

Flowers always live

by Lorenzo Balbi

Anyone who has passed by the entrance to Palazzo Cavalli-Franchetti in Venice, a few steps from the Accademia bridge, will remember the fresh flower shop nearby. One of only a few in Venice, with small green windows in a triangular space in the corner by the fifteenth-century palace gate. Unfortunately in these last few months, during the preparation of this exhibition, even the small florist of the Accademia has closed. It's another victim of the unstoppable transformation of Venice into an entirely touristic city in which any good or service – even buying a bouquet of flowers – is managed directly by hotels or tour operators. In this way, that shop was a bulwark of resistance, a symbol of resilience and radicalism.

There are some areas of the lagoon which are periodically submerged by the sea. At every little increase of the water level they sink to re-emerge only at the next low tide. Some areas remain dry long enough that a characteristic vegetation develops on their surfaces: one of the best known species is the limonium, a perennial herbaceous plant characterized by small pale pink or purple flowers which, when grown in large quantities, appear to form floating clouds. It is one of the few truly native biodiversity oases still surviving in the contemporary world of the lagoon, rooted in the wet soil of salt marshes until they are definitively submerged by the new technological tide control systems.

In Venice's shops, hotels, and restaurants there are flowers, bouquets, and floral arrangements that accentuate the various locations, and brighten the moods of those who see them. Just like the 20 million tourists who flock to the city every year, these cut flowers, kept alive through meticulous procedures and scientifically advanced techniques, come from all over the world, even from the most faraway and remote places. The journeys these flower-tourists must undertake to end their lives in the lagoon are long and complicated and the tricks used by the experts to get them to their destination still intact, fragrant and colourful, fascinating and unexpected. While this imported flora is treated as a true living treasure, Venice's original plant life struggles to survive in an environment that has become increasingly inhospitable. It must cling to inaccessible places, to the few abandoned houses, to the crevices of suspension bridges.

The research carried out by Giovanna Repetto (born in Padua, 1990. Lives and works in Turin) stems from the analysis of these contradictions. Her works manifest themselves in artistic productions that reveal a curatorial approach. The artist, in fact, takes care of these floral species, inserting herself into the production process, in the journey and the packaging they must undergo. With a photographic approach, the various works she proposes for this exhibition-installation portray a human landscape, with its stories and its quirks, which fits into a unique historical, social, and cultural context. The artist's gaze, however, is not limited in this case to the creation of images, but stimulates an action that leads her to the literal care of the flowers which are the protagonists of her investigation. The tropical flowers, after being in refrigerators, soaked in ammonia, bandaged with gauzes, plastics and cushions, once they have arrived at their destination are taken into custody by the artist who subjects them to acupuncture sessions.

The exhibition of Giovanna Repetto, her first solo show in an institutional setting, proposes entirely new productions, different works and installations that lead visitors to a video - the first shot entirely by the artist - which brings together all her studio work and research. It's a personal and col-

lective journey that leads us to discover an artificial nature, a journey of awareness that highlights how man is changing natural ecosystems in an incontrovertible way and at very high speed. Repeated and conscious gestures punctuate the images in the video, lingering over the lack of roots of these cut flowers, in clear contrast to the radical resistance of the lagoon plants and the native workers, thus coming into contact with the theme of this series of exhibitions. They are images and "landscapes" - as she herself defines them - real and unsettling like a huge white rabbit called Puma who, transplanted to Venice, lives in a flower shop feeding on the scraps of precious exotic vegetables.