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WOMEN ARTISTS RULE AT 59TH INTERNATIONAL OLYMPICS OF ART

By P. Andrews-Keenan

'Venice, said feminist **Erica Jong**, is the city of mirrors, the city of mirages, at once solid and liquid, at once air and stone." *The Fear of Flying* author would have relished that, in this amorphous city, during the 59th International Art Exhibition, nine of every 10 artists exhibiting is a woman. Italian **Cecilia Alemani**, the director and chief curator of New York's High Line Art is the first woman to ever curate the Biennale which has been held since 1895.

Under the theme ***The Milk of Dreams (IL Latte Dei Sogni)*** 213 artists from 58 countries were featured; 180 are participating for the first time in the International Exhibition. 1433 works and objects are on display and 80 new projects were conceived specifically for the Biennale de Arte. "*The Milk of Dreams* takes its title from a book by Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) **Alemani** stated – "In which the Surrealist artist describes a magical world where life is constantly re-envisioned through the prism of the imagination. It is a world where everyone can change, be transformed, become something or someone else."

'***The Milk of Dreams***' pivots around a centrally located section, titled '**The Witch's Cradle**', which Alemani describes in her curatorial statement as the 'fulcrum' of the exhibition in terms of theme and scope. Here, she showcases the work of artists **Loïs Mailou Jones**, and **Augusta Savage (The Harp)**, with the goal being to tell a different story of personhood that tilts power away from men. Pigment shared the story of the destruction of Savage's Harp in the Winter 2021-22 issue of the Pigment Magazine.

The **Golden Lion** for best artist in the Biennale's central exhibition, was won by Chicago native and New York based artist [Simone Leigh](#) for her work "Brick House," a 16-foot-tall bronze of a Black woman with cornrows and a dome-shaped torso that combines the forms of a skirt and a clay house. According to the Biennale **Leigh** won for the "rigorously researched, virtuosically realized, and powerfully persuasive monumental sculpture ... which alongside Cuban printmaker [Belkis Ayón](#), provided a compelling entrée to the ideas, sensibilities and approaches constellated and animated throughout *The Milk of Dreams*.

Leigh reimagined the U.S. Pavilion as a thatched hut based on one from the exhibition *Coloniale Internationale – Paris 1931*. While one Biennale cannot erase the impact of colonization, abuse, and misrepresentation of women and Black people across the globe, certainly it should spur us to delve into, and understand our shared history from a more global perspective.



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The artist **Sonia Boyce** won Britain the top prize for best national participation for “Feeling Her Way” — a sound installation of five Black British female musicians singing a cappella. Boyce is the first Black woman to represent Britain at the Venice event.

Special Mention for National Participation went to **Uganda**, a first time participant in the Biennale which acknowledged their vision, ambition and commitment to art and working in their country. “Acaye Kerunen, in her choice of sculptural materials like bark-clothed raffia, illustrates sustainability as a practice and not just a policy or concept,” said the committee.

#PIGMENTTAKESVENICE – Highlights

In Conversation with Kymberly Pinder and Aki Sasamoto. Pinder, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Dean of the Yale School of Art, and exhibiting artist Sasamoto, Assistant Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Sculpture, engaged in a conversation about art, the Biennale exhibition, and the Yale School of Art. Pinder shared her goal to make obtaining an MFA from Yale, one of the most diverse MFA programs in the country, both debt and tuition free. We’re looking forward to hearing more about that.

Kehinde Wiley’s arresting exhibition [An Archaeology of Silence](#) is a collection of new monumental paintings and sculptures, curated by **Christophe Leribault**, President of the **Musée d’Orsay** and **Musée de l’Orangerie**. Wiley’s work literally took our breath away. The subjects – young Black, fashion forward men and women, did not engage with the viewer, rather they gazed off into space, turned their heads or covered their eyes. It was their way of reclaiming the invisibility that the world so often imposes on them. In this case it was as if the viewer was invisible, or perhaps just irrelevant.

Two life sized sculptures, positioned head to head of a man and a woman, were laying in a coffin. Rather than an overhead view into the coffin it was an inside view that was disturbing yet engaging in the life like portrayals. The exhibition was inspired by German painter **Hans Holbein’s** painting *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, as well as historical paintings and sculptures of fallen warriors and figures in a state of repose.

The attention to detail down to clothing logos, shoes and jewelry of each subject was impeccable. Beautiful, powerful and disturbing you cannot walk away from this exhibition unchanged. The exhibition is at the **Fondazione Giorgio Cini** until July 24th.

Pigment attended an opening brunch for the **Pavilion of Zimbabwe** its sixth consecutive appearance at la Biennale di Venezia. The exhibition ‘**I did not leave a sign?**’ featured artists **Kresiah Mukwazhi, Wallen Mapondera, Terrence Musekiwa and Ronald Muchatuta**. The



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exhibition is curated by **Fadzai Veronica Muchemwa**. The Commissioner of the Pavilion is **Raphael Chikukwa**.

Artificial Future of Cities by artist **Raul Esteras** was shown by the **REM Project**, the only Black owned gallery in Puerto Rico. It was the artist's reflection on how - in a not so distant future – technological advances will affect humans in all social levels. Expect Pigment to share more about REM.

Follow us on Instagram for highlights of the trip from our entire team – **Veronica 'Vee' Harrison, Simone Woods,** and **Dana Todd Pope's** video blog as well. Shout out to all the brothers and sisters we gave 'the nod' to in Venice and the impressive Chicago crew in attendance **#blackatthebiennale**. So many of these creatives from Leigh to Yale's Pinder spent a portion of their career in Chicago. What a light it shines on our creative community. Shout out to Vee's classmate who joined us for dinner. We took a side trip to **Florence** to see the works of **Michelangelo**. **Georgina Heard** what a crack to make about David. Thanks to Venice photographer **Federico Vespignani** for capturing the **The Speculative Future of Blackness - Artists' Talk**.

This Biennale shows that Black people have international comrades in arms in envisioning a more equitable future. As we commemorate, and frankly mourn, the 30 years since the LA riots and beating of Rodney King, it will take all of us to rewrite this narrative and conjure the future we all desire. Artists have certainly envisioned the future and the hope is palpable!