



View of "Oo," 2013, Lithuania/Cyprus pavilion, Venice. (Foreground) Maria Hassabi, *Intermission*, 2013; Gabriel Lester, *Quisque*, 2013. Background: Dexter Sinclair, *Work in Progress*, 2013. Photo: Robertas Naruskas.



Maria Hassabi, *Intermission*, 2013. Performance view, Lithuania/Cyprus pavilion, Venice, May 29, 2013. Photo: Robertas Naruskas.

318 ARTFORUM

VENICE 2013

## Now You See It

CLAIRE BISHOP ON THE LITHUANIA/CYPRUS PAVILION



Styrmir Örn Guðmundsson in collaboration with Jurgis Paškevičius, *Talker reader reader*, 2013. Performance view, Lithuania/Cyprus pavilion, Venice, May 29, 2013. Photo: Robertas Naruskas.



Anonymous, untitled, 2013, reprogrammed Robot Roomba vacuum cleaner. Installation view, Lithuania/Cyprus pavilion, Venice. Photo: Robertas Naruskas.



Gabriel Lester speaking at the opening of the Lithuania/Cyprus pavilion, Venice, May 30, 2013. Photo: Robertas Naruskas.

Only some of the activity I saw was curated; the rest was pure chance.

**DEPENDING ON WHOM YOU SPEAK TO**, the Lithuania/Cyprus pavilion is either an unforgettably atmospheric nonpavilion that sets new standards for post-national, site-specific representation in Venice, or an obfuscating haze of fictions without any core or substance. The jury in Venice clearly took the former view, awarding the undertaking a "special mention" during the vernissage.

For a start, there is the pairing: Lithuanian curator Raimundas Malašauskas was invited to organize both national pavilions and decided to make an unlikely merger. And then there is the building: Rather than rent out a romantically decrepit palazzo, he pooled the budgets to lease the Palasport, a fully operational, multilevel, 1970s-era sports hall located right next to the Arsenal. Inside, there are two possible routes: the long (seven flights of stairs) and the short (three).

I unwittingly set out on the long route, hunting for Maria Hassabi's performance *Intermission*, 2013. A group of us were directed downstairs into an empty, dark, cavernous room where nothing was happening (later we saw a dance by Lia Haraki there). We then sprinted up the stairs to emerge at the top of a vast, bright basketball court, flanked by steep bleachers. We had missed *Intermission* but stumbled into the pavilion's grand opening. Gabriel Lester gave a rousing speech. This was followed by an aerobics demonstration by Francisco Camacho Herrera, obeying instructions delivered in a thick quasi-Russian accent by Anders Kreuger.

In the center of the court, Lester had installed a selection of walls, which turned out to be temporary exhibition dividers donated by various European

museums (*Cousins*, 2013). These were surrounded by pinecones and wood chips (an installation by Jason Dodge), while scoreboards with custom electronics (by Dexter Sinister) blinked the numerical-sounding titles of the pavilion's shows, "oO" and "Oo," at either end of the court. Other works, including a sound piece by Morten Norbye Halvorsen and sculpture by Phanos Kyriacou, were buried among the bleachers. I completely missed Myriam Lefkowitz's guided walks (participants were led around Venice with their eyes shut) and Jurgis Paškevičius and Styrmir Örn Guðmundsson's tours of the pavilion, which culminated in break dancing.

When I returned the next day, the sports hall was nearly empty. Hassabi—best known for her glacially slow choreography—was moving diagonally down the bleachers with two other dancers, their movements barely perceptible. Hardly anyone was watching, but this made the performers' slow-motion intensity all the more striking and otherworldly; they moved at a pace completely remote from the Biennale's frenetic norm. This was easily the most striking and beautiful new work I saw in Venice. In the center of the court, proceeding haltingly between Lester's *Cousins*, was a man with a walking stick and a wonky mask (which I later found out was made by children in Lithuania). Behind me, two people were sleeping. At one point, a group of seven-year-old girls came marching through in dance outfits, as if ready for a class. Only some of this was curated; the rest was pure chance. Instead of Venice, or a national pavilion, I felt like I was in a city of lost souls, suspended in some placeless, timeless void.

*Satrėiga* is the Lithuanian word for "things taking care of themselves," and it's a good descriptor of Malašauskas's curating. The yellow leaflet that guides you through the show is elliptical at best, while the invigilators seemed to have no idea what was going on. After the first week or so, when the programmed events ended, local Venetians animated the pavilion by adapting their exercise routines to this sprawling, fragmented, and utterly incomprehensible exhibition. The show closes this month as local basketball players reclaim their court.

As always with Malašauskas, generosity toward the individual viewer is not a priority; his exhibitions tend to be a combination of treasure hunt, time travel, and conspiracy theory. If you decide to play the game, the pavilion becomes a long-term puzzle: The exhibition will only make sense gradually, over the next few months or even years, as you talk to others who experienced it, joining the dots of its alcatraz, quasi-fictional existence. The organizing premise will get no clearer, of course, but as a set of disconnected, peripheral experiences the show will start to acquire a more tangible character.

Is it enough for curators to create moods rather than arguments? For a large-scale biennial, almost certainly not, but for a pavilion on the margins, gently chafing the main event, this strategy has some value. Randomly interweaving the curated and the noncurated produced a distended parallel universe—a sensibility that will outlive the pavilion's existence, leaving an opaque but indelible impression. □

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