminate the (now submerged) stage of our "society of the spectacle" and, on the other, the fireflies that are returning as redeeming but fragile elements, opportunities offered up as guides, fleeting flashes in the darkness that can show us the way out of the new Flood.

History of Night and Destiny of Comets acts as an authentic multidimensional screen that collects and shows the images generated by each individual visitor, making each visit a quintessentially subjective, unrepeatable and therefore unique experience. Tosatti's device, which he has designed as an impeccable scenography of spaces, transforms the mundaneness of the ordinary into something that is quite extra-ordinary, giving it an aesthetic quality that is also - and especially - intrinsically emotional. Tosatti metaphorically opens a window onto a parallel world, reflecting aspects of the real world while always remaining unreal. Indeed, he deliberately evokes almost archetypal emotions and sensations, which therefore affect most people, incorporating enough details to make them immediately recognisable but without giving them any excessively personal or defining characteristics.

His proverbial skill in recreating these "interstitial spaces", which can be considered as the fundamental elements on which Tosatti's work is based, takes us in a different direction. It takes

¹¹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹² Ibid., p. 92

us into a vision that banishes the initial melancholy, filled as it is with an inescapable sense of ruin, of the past, of history and of the persistence of memory, and it leads us into a proactive, spectacular vision, into a spectacularly emotional representation of the human condition.

[...] *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* is built on this urgency, offering a sensational and unyieldingly optimistic vision of the present, creating a balance between the errors of the past and the prospects for the future. Indeed, the work does not express any dramatic position, but rather a proactive, optimistic one: the critical issues of the present are used and interpreted in a way that will help us take on the challenges of the future. After all, in these uncertain times, optimism needs to be considered as an ethical necessity, almost a moral obligation.

The meta-pandemic condition now offers us a chance to rethink Humanity, taking up and giving new impetus to the challenge of a truly momentous crisis, which obliges us to bring into question our habits and attitudes, our lifestyles, methods of political action, and international relations, and to start coming up with a new vision for the postpandemic world.

From this point of view, the fireflies become an emblem of nature's survival, against all odds and against the toxic actions of man. The case of Venice is well known, for its normally murky, muddy waters became surprisingly clear, and filled with fish, during the first quarantine, which suddenly put an end to normal human activities.

In the end, Nature always gains the upper hand. And, perhaps, the faint lights of the fireflies are the only thing that can lead us through to the end of the night.

Biographies

Onofrio Cutaia

Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion

Onofrio Cutaia is the Director-General for Contemporary Creativity - Ministry of Culture and Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia since January 2021.

Born in 1959, he graduated in Law from the University of Catania.

In 1990, he became an official of the ETI Ente Teatrale Italiano (Italian theatre organisation). From 2002 to 2007, he was director of the Mercadante Theatre in Naples, which became a public initiative Teatro Stabile under his leadership. In 2007, he returned to ETI as Director-General, a position he held until 2010.

Among the many initiatives carried out during these years are the programming of the Teatro Valle in Rome with the *Monographs of Scene* project, the *Theatres of the present time* projects for new creativity of young groups and again *Spaces for contemporary dance*, with the aim of promoting the artistic work of Italian dancers and choreographers. Under his direction, there are also numerous international initiatives, including the project to promote contemporary dramaturgy *Face à Face*, which, thanks to a bilateral agreement between Italy and France, has led to collaboration with important international festivals (Avignon, Istanbul, Barcelona, Madrid, Moscow, Amsterdam, Santiago de Chile, New York, Berlin).

He is then appointed to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, as Head the Unit for Theatrical Activities in the Directorate-General for Entertainment.

In July 2014, he was appointed Director-General for Tourism Policy.

In October 2015, he is appointed Director-General of Entertainment, where he remains for five years, until December 2020.

He was a lecturer for the course 'Theatre Management Models' at the DAMS of Roma Tre University and for the course 'Production and Organisation of Theatre and Dance Shows' at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy of La Sapienza University in Rome.

<https://creativitacontemporanea.beniculturali.it>

Biographies

Eugenio Viola

Curator of the Italian Pavilion 2022

Born in Naples in 1975 and lives and works in Bogotá, Colombia.

Eugenio Viola is the current Chief Curator of MAMBO - Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, in Colombia. From 2017 to 2019, he was the Senior Curator of PICA - The Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts in Perth, Western Australia. From 2009 to 2016, he was Curator at the MADRE Museum in Naples, where he was involved, since 2013, in developing the museum's collection. Here he co-curated the first major institutional exhibitions in Italy of Boris Mikhailov and Francis Alÿs, a site-specific installation of Daniel Buren and, retrospective exhibitions devoted to Vettor Pisani and Giulia Piscitelli.

He has collaborated with numerous Italian and international institutions, curating exhibitions devoted to, among the others: Regina José Galindo (Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, 2016); Karol Radziszewski (CoCA - Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu, Torun, 2014); Mark Raidpere (EKKM - The Contemporary Art Museum of Tallinn, 2013); Marina Abramović (PAC - Milan, 2012); Francesco Jodice (MSU - The Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 2011), ORLAN (MAMC - Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Saint Etienne, 2007). In 2015 he curated the Estonian pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. He has curated over 70 exhibitions in Italy and abroad, over 50 catalogues and books, and contributed to numerous international publications.

Viola has a Ph.D. from the University of Salerno on "Methods and Methodologies of Archaeological and Art Historical Research" and is a scholar of the experiences related to performance and the body. On this subject, he has edited the monographs dedicated to Teresa Margolles (Edizioni MAMBO, Bogotá, 2019); Regina Jose Galindo (Skira, Milan, 2014); Hermann Nitsch (Morra Editions, Naples, 2013); Marina Abramović, (Sole 24 Ore Cultura, Milan, 2012); ORLAN (Charta, Milan-New York, 2007).

He has collaborated for many years with the American magazine *Artforum* and Italian *Arte*. His writings have also been published in *Flash Art*, *Segno*, *Exit Express*, *Arte e Critica*, *Enciclopedia Treccani* and many other Italian and international magazines and publications.

<https://www.eugenioviola.com/>

<https://www.mambogota.com/>

Biographies

Gian Maria Tosatti

Artist of the Italian Pavilion 2022

Born in Rome in 1980 and lives and works in Naples.

Trained in performance, he began his artistic journey in Rome in 2005 investigating the border between architecture and visual arts, creating site-specific environmental installations that would become the hallmark of his work. Between 2008 and 2016, he lived and worked in New York before settling back in Naples, Italy. His projects are long-term investigations into issues related to the concept of identity, both on a political and spiritual level, designed for entire buildings or urban areas. His practise often involves communities connected to the places where his works take shape.

He is the current artistic director of the Rome Quadrennial for the triennium 2021-2024 and also works as a columnist and journalist for *Il Corriere della Sera* and *Opera Viva* magazine. He writes essays on art and politics and has recently published *Experience and Reality* for Postmedia Books. *Esperienza e Realtà. Teoria e Riflessioni sulla Quinta Dimensione*. [Experience and Reality. Theory and Reflections on the Fifth Dimension].

He has developed exhibitions and personal projects in numerous national and international spaces, including: A4 Arts Foundation (Cape Town, 2019); Manifesta 12 (Palermo-Catania, 2018); Homo Novus Festival (Riga, 2018); Madre Museum (Naples, 2016); Hessel Museum of the CCS BARD (New York, 2014); the Salerno Archaeological Museum (Salerno, 2014); Morra Foundation (Naples, 2013-2016); the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (New York, 2011). In 2017 he won the New York Prize and in 2019 his exhibition project *My heart is empty as a mirror* was among the winners of the VII edition of the Italian Council.

The exhibition at the Museum Madre in Naples in 2016, curated by Eugenio Viola, was the artist's first solo exhibition in an Italian public museum. The first anthological exhibition about his career, curated by Vicente Todolì, is being programmed for 2023 at the Hangar Bicocca in Milan.

<http://www.tosatti.org>

Public Program

Public Program

Initiatives on the occasion of the Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity - Ministry of Culture

On the occasion of the Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, promoted by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity - Ministry of Culture, a series of events (Public Program) is planned aimed at widening the view of other realities of Italian and international contemporary creativity in a diverse and transversal way, spreading the themes of *History of the Night and Destiny of Comets* throughout the world.

Contents and Objectives

The Public Programme, coordinated by **Adriana Rispoli**, aims, on the one hand, to symbolically unite the south and the north of the peninsula, approaching Venice and Palermo, passing through Naples, and, on the other hand, to connect Italy with the rest of the world. It aims to disseminate the guidelines of the project for the Italian Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2022 and to **involve artists and creators** in a series of talks (**Giulia Piscitelli, Andrea Mastrovito, Eugenio Tibaldi, Stefania Galegati**), performances (**Dewey Dell**), ecowalk (**g.olmostuppia**), whose poetry in various fields combines the contemporary urgencies of a reinterpretation of history and a necessary search for a new ecological and social balance, while seeking an international dialogue.

The public program will include a series of lectures and performative actions in collaboration with **Ca' Foscari University**, Venice and will establish a network of "embassies": Museums and cultural institutions, both national - **Museo Madre, Naples; Marevivo Onlus, Venice; Fondazione Merz - ZACentrale in the spaces of ZAC - Zisa Arti Contemporanee Pavilions, Palermo** - and international - including: **MAC Lima, Peru; Belgrade Cultural Center, Belgrade, Serbia; MAC, Montreal, Canada; MSU Zagreb, Croatia; ZOMA Museum, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia; MALBA, Buenos Aires, Argentina; EMST State Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece; A4 Art Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa; AGWA Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia; MAMBO, Bogotá, Colombia** - invited to organize independently meetings that will contribute to create a polyphonic mosaic of interventions on the global themes that are protagonists of the Italian Pavilion 2022, namely the problematic balance between man and nature, sustainable development and territory, ethics and profit, especially where the debate on post-industrialization and environmental sustainability is urgent for various reasons.

Tutte le attività del Public Program saranno aperte al pubblico e documentate sui canali social e sul sito nottecomete.it.

All activities of the Public Programme will be open to the public and will be documented on social channels and the website nottecomete.it.

Inauguration of the Public Programme

The public program **will be inaugurated on April 27, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. at the Madre Museum in Naples** with a talk attended by, among others: Onofrio Cutaita, Director-General for Contemporary Creativity - Ministry of Culture and Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion; Angela Tecce, President of the Donnaregina Foundation for Contemporary Art; Kathryn Weir, Artistic Director of the Madre Museum; Eugenio Viola, Gian Maria Tosatti; Letizia Magaldi, Vice President of the Donnaregina Foundation for Contemporary Art.

History of Night and Destiny of Comets

curated by Eugenio Viola

Ed. Treccani

The exhibition of the Italian Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2022, entitled *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* curated by Eugenio Viola, is accompanied by the publication of a catalogue published by **Treccani**.

Conceived as a tool to complete the experience of the visit, an emanation of the project conceived by Gian Maria Tosatti, the volume gathers in-depth critical and documentary contributions, as well as a comprehensive iconographic apparatus that includes a selection of photographs taken by the Italian photographer Mimmo Jodice (Naples, 1934).

The publication begins with institutional texts by the Minister of Culture, **Dario Franceschini**, the President of La Biennale di Venezia, **Roberto Cicutto**, and the Director-General of Contemporary Creativity and Commissioner of the Italian Pavilion, **Onofrio Cutaia**. An introductory text signed by the curator of the Italian Pavilion, **Eugenio Viola**, explains the exhibition project in detail: its genesis, the main historical and literary references that underlie its conception, and contextualises it in the artist's artistic-existential journey. The textual apparatus is complemented by a **dialogue between the artist Gian Maria Tosatti and the curator Eugenio Viola**.

An anthological section contains literary excerpts that underlie the conception of the project, as well as a visual essay consisting of photographs by Mimmo Jodice taken between the end of the 1960s and the 1970s, which are not only a reportage of Italy in the years of the economic boom. Italy, but also an early document of social denunciation in the field of industrial photography.

The volume is enriched by an extensive iconographic documentation of *History of Night and Destiny of Comets*, the site-specific work displayed in the spaces of Tese delle Vergini in the Arsenale.

Storia della Notte e Destino delle Comete

Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

Exhibition catalogue curated by Eugenio Viola

Texts: Eugenio Viola, Gian Maria Tosatti

Graphic project: Mosaico Studio

In the course of its almost one hundred years of existence, the **Institute of the Italian Encyclopaedia** has become one of the most important centres of cultural production and dissemination in the country, pursuing a conscious and ambitious vision of extraordinary value.

Treccani Arte is a new branch of the Institute that, since 2018, has proposed a series of initiatives related to the world of contemporary art in order to accompany the public in interpreting the complexity of the present.

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SANLORENZO

Sanlorenzo is the main sponsor of Italian Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2022

A path consisting of a coherent progression has led Sanlorenzo to be the main sponsor of the Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. For the essence of the shipyard, art, embedded in a rich cultural fabric that is integral to its history, is imbued art. This is demonstrated by the last 15 years and the milestones that have marked them.

It was a collection of works by Gianfranco Pardi, a painter and sculptor trained as an architect, that in 2008 symbolised the beginning of that virtuous union between art and design that has permeated every Sanlorenzo yacht ever since: on board the SL100, Pardi's works entered into a dialogue with icons of Italian design following the interior design of the Dordoni Architetti studio. With the intention of bringing on board the perception of an elegant Italian home as it has never existed before. Which then expanded in search of ever closer links with the most important art institutions and galleries.

First act, two events with Tornabuoni Arte at the epicentre of collecting: in Miami and Venice, Sanlorenzo, against all exhibition convention, transformed two of his yachts into real floating galleries. Prelude, in 2018, the birth of the global partnership agreement with Art Basel. Since then, Sanlorenzo has been present at the annual events in Hong Kong, Basel and Miami Beach with large installations that artistically express the transversal and experimental soul of the brand, curated by Piero Lissoni, who was chosen by the shipyard as art director that same year. But Sanlorenzo's artistic sensibility is evident not only at Art Basel, but also in other installations of great visual impact: above all, the installation *Il Mare a Milano* shown at the 2017 Triennale, which will be awarded the Compasso d'Oro in 2020.

Venice. The link will be consolidated between 2019 and 2020, this time touching on auteur photography: it will be entrusted with the artistic story of the uniqueness of the shipyard with the exhibitions *Naviganti* by Silvano Pupella and *Dedalo*, works by Veronica Gaido, along with others by John Pawson, to be exhibited at the Casa dei Tre Oci. In 2020, the multi-year collaboration with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, of which Sanlorenzo

will become an institutional partner, will once again take place in Venice, reaffirming Sanlorenzo's intention to be a promoter of cultural development.

Having cultivated dialogue with art in innovative and transversal ways, Sanlorenzo launched a new, ambitious challenge at Art Basel last September called *Sanlorenzo Arts* an interactive platform that explores the most pressing issues of our times through close relationships with artists and representatives of creativity. With a declared role no longer just as a patron, but as a producer of culture: first act, two commissioned works entitled *Suspensions* created by Swiss artist Emil Michael Klein for the Collectors Lounge at Art Basel.

To be alongside the Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, curated by Eugenio Viola, is a unique and extraordinary achievement for Sanlorenzo. But above all, it is another starting point from which we to explore new ways of relating to the world of contemporary art and its languages in the future.

Cav. **Massimo Perotti**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sanlorenzo, comments on this important presence as follows: «We are witnessing a new renaissance that places contemporary culture at the heart of society and industry. Venice and the Italian Pavilion are an exceptional global showcase: a synthesis of the creativity and energy that Italy expresses and a highly talented young artist like Gian Maria Tosatti, who was chosen as the sole interpreter of this space. We are delighted to be able to make our contribution to such a special project, which we are sure will leave its mark on this Biennale».

VALENTINO

Maison Valentino is pleased to announce that it is the main sponsor of the Italian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

Valentino creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli and CEO Jacopo Venturini support curator Eugenio Viola and artist Gian Maria Tosatti for the Italian Pavilion at The 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia.

The Italian Pavilion at the Tese delle Vergini in the Venice Arsenale, called *History of Night and Destiny of Comets*, will be represented for the first time in its history by a unique artist, Gian Maria Tosatti. The 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, entitled *The Milk of Dreams*, is curated by Cecilia Alemani.

Maison Valentino continues its commitment to promoting and supporting culture with projects based on reciprocity. In the Gaggiandre in the Arsenale, grafted onto the walls of the Tese delle Vergini, which house the Italian Pavilion, Pierpaolo Piccioli presented his Couture Show collection *Valentino Des Ateliers* in July 2021. A project entirely dedicated to dialogue with contemporary art and young artists. On this occasion, Valentino sponsored the 49th International Theatre Festival - La Biennale di Venezia.

Once again, the creative director wants to pay homage to the city of Venice and its cultural landscape. For him, Venice is the city that naturally generates vibrations for art, theatre, music, architecture, cinema and everything that has to do with creativity. For Pierpaolo Piccioli, Venice is the authentic setting for a dialogue between art and fashion in which a creative mind can present his creations.

Gian Maria Tosatti and Pierpaolo Piccioli begin a dialogue made up of inspirations that come from the same curiosity and value system that unites them: a common research aimed at building a heterogeneous community. A continuous search for different forms of expression, always changing and unexpected, with an artistic sensibility that varies from form to form. Their awareness of the human being and his role in contemporary society. The curator Eugenio Viola has chosen to propose a project that acts as a powerful statement of contemporaneity, capable of restoring a bold reading of the present.

The work of Gian Maria Tosatti is conceived as an intermediary that combines a multitude of languages, from literary references to visual art, from theatre to music and performance, with the aim of creating a new consciousness that moves between the dreams and mistakes of the past and the promises of a future that, in part, has yet to be written. *History of Night and Destiny of Comets* is conceived as a large environmental installation that offers a suggestive vision of the current state of humanity and its prospects with a proactive and optimistic view.

The Italian Pavilion will be inaugurated on the occasion of the vernissage of the 59th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia and will be open to the public from Saturday 23 April to Sunday 27 November 2022.

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