



la Biennale di Venezia

55. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Partecipazioni nazionali

## **PAVILION OF MALDIVES**

**At the 55th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia  
(First official participation)**

### **Title**

Portable Nation: *Disappearance as Work in Progress – Approaches to Ecological Romanticism*

### **Commissioner**

Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture

### **Curatorial Team**

CPS – Chamber of Public Secrets (Alfredo Cramerotti, Aida Eltorie, Khaled Ramadan)

In collaboration with the Gervasuti Foundation (hosting Venue)

### **Associate Curators**

Maren Richter, Camilla Boemio

### **Assistant Curators**

Stine Hoxbroe, Galia Kirilova, Dorian Batycka, Hanna Husberg, Laura McLean, Kalliopi Tsipni-Kolaza, Dana Kopel

### **Advisers**

Henry Meyric Hughes, Hedwig Fijen

### **With the support of**

The Danish Arts Council, Mookai Suites, moinc, The Allam Foundation, bm: ukk - Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, The Arts and Culture, Kultur Steiermark-Department Culture, Europe, Foreign Relations, Pro Helvetia Swiss Arts Council, 6 Contemporary Arts, Material Fonds, HIVOS: People United, Ayyam Projects, The School of Art and College of Fine Art – University of Arizona, Art Sawa Gallery Dubai, Olympus Cinema Male, Imad Agency Photo Archive, The Maldives National Museum, Meyer Sound and CITRIS, Contemporary Practices Art Journal, Transart Institute New York, Horcynus Orca Foundation Messina.



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#### **Thanks to**

Mohamed Adam, The Maldives National University, Yasmine Allam, Omar Donia, Olympus Cinema, Male, Imad Agency Photo Archive, The Maldives National Museum, Meyer Sound, Martina Corgnati, Michael Fadel.

#### **Exhibitors**

Mohamed Ali, Sama Alshaibi, Ursula Biemann, Stefano Cagol, Wael Darwesh, Moomin Fouad, Thierry Geoffrey (aka Colonel), Khaled Hafez, Heidrun Holzfeind & Christoph Draeger, Hanna Husberg, Laura McLean & Kalliopi Tsipni-Kolaza, Achilleas Kentonis & Maria Papacaharalambous, Paul Miller (aka DJ Spooky), Gregory Niemeyer, Khaled Ramadan, Oliver Ressler, Klaus Schafler, Patrizio Travagli, Wooloo.

#### **Performers / Events**

Mark Dahl, Ehsan Fardjadniya, Shani Leiderman, Celeste Pimm, Oliver Ressler, Marian Tubbs.

#### **Venue**

Gervasuti Foundation, Via Garibaldi, Fondamente Sant'Anna, Castello 995, 30122 Venezia

#### **CONTACT**

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##### **Follow us**

Blog: [www.maldivespavilion.com](http://www.maldivespavilion.com)

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## THE PROJECT

The history of artistic aesthetics of the Maldives is not widely documented, the archipelago is not known for its visual arts activities but rather for its most central aesthetical themes such as supreme beauty of the ocean, ecology and environment. CPS intends to treat the culture and nature of Maldives as our central subject, marking its importance through its ecology, and what it would mean for the islands to disappear.

Through inviting artists and contributors to donate their powerful visual and intellectual abilities to the Maldives Pavilion, our intention is to provide a meaningful experience and breadth of knowledge about the concept of Contemporary Environmental Romanticism in relation to the nature and culture of the Maldives. Consequently, we are looking for an unusual treatment of the Maldives Pavilion, something in the direction of how Contemporary Environmental Romanticism underlines the interpretation of nature as a source of aesthetic experience. From this experience, the eco-activism projects will also return their investment by donating funds to environmental causes.

Combining our curatorial team of three appointed curators and commissioners, we wish to partially capitalize on their diverse cultural identities from Europe and the Middle East suggesting the overlap of international cultures that coexist on this paradise island. On the one hand Western thoughts concerning nature has been marked by dualism, the notion of the opposition of nature and culture. On the other hand Eastern thoughts consider nature a guide and source of intellectual and spiritual inspiration, because in the Eastern thoughts the natural world simply “is” the law, and human activities are adjusted according to its mechanisms. The collaboration we wish to capture is to prove the duality between art/culture and its inter-dependencies with environmental causes. Only through such activities are we able to regulate interests into ways of sustainably developing positive impacts that will help avoid negative impacts on our own cultural ecologies. By bringing awareness to the activities happening in the Maldives, we wish to break away from allowing such losses of land to happen in this advanced digital age. Observation is what converts possibility into reality.

### **Chamber of Public Secrets**

Alfredo Cramerotti, Aida Eltorie, Khaled Ramadan

[www.maldivespavilion.com](http://www.maldivespavilion.com)

[www.chamberarchive.org](http://www.chamberarchive.org)



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## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Sama Alshaibi

### ***Silsila***

*Silsila* — Arabic for ‘chain’ or ‘link’ — is a site specific, video installation work that depicts Alshaibi’s three-year cyclic journey through the significant deserts and endangered water sources of the Middle East and North African region and across to the bountiful waters the Maldives. By linking the performances in the deserts and waters of the historical Islamic world with the nomadic traditions of the region, and the travel journals of the great 14th century Eastern explorer, Ibn Battuta, Alshaibi seeks to unearth a story of continuity within the context of a threatened future. *Silsila* takes its inspiration from the Sufi poet Assadi Ali, who began each line of his poems, “I, the Desert”. An excerpt from that poem calls for us to recognize our common identity: “the grains of my sand rush in asking / begging You [Allah] to keep my descendents / and nation united”. *Silsila* is a story of a shared history and soon to be written future — the tales of the climate refugee and its geographic voice, and our search for connection with each other as interdependent peoples and nations plagued by an unthinkable future.

Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery  
Audio-scape by Filastine

Christoph Draeger, Heidrun Holzfeind

### ***Tsunami Architecture / The Maldives Chapter Redux***

In 2010/2011 Christoph Draeger and Heidrun Holzfeind visited Southeast Asia to investigate the current state of architecture built or reconstructed in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. *Tsunami Architecture* documents the long-term effects of the disaster through conversations with survivors, eyewitnesses, aid workers and rescue personnel. The film *The Maldives Chapter Redux* (26 min, 2013) looks specifically at how the flood of aid money has transformed whole islands, rebuilt and refashioned local economies and shaped communities on three islands in the Maldives.

Courtesy of Lokal 30, Warsaw; Y Gallery New York; Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris



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Klaus Schafler

***Hacking the Future and Planet***

*Hacking the Future and Planet* focusses on the ambivalent character of large-scale interventions in the global climate system, geoengineering technologies that "hack the planet" to slow or even reverse our civilizations' impact on the climate and environment to counter global warming. On a local level, geoengineering technologies also include modifications like huge dikes that could possibly prevent the Maldives, Venice or New York, all three at risk of flooding due to global warming and rising sea levels, of their somewhat similar destinies. However, the side effects of these constructions, as well as of other geoengineering laboratory experiments or field tests, on natural and cultural habitats are unpredictable and pose numerous ethical and geopolitical questions. Who should decide if the application of geoengineering technologies would be legitimate and suitable to save the nature of unique places for humanity and above all for their local populations?

Stefano Cagol

***The Ice Monolith***

A monolith of ice of the Alps appears in Venice along the shore in Riva Cà di Dio and melts in the summer sun. A kubrickian metaphor questioning about the serious process that is affecting the planet. Stefano Cagol, based in a village in the Alps and just back from projects in the Arctic region, is witnessing the ongoing vanishing of the so called "eternal ice." Ice melts to water. Water that in the next decades risks to overwhelm the most sensitive areas of the globe – firstly Maldives (but also Venice). Alps and Maldives, ice and sun, so far but so close, connected by the same fate. *The Ice Monolith* is a few hour-action process which will happen during the opening: A disappearance. Its video documentation is on view in the Pavilion. In a further video installation mountains emerge from water – or disappear into it. Dilemmas, resources, strategies, utopias are faced also in a platform involving a wide circle; from curators to researchers from dialogues to concerts, in different moments and places – will capture the Maldives Pavilion in Venice, by Stefano Cagol's studio at VIR Viafarini-in-residence in Milan, on the web, and on the top of alpine glaciers.

<http://www.icemonolith-maldivespavilion.com>

Courtesy of Oredria Gallery, Rome (Italy)



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Wael Darwesh

***The Disappearance***

*The Disappearance* uses large fields of flat solid color and mixed media to capture a fleeting moment in our pulsating memory and its influence on the soul. This visual experience attempts to explore the consequences on the collective memory and psyche of experiencing long periods of continuous change, inconsistencies, anticipation and suppressed actions. The absence of transparency, the inability to predict the next moment and the emergence of various predictions has led to many changes around us and inside us. At the end all are human emotions and experiences. These variables have created a great load on our memory and left alone the mental abilities to absorb or explain these changes. This visual sonata of solid planes of form and color blended with gold leaf and collage, are juxtaposed with abstract figures that seem to dramatically perform roles in a theatrical background.

Courtesy of Art Sawa Gallery, Dubai (UAE)

Khaled Hafez

***On Noise, Sound & Silence***

'On Noise, Sound and Silence' proposes the island as metaphor for the transience of memory, steadily submerged with the passage of time and loss of resolution in the mind. The visual and sculptural elements in this work evoke a poetic voyage through the black box of recollection, that repository of experience, nostalgia and travel that accumulates within each of us as we pass from childhood, into adolescence and adulthood. Like islands sinking into the sea, time threatens with the slow extinction of those defining elements that make up the self. The fragility of the island is the fragility of memory.

'On Noise, Sound and Silence' is created in two formats: three synchronized screens each with its individual audio track and in a single channel adaptation with a composite audio track. Both formats are accompanied by an installation of sculptural elements. The work addresses water in its different contexts: filmed across different geographic locations and free of any linear narrative, the footage tackles water as a source of life, communication and transportation but also of submersion and obliteration. All identifying elements of time and place have been removed. Instead the viewer is engulfed by water on all sides and encouraged to turn inwards in this highly synthesized personal landscape.

Courtesy: Liebkranz Galerie, Berlin (Germany), AB Gallery, Zurich & Luzern (Switzerland), Meem Gallery, Dubai (UAE), Galeria San Carlo, Milan (Italy), Raymaluz Gallery, Madrid (Spain), Bekris Gallery, San Francisco (USA), Mark Hachem Gallery, Paris (France).



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Thierry Geoffroy, aka. Colonel  
***Can Emergencies Be Ranked?***

Thierry Geoffroy (aka Colonel), takes on the Maldives as an Emergency case, needing immediate treatment. He seeks to activate the exhibition space here and overall as a format for a “Mobile Emergency Room”, transforming “rigid exhibition spaces” into “elastic and generous exhibition spaces.”

*“I will act like a space generosity hunter and climate change Emergency art re-distributor.”*

Colonel seeks to offer his exhibition space to artists expressing emergencies and also request space from others. What nation is willing to debate its capacity to share some of its territory? And, Can Emergencies be ranked? Thierry Geoffroy will do what’s similar to a “fire exercise” – a pre-test of hospitality between national pavilions getting and giving spaces for emergencies. A fire exercise where he can test the escape issues in order to gain knowledge and prepare how to be ready. An alarm exercise not to be taken by surprise, and created to avoid the situation of: Oh! We did not know! If we knew we would have taken an alternative action, and avoided this accident!

[www.emergencyrooms.org](http://www.emergencyrooms.org)

Patrizio Travagli  
***Pantheistic – Polifacetic***

Patrizio Travagli is working on the memory of disappearance. Building a tower of over 500 mirrors, *Pantheistic-Polifacetic* – he creates fragments of reflections freestanding in a public space, only there to be taken away by passer-by’s. In this process of elimination, are there instructions on the back of the mirrors, requesting for the “participator” to take a photograph of the reflection they seek to capture as their “own memory” and send it back to the assigned email address which will then load all the information captured by the indigenous unknown and electronically collect and save all the histories developed from this fragment of a mobile light-sensitive surface.

Edward Cutler Gallery, Milano (Italy), Tayloe Piggott Gallery, Jackson, WY (USA)



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Hanna Husberg, Laura McLean & Kalliopi Tsipni-Kolaza

***Contingent Movements Archive***

Landmasses have disappeared before. Over thousands of years geological shifts and fluctuating sea levels have shaped migratory patterns and cultural evolution. But the complete disappearance of a nation state beneath the ocean is unprecedented in modern times, and the questions that arise in the face of this situation throw current international laws and issues of cultural continuity into disarray.

The Contingent Movements Archive seeks to unpack the problematics and possibilities of the anticipated submersion and dissolution of the Maldives, exploring these contingencies within a global context. Online and at the pavilion, this speculative project draws together a wide range of perspectives, to map out potential migration scenarios for the permanently displaced population and its culture. The archive will be built up over the period of the Biennale, with critical input from the Contingent Movements Symposium to be held at the pavilion.

[www.contingentmovementsarchive.com](http://www.contingentmovementsarchive.com)

Mohamed Ali & Moomin Fouad

***Happy Birthday***

Winner of 12 MFA Awards from the Maldives Film Festival 2011, Mohamed Ali and Moomin Fouad debut *Happy Birthday* under the context of a kidnapping and disappearance. The hero is a simple man, living a normal life, until his birthday he receives a call telling him that his wife and child have been kidnapped. He is asked to get the ransom if he wants them back and by the time he finds out that this was just a hoax, its too late.





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Oliver Ressler

***For a Completely Different Climate***

“For A Completely Different Climate” deals with an emerging social movement that questions and selectively fights the response (or non-response) of states and corporations to climate change. This leftist movement has the potential to mobilize especially in Britain, where in August 2008 a Climate Camp was organized to close the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station east of London. Although the Kingsnorth station has been shut down, the energy corporation E.ON plans to build, at the same location, a new coal-fired power station that will assure profits for the next few decades. This project completely conflicts with the necessary goal of reducing CO2 emissions. Preventing a new coal-fired powerplant in Kingsnorth is of great symbolic value, since a successful resistance could mean the end of other planned projects for coal-fired powerplants elsewhere in Britain. “For A Completely Different Climate” is a 3-channel slide installation -in Venice shown on one monitor - based on photos taken in the Climate Camp and at the demonstrations and blockades of Kingsnorth, combined with short texts and audio recordings of the demonstrations and workshops.

Courtesy of Galleria Artra, Milan (Italy)

Greg Niemeyer in collaboration with Chris Chafe and Perrin Meyer

***Polartide***

Polartide is a sonification of the sea water levels from 4 islands realized in pods. Visitors approaching the pods will clearly hear sounds of water dripping into a large well creating the illusion of caps of deep wells. In actuality, there is no well, but pairs of very powerful speakers under the pods that produce the sounds of illusion thereof.

[www.polartide.org](http://www.polartide.org)



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Wooloo

***Maldivian Coconut (Capriccio)***

Wooloo has moved a crop of fresh Maldivian coconuts from a local palm tree to the canals of Venice. Each of the palm's twelve coconuts will be placed in a distinct site determined by twelve classical "Vedutismo" paintings of the Venetian cityscape. During the biennial, the coconuts will spread throughout the city on the currents of the water, noticed only by passersby who stumble across them. A small, out-of-place element inserted into one sinking civilization from another, the coconuts serve as a reminder of both the resilience and fragility of nature. Featured on the nation's official Emblem, as well as on countless guidebook covers, hotel brochures, and tourist photographs, the coconut palm is not only the National Tree of the Maldives, but a major element of the island nation's visual culture. The coconut and Maldivian life is essentially inseparable. Yet the image of coconuts in the water is also an image of destruction: following the last tsunami to hit the Maldives, the vast number of coconuts floating in the water was a major sign of ruin. When rising seas eventually submerge the Maldives, its coconuts will bear witness to its last days. Floating away like pieces of memory, the DNA of an extinct time.

Achilleas Kentonis & Maria Papacharalambous

***Mental Para-Dice***

*Mental Para-Dice* works as a catalyst of reflection and discovery. It's about a poetic, critical, aesthetic, philosophical and scientific stroll within space and time. Through play and adventure it aims to retrieve hidden knowledge and forgotten truths (αλήθειες), bringing relationships, communication, creation, even politics to a purely energetic level. A nano-university as the alma mater of knowledge: Where the awakening of mind and soul leads to "miracles".

"To develop a complete mind: Study the Science of Art.

Study the Art of Science. Learn how to see.

Realize that everything connects to everything else".

– *Leonardo da Vinci*

Implementation of 3D animation: Babis Venetopoulos



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Ursula Biemann

***Deep Weather***

The short video essay *Deep Weather* draws the connection between the relentless reach for fossil resources with their toxic impact on the climate, and the consequences this has for indigenous populations in remote parts of the world. The video elaborates on oil and water as the two primordial liquids that form the undercurrents of all narrations as they activate profound changes in the planetary ecology. The first scene gazes down on the huge open pit extraction zone for tar sands in the midst of the vast boreal forests of Northern Canada, opening the view into the dark lubricant geology. The second part of *Deep Weather* turns to the consequences of the melting Himalayan ice fields, rising planetary sea levels and extreme weather events that increasingly define the living condition in Bangladesh. The video documents the gigantic community effort in building protective mud embankments. For different purposes there is massive landscaping going on, on a planetary scale.

Paul Miller, aka. DJ Spooky

***Maldives Adagio: Tide and Tariff***

Tide and Tariff is a project based on oceanic studies of the currents that surround the Maldives atolls. The Maldives is a nation consisting of 26 natural atolls, comprising 1192 islands. Paul D. Miller is the first Artist in Residence at The Metropolitan Museum, and was inspired by the museum's Oceanic collection to explore some of the linkages between the production of physical art objects and what Miller calls "data aesthetics." He took several studies of the ocean currents around The Maldives Atolls and turned them into sonic data. This will be presented in the form of sound and print, and accompanied by a special performance on opening night, Maldives Adagio.



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Khaled Ramadan in collaboration with Abed Anouti

***Maldives To Be or Not***

Khaled Ramadan releases a debut for his documentary film *Maldives To Be or Not*. Captured during his trip in March 2013, Ramadan notes the paradoxes captured between Western culture and its long tradition of romanticizing the imagery of the East. The Maldives today is wavering between the fiction of the West and the reality of the East, and the islanders are at the conjunction of Edward Said's theoretical duality "West is Culture, East is Nature". In 2007 Maldives became the first country to open an Embassy in Second Life, the online virtual world adding more confusion to the country's fictional reality. The environmental hazard about the Maldivian nature is an over politicized notion, and the nature has proven to be much more sustainable than the Maldivian culture. Ramadan's journey to the Maldives is about the East coming into its own. He meets the Maldivian community, the Dhivehi people, which means "the islanders", not as an anthropologist, colonialist or journalist, but as a citizen of the Arab world who wants to learn about what's left of the shared history and how this amphibious nation is treating its contemporary culture in relation to its ecological strengths and weaknesses.



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## PERFORMERS / EVENTS

Celeste Pimm

### ***Resonant Zenith***

Resonant Zenith is a sonic and sculptural interplay with burgeoning environmental crisis, presented for two sinking lands- Venice and The Maldives. Centralizing around the subtle phenomena of rising water levels, this inconspicuous development is brought into the forefront of perception. Water washing onto a Venetian shore is mechanically transformed into sound by bell structures. This data transformation presents a new platform for cogitating rising water levels. A notable warning is formed from the gentle wash of a wave.

Ehsan Fardjadniya

### ***Pirate Cinema***

Pirate Cinema--a mobile moving-image installation powered by renewable energy. The Amsterdam version of the installation is a DIY, recycled and hacked machine! A five wheels bike for three people to move forwards or produce electricity. For Venice we are designing a customised and optimised version that suits the city architecture and it's urban culture. Pirate Cinema is an open platform. A catalyst for engaged art, guerrilla promotion, street politics and people's empowerment. We organised and participated in varieties of events like short and feature films screening, experimental music, bands performances and festivals.

Mark Dahl

### ***The Greatest Challenge in the Prevention of Global Degradation and Disaster***

The greatest challenge in the prevention of global degradation and disaster, is the depoliticisation that pervades dominant discourse. My contribution to the Maldives Pavilion will be simple and performative, but, I hope, challenging in light of the context. I will be burning a very small amount of coal in a coal BBQ. The disappearance of what seems to not appear in the first place, what will emanate into the atmosphere, will seem both inconsequential and problematic. People in attendance will be free to make use of the BBQ which will otherwise be cooking nothing. It is doubtful that it will be made use of, and this possibility will inform the work. I plan to also, at some point, if possible, relocate the BBQ to a spot just beyond the gate where those who cannot or will not pay for entry to the Biennale can be exposed to the absurdity going on inside.



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Shani Leiderman and Valentin von Lindenau

**WAX**

WAX is a performance, a live sculpture and a concert in which a woman removes hair from her legs, using warm wax, while singing and talking to an audience. You are invited for 30 minutes of intimacy with two Mediterranean legs and the wax that makes them shine.

Marian Tubbs

***Open Model for an Affective Landscape, Virtual Becomes Real When Necessary***

“Open Model for an Affective Landscape, Virtual Becomes Real When Necessary” is 100% non-organic meditation on virtual simulations of natural ecologies. The fictive documentary makes suggestion to dwelling in virtual landscapes as a call forwarding to the death of nature. The internet sourced imagery and soundbites have been animated into a moving landscape ranging from crude cutups to dreamy vistas where exotic animals call out to the senses. The content problematises intellectual property and thinking through the concept of Ersatz nature.

Oliver Ressler

***Leave it in the Ground***

The film *Leave It in the Ground* (working title) will draw a line between global warming and uprisings, how disastrous weather conditions somehow will lead to the emergence of social movements, the fall of governments, or where this has already been the case. The link between climate change and social movements is a complex one, usually entailing at least one or more other central factors.

The film is a commission by Lofoten International Art Festival in Norway, that will open on September 6, 2013.