

European Cultural Centre Italy: Time, Space, Existence
Welcome Remarks 5/18/2023
Prepared by: Michelle Jeffrey Delk, Snøhetta

Hello and welcome everyone. It's a beautiful day to be in Venice here with you at Marinaressa (Ponente) Garden. I'm Michelle Delk; a landscape architect and partner with Snøhetta, based in NYC.

With me today is Kurt Marsh, who has invested so much passion into this exploration. I also want to thank Alan Brake (from Snøhetta) and our other partners; Jay Taylor from MKA structural engineers and 3DW, our fabricators here in Italy. Without their help, our installation *Counterbalance*, would not have come into reality. It's also nice to see other friends, family, and supporters who are here today.

Expand and Interact

We were so pleased to be invited to this sixth biennial architecture exhibition curated by The European Cultural Centre (ECC); Time Space Existence. And as the title of the event suggests, I encourage you to be patient, open, and inquisitive as you explore today.

Please look for moments to expand your mind and take a little extra time to talk with the person next to you. Ask a question or share an observation with others you meet today as well as with those you might think you already know well.

Ask:

What drew you here today?

What inspires, challenges, worries, or comforts you?

How do you perceive Time, Space, Existence?

I invite you to share your thoughts and your stories. By sharing what brings you here today, you contribute to creating memorable and tangible influence on how each of us sees, and interacts, with the world.

Invisible Connections

I've become increasingly interested in the invisible connections across our planet and have been thinking a lot about this web of life that we are all a part of.

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This reminds me that we each can, and should, aim to contribute to the betterment of the whole rather than only the betterment of the individual.

I often visualize how the forests that stretch across this earth communicate in sometimes surprising ways. We should be listening more closely to the whispering of the trees as a reminder that we (all living beings and, all matter) are often connected in the most invisible ways.

I encourage you to revisit how polymath Alexander von Humboldt beautifully described, over 250 years ago that we live in a highly interconnected world and that we are part of nature as a living whole, bound by an intricate net-like fabric.

His observations demonstrate the need to recognize how our actions impact ourselves and others.

Mindfulness

We at Snøhetta first started considering how we might contribute to Time, Space, Existence in late 2019, almost four years ago. But, as many of us experienced just a few months later, the Pandemic changed our course and, in many ways, slowed us down. But obviously it did not stop us.

Of course we all can be overwhelmed by the many sad stories from these past few years of people we've lost and challenges we've faced. But this also brought us stories of reflection, evaluation, and of moments of joy and new perspectives.

For a time (with all the silence and all the clear air) I had never seen or heard so much, so vividly. And, in the quiet, I grew to appreciate the smallest of details.

By simply taking more time to look around with even more curiosity and by listening even more closely, I've come to appreciate how differently I now see the world around me, and even my own potential.

Some of the many challenges (that we are all too well aware of) can be overcome when we believe that small ideas or seemingly inconsequential efforts can make a difference. Each of us exists as a single strand of a larger web. This is woven together with both fragility and strength and we must avoid allowing this to be torn apart or turned against us.

Ground is not Given

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When we began thinking about Time, Space, Existence we were drawn not only to appreciate and express beauty but also vulnerability. The vulnerability of a place like Venice, where land and water are so obviously co-mingled, deeply affects everyone here and reminds us of the fragility of life across the globe.

It's often easy to take for granted what we have around us including the ground that we stand upon here today. In my work as a landscape architect I've come to recognize that what is underground, what is unseen, is often the most fragile, powerful, mysterious, and sometimes expensive influence of what ultimately is possible above the ground.

Here in Venice, ground is not given. This is an amphibious place, with an uncertain future; moored to the sea, the moon's tides, and penchants of world culture. Perched at the edge of the lagoon, this Garden is bound by buildings to the west, north, and east and opens to the water to the South. Maritime pines and sky create the ceiling with pine duff, earth, and water underfoot. But, for many, once a place becomes familiar, we adopt a sort of visual fuzziness, a tendency to overlook our own connections to, and the subtlety of, these places.

At the same time, when we look around, we see the evidence of our impact on this world and on each other' from state of the buildings in need of repair, to the strain we place on the earth under our feet, to the quality of the air we breathe, or the health of other living creatures we share this planet with.

So today I remind you to be intentional. How we choose to interact informs how we understand the world around us and our co-inhabitants. Interaction is about exploring relationships, of cause and effect, and that is intellectual, as well as physical engagement, with our bodies as well as with our minds.

Recognize that the world is unpredictable, and balance can be precarious.

Finding Joy

So today I invite you to be contemplative but also to be playful!

Interact with each other, explore this moment that we've brought to the garden, and enjoy all the many great installations and ideas that have been brought here to Venice. Whether alone, or

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together with others, I hope today you will experiment. Play with cause and effect, observe and join in, with a sense of openness and joy.

Because sharing joy is one way that we can come together to weave a web that is stronger when pushed or challenged. We can be joyful, yet also serious in life, without sacrificing one for the other.

Today, we hope to call subtle concern, yet optimism, to the impact we each have on the environment around us.

Something as stable as the ground beneath our feet, or the structures we construct; for comfort, shelter, or viewing, are not always what they seem when placed into a world that is shifting and changing around us. Just as we inhabit our bodies, we inhabit the places and structures we create as physical designers. These places act as extensions of our lives, our values, our imaginations, and our dreams.

In uncertain futures, we hope to humble yet to inspire; to remind each of us of our precarious place in this world that we share with others.

What seems to be is not always as expected.

Thank you for listening and I hope you enjoy your day.