

Curators in Isolation: Cynthia Penna, International Curator (Italy & USA)

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Curators in Isolation - Interviews with Curators regarding, “The Future of Art Post-Covid 19” and how this may reshape the art world.



International Curator Cynthia Penna

Cynthia Penna (Napoli, Italy) is an International Curator, residing between, Italy, France, and USA. At the moment Penna is in lockdown in Los Angeles with her husband, Renato. Penna is vital force in the art world, during lockdown she curated a new project *Time*. I was keen to interview the curator to learn about what her thoughts are about the art world post-Covid 19.

Interview with Cynthia Penna, International Curator, (Italy, USA)

“The Future of Art Post-Covid 19”

VC: It’s so nice to talk to you today before we being on the topic, can you briefly describe your lockdown?

Cynthia Penna: We are currently in Los Angeles and our lockdown consists of a proliferation of ideas and projects that we have created to make our seclusion more acceptable and at the same time to give to our public a moment of relief and distraction from bad news.

VC: Cynthia, you work on many curatorial exhibitions all the time in Europe as well as in the United States, did you have any exhibitions planned during the quarantine?

Cynthia Penna: We should have presented a lot of exhibitions during our Italian Spring: one solo show of American artist Yuri Boyko at the high-speed Train Station of AFRAGOLA near Napoli which the title is *Transience (Migrating Mind)* and is focused on identity, migration, transformation, dialogue among people; after this exhibition, another one was programmed in the same location featuring the artworks (mostly paintings) by the Japanese artist *Yasunari Nakagomi* and representing abstract landscapes seen from a running train. Both exhibitions have been postponed to undetermined date and are part of the major project “Traveling with Zaha” that

started last year as a collaboration between the City Hall of Afragola and our **Institution ART1307**.

Plus: one important site-specific installation and solo exhibition of the German photographer Hertha Miessner should have taken place in the prestigious location of Pio Monte della Misericordia in Napoli, in dialogue with Caravaggio work "The seven works of Mercy", and finally a workshop of 6 international artists with a subsequent exhibition for 6 months should have taken place at the Art Hotel Gran Paradiso in Sorrento.

Almost everything has been postponed to next Fall or next year.

Also, one exhibition of Italian artists planned for the Fall in a gallery here in Los Angeles is now in a stand by waiting for the evolution of our society in the next months.

Exhibitions that have been postponed ... making new plans to present them



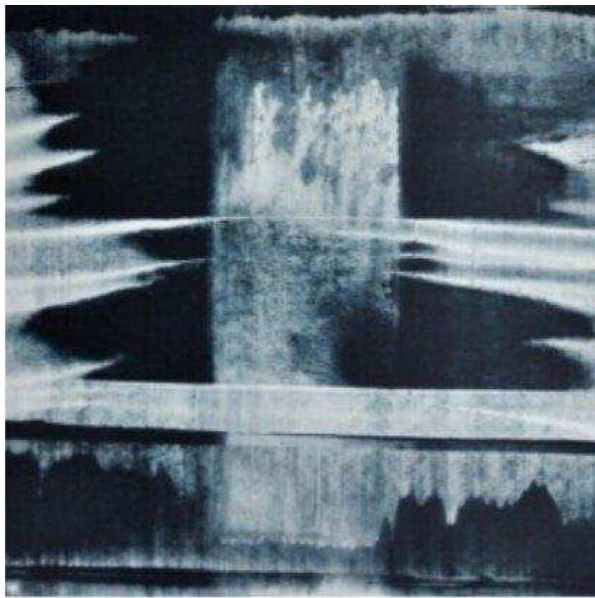
Mockup installation, Yuri Boyko *Migrating Minds*, First Room, "We as Human Beings: The Identity", for AFRAGOLA Train Station, Napoli



Mockup installation, (partial view) Yuri Boyko: *Migrating Minds*, Second Room, "Migration and Dialogue", for AFRAGOLA Train Station, Napoli



Mockup Installation: Yuri Boyko, *Migrating Mind*, Third Room, "Movement", for AFRAGOLA Train Station, Napoli



Future event, Yasunari Nakagomi: *Landscape in Motion*

VC: For the exhibitions that were postponed, what's next?

Cynthia Penna: As all galleries and museums in the world, we have gone online and through the web, we are taking care of some interesting projects: one of them regards the profile of some artists that we have met and highly appreciated in our life: some intellectual artists who carry on their shoulders a long experience and a long life inside the art world and deserve the attention of the public again and again. In a world always running fast forwards and in which age seems to have become a sort of "original sin", where experience and philosophical thinking seems to have become a "bad behavior" or a "bad habit", we are enhancing the value of intellectual personalities that have given so much to the art world.

VC: Since the lockdown, I heard you have a new curatorial project in the works, called *Time*, I would love to hear more about this. What was your inspiration?

Cynthia Penna: Yes, we have put up a project involving many artists (at the moment, we have got the participation of more than 60 artists and intellectuals) about the "perception of Time in the time of seclusion" and dealing with this big issue of our life. The sensation that all of us are receiving from this drastic and sudden change of habits and relations, is so dramatic that artists and intellectuals and not only politicians are called to face and to describe. Art has also the capacity to condense and squeeze in a few words or only in one image thousands of concepts.

We will edit and publish a book to "freeze" this experience in History.

The incomes from the sale of the book will be donated to charity.

VC: What kind of message are you hoping *Time* project will have for a larger audience?

Cynthia Penna: The message is that of the precariousness of our lives. We are only passing through on this earth, we are only guests of the Earth. Time is something related to Universe and both of them will exist forever: our "moment" on Earth is a very short one and we have to take an opportunity from it to make our best in terms of relationships with other human beings and relations to Nature surrounding us. We have a duty: the one to leave the

*Earth without damaging it and to preserve it for the future
to come and for other human beings coming after us.*

New project, Time



Time - in progress, a project which will include over 60 artists and intellectuals reflecting on 'time'. The final outcome will be published in a book.

VC: There is so much change and now speculation about what the artworld post-Covid 19 will look like. As each artist, curator, gallerist and or museum director desperately tries to examine how to make the next move forward. As an international curator, what are your thoughts? And what do you envision?

Cynthia Penna: the art world in the last 20 years has become a "market" more than a forge of ideas. In my opinion, we cannot confuse the stock exchange with the art world: if someone wants to invest his/her money, it is much better and safer to go to the stock exchange and buy something. Art cannot assure any capital increase because there are too many factors involved in it. First, the figure of the artist in-itself: the artist is a human being subjected to so many issues like health, death, encounters, family situations: everything conveys to create an artist and mostly to be successful. Not last the fact of being in the right place at the right time. There is no gallery on the earth that can assure a capital increase in buying one artist instead of another. Even the big industries of art like the mega galleries cannot predict the future of an artist: they do not have the glass ball!

The future, I hope, will be a resizing of all values and numbers around art. A reduction of prices of everything which surrounds the single artwork like Fairs, rents of spaces, prices of packaging and transportation, and all this collateral things that force galleries as well as artists to increase all prices in a sort of war of money.

I hope in a new discovery of thoughts and experimentation in art; I hope that artists will come back to pure intellectual research.



Past Installation, Laddie John Dill, *Antiquitas in Luce*, Archaeological Museum Napoli



Past exhibition, Shane Guffogg *Retrospective* at Villa di Donato, Napoli, Shown here is Guffogg's interpreted *Ginerva di Benci* painting along side the inspirational portrait by Leonardo da Vinci

VC: How will you move ahead in the immediate future regarding curating and exhibition planning?

Cynthia Penna: We own a cultural Institution that has been presenting art and artists for 15 years, realizing a sort of bridge between different countries.

Our research and pleasure in art are to discover new artists, introduce them to the public, and give them opportunities to be seen in different countries.

I hope that we will have the opportunity in the future to continue this path that has been paved for many years of emotions and satisfactions.

VC: What advice do you have to an artist, fellow curator, and gallerist?

Cynthia Penna: To never give up and stubbornly go on.

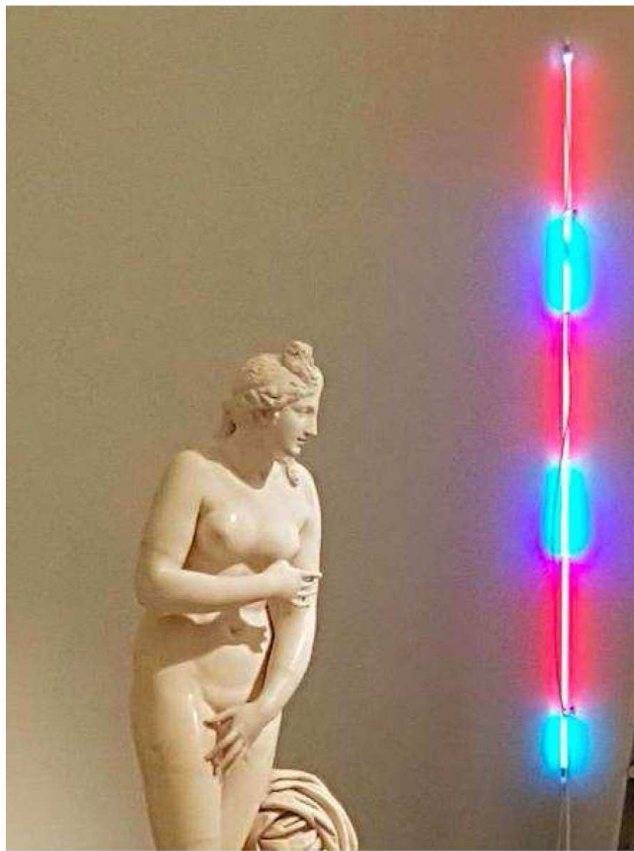
Below, more past exhibitions curated by Cynthia Penna



Past exhibition, Max Coppeta, *Flow*, Museum of Reggia di Caserta
(Caserta Royal Palace)



Past exhibition, Max Coppeta *Flow* gearing up for a museum lecture



Past exhibition, Laddie John Dill, *Antiquitas in Luce*, Archaeological
Museum of Napoli



Music was an additional element to *Todd Williamson in Napoli* paintings
exhibition at Villa di Denato



Everyone enjoys being around art - a well attended reception at Villa di Denato

VC: What do you hope for regarding museums and their future exhibition planning? What would you like them to do? I notice some museums are offering online educational courses and film viewings. What would you like to see museums offer?

Cynthia Penna: I am old school in art in a way that I cannot accept to look at art through a video. If I could, I would touch every single art piece with my hands including the huge masterpieces of the past!!!! (in my life I also practiced restoration of paintings so that I could really touch them!!!!). So, forget about seeing artworks through the video screen. Museums will have to re-open and plan their exhibitions as usual. Maybe they can go through reservations in advance for admission and reduce the number of people attending the same show at the same time and keep temporary exhibitions longer than usual so that everybody can attend them. I would also suggest staying open longer than the usual hours like a closure every day at 8 PM so that people can go to the museum after work. Educational classes can be taken online but once a week students need to have access to museums to see in person what they have studied online.

VC: I have so much respect for your opinion on these subjects, and you have brought up so many important points regarding the legacy of art and how it will continue to reach audiences around the world. Your contribution and enrichment to the arts as an international curator and world humanitarian is so impressive, always providing visually rich, intellectually stimulating, and thought provocative exhibitions. Which I might add to the reader, are featured on an on-going base on both sides of the globe. With all that we spoke about regarding art post-Covid-19, could you provide me with your ideal vision? I would love to hear about your dreams for the future of art and gain further insight.

Cynthia Penna: In a world of pure dreams I imagine an art world cut off from the market; a world where artists are visionaries in search of emotions to share; curators and museums are people and places that help artists to realize and share their visions with the public and galleries return to being places of discussion, meeting, and dialogue between artists and the audience.

Still in a world of dreams, what I would remove from the art world are the "local markets" that have become the contemporary art fairs and also the whole concept of low trade and speculation on works of art. I would also change the structure of the Biennials scheduling them at least every

four years because I believe that artistic research needs time to develop; in 4 years-time something new will emerge, but it is simply illusory to expect new creations in only two years and with the contemporary presence of the same artists to the art Fairs going on all over the world. In the end we “stir always the same soup”!

More than this, don't ask me for a recipe relating to the economics of the art sector because I am not an expert in this sector: I am a curator and not an economist. But I can affirm that humanity nowadays is hungry for beauty, art, and culture that seems to have reduced little by little in the last 30 years their presence in our society.

VC: Thank you for your answer, it is especially enlightening to me during this time of massive change, it gives me hope that the future of art will always exist no matter what the circumstances are.

On a more personal note, I know you are super busy with curatorial planning, but, how are you spending your downtime in isolation? Are you catching up on reading and great books? There has been so many new dance videos posted online recently, are you dancing into the evenings? Or watching any great films? How about music, are you taking the time to sing out loud to de-stress? I certainly am!

Cynthia Penna: I don't dance and I don't sing, but I do (now in my apartment) a lot of physical exercises that I practice since I was young. Plus, a lot of telephone calls and Zoom conferences, and conversations with all my people in Italy in the morning and with my friends in LA in the afternoon. I cannot live without human relationships, connection to people, emotions shared, and plans for the future discussed.

So, I just continued my usual contacts going online or by phone.

I usually read a lot and in this period, I have read just to relax my mind, two very amusing little books written by Francesco Bonami (the once director of Chicago Museum of Modern art) about his life experience as curator: very light and very amusing. But I usually and eagerly read whatever comes to my attention or in my hands.

But I repeat, my main interest is to talk with people because this is the real thing that enriches me.



Cynthia Penna with American artist Todd Williamson during his painting exhibition in Napoli

Biography

Cynthia Penna is a Graduate in Antiques and Decoration at Università Popolare di Napoli. Penna and also holds Degrees in the technique of Painting Restoration and the Development of Printing Photographs. In addition to Penna's numerous Fine Art Degrees, she holds a Degree in Jurisprudence at University Federico II Napoli Italy

Cynthia Penna has curated exhibition's at the following museums, galleries, and cultural centers

(Partial listing)

Art 1307 Association Napoli, Castel dell'OVO Napoli, Zaha Hadid designed High-Speed Train Station Afrogola, California State University Los Angeles, LA Artcore Los Angeles, Pio Monte della Misericordia Napoli, Reggia di Caserta, Castelli Art Space Los Angeles, LAAA Artists Association Los Angeles, Archaeological Museum of Napoli, Museum of Art and History Lancaster, The Loft at Liz's Los Angeles, Metropolitan Art Museum Toyko, Art Hotel Gran Paradiso Sorrento, PAN Palazzo delle Arti Napoli, Villa di Donato Napoli, Belmont University Nashville, Galleria Arte Silva Serengo, 6029 Gallery Los Angeles, EMBLEMA Museum Terzigno Napoli, Villa Bruno Napoli, Cultural Association "La Maison des Arts" Carces France, Japanese Cultural Association Milano, Ambassade du Tourisme Saint Tropez

Cynthia & Renato Penna and ART1307

CULTURAL INSTITUTION



WEBSITE

Founded in Naples in 2007, ART1307 is a cultural institution whose mission is to promote the visual arts on an international level.

It is a matter of an essentially cultural purpose, and within this context, the association has strived to establish international exchanges with other cultural institutions abroad in order to offer artists and the public a much vaster and more varied scenario of contemporary art.

The artists who have been invited to exhibit with ART1307 have not been chosen so much, or not only, on the basis of whether they have already gained international recognition, but first and foremost on that of the quality and talent manifested by their works.

The association has chosen artists of all age groups, even if special attention has been dedicated to young emergent ones, but the most important aim has been to give the public an opportunity to experience the new creative expressions of contemporary art and the great variety of materials with which many artists choose to measure swords.

ART1307 is a sort of "place" of research, In this context conferences and meetings with the artist have been organized on a regular basis, also at schools. Many such initiatives have been held at the Academy of Fine Arts of Naples and at the Art Institute of Benevento (Campania).

The association's exhibition venue in Naples is a spectacular villa from the 18th century: Villa di Donato, an ancient hunting lodge used in the past by the Bourbons, which once lied inside the vast forest of Capodimonte. Exhibitions have held in many other venues over the years, not only in Italy but above all abroad, in France and above all in Los Angeles, California, where the association set up a "branch" in 2011, whose main purpose is to promote Italian artists on the other side of the Atlantic.

Over the years ART1307 has established relations with American cultural institutions as LA Artcore, LAAA, and the public library of West Hollywood in Los Angeles; with the Italian Institute of Culture in Los Angeles. In France it is a close associate of the Ambassade du Tourisme and the Municipality of Saint-Tropez, the Maison des Arts in Carces, and the Festival des Alpilles in Provence, of which it has become an official partner. In Italy, it collaborates with the Superintendency of Cultural Heritages of Naples, the PAN Palace of the Arts of Naples the Pio Monte della Misericordia, and the Amy-d Association of Milan.

In 2012 an artists' residence was created in Naples, where foreign artists may live for a period of at least one month, producing works of art inspired by the city and dedicated to it. Since it was opened, Californian artists Shane Guffogg, Todd Williamson, Lisa Bartleson, Laddie John Dill, Miguel Osuna, and Kelly Berg and Japanese artists, Yasunari Nakagomi, have followed one another.

The association has participated in a series of international art fairs with the purpose of making Italian art known to an as vast public as possible. The chosen fairs have been located in Milan, Paris, Los Angeles, and Houston (Texas).

In 9 years of activity, we have shown our artists in no less than 18 different places in the world, because we are motivated by a single credo: Art is the only remedy and the only salvation for a world where living is worthwhile;

it is possible to live on art, but one certainly cannot live without it!

LOCATIONS

Napoli

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