



## Press Release

The exhibition *The Waters We Are In*, is part of a long term curatorial project developed by Lanfranco Aceti and titled *What If This Were the Case?* The exhibition is part of the events of the official parallel program of the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale and is realized with the support of the IDC Foundation. “Students as Researchers: Creative Practice and University Education” a Collateral Event organized by the New York Institute of Technology, School of Architecture and Design, one of nine collateral events approved by Leslie Lokko, curator of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, presents an exhibition in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Cuts (MoCC).

Conceived and curated by Lanfranco Aceti and promoted by MoCC, *What If This Were The Case? - The Waters We Are In* consists of a temporary exhibition, public space installations, performances, catalog presentations, and public lectures that will be hosted at the Armenian Culture Studies and Documentation Center and at Centro Ricerca Arte Contemporanea (CRAC) Puglia during the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023.

Lanfranco Aceti brings a team of artists — Giulio De Mitri, Laura Mega, Diego Repetto, and Oliver Ressler — who will make a case on the contemporary crisis of water and its substantial and elemental alterations. The artists had a residency at and collaborated with MoCC, to analyze the contemporary role of water and its elemental nature.

Inspired by Marcel Duchamp’s *Box in a Valise* (from or by Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy), 1935-1941, the artists have worked and developed their newly commissioned works of art at MoCC, creating a dialogue as well as forms of aesthetic engagements with the element of water and its crisis. As part of the exhibition opening at the 18th Venice Architecture Biennale, the curators Lanfranco Aceti and Alessandro Melis presented the case files in an exhibition in collaboration with CRAC Puglia titled *Monumental Elements*, realized at Palazzo Pantaleo with the support of the municipality, MAS week, Taranto Grand Tour, and UNESCO.

The newly commissioned works of art, shipped in pieces of luggage — which in their own merit reflect aesthetic choices and are an indissoluble part of the work of art presented by each artist — deal with the contemporary crisis of water, which has been transformed from its original symbolic and mythological role of a life-giving element into a silent killer.

“What role does water play in our lives?” asks Aceti. “Is it the same crisis — like everywhere else but with different manifestations — affecting the rest of the world? Or are there substantial differences in the reinterpretation and perceptions of the water crisis? Are there differences — conceptual and aesthetic — in how European and

international artists reinterpret their relationship with collapsing waterways, polluted seas, and increasingly violent rainfalls? What new socio-political divides are being created by the water crisis and what is its redefining geopolitical role across the world?"

The artists have set up temporary workshops and residencies at MoCC to develop and participate in curatorial conversations, aesthetic interpretations of water, and analyses of water-related socio-political issues and imaginaries. Packaged within pieces of luggage, the works of art emerge from material and process-related challenges which, historically rooted in portable art, straddle the line between 'presenting a case/thesis' and 'being a case/luggage.' The works of art are presentations of symbolisms that renew our understanding, through art production, of the meaning of water. From the US social-water crisis (Benjamin J. Pauli, *Flint Fights Back*, 2019) to the kaleidoscopic usages of water in South East Asia (Peter Boomgaard, *A World of Water*, 2007), *What If This Were the Case? - The Waters We Are In* paints a picture of past notions of water and things to come through the eyes of artists in relation to their international counterparts.

The theme for this year's Venice Architecture Biennale is The Laboratory of the Future. Collaborating with MoCC's Director, the artists have developed a multidisciplinary laboratory practice that engages multiple local and international stakeholders, maps out ways and means of sharing experiences of art production, develops innovative aesthetic approaches, and constructs future models for mutual development within the world at large.

The exhibition concept — as designed by MoCC's Director, Lanfranco Aceti in collaboration with Alessandro Melis, Inaugural IDC Foundation Endowed Chair, New York Institute of Technology — allows for the varied aesthetic voices of the artists to harmonize and contrast in a contemporary analysis of the water crisis and the future living conditions that humanity is plunging itself into. The focus is less on creative, harmonious, and cohesive structures realized through thematic conceptualizations but rather on supporting the artists in the conception and execution of their own themes, at times discordant and disconnected, to enable them to produce new works that challenge preconceived notions of 'alterity' in regards to the eco-crisis that we are throwing ourselves in. The result is an exhibition that — originating from the diversity of the artists, their artistic positions, and geolocalized preoccupations — explores alternative ideas and ideals of memory, existence, and wading through future uncertain waters.

The works of art are about personal perspectives, momentous experiences, subtle concerns, and glocal narratives. Water is a fluid shared element. It has shared commonalities in nation-building processes and collective sedimented memories. How these experiences are transposed in a visual art context, either retaining complexities or discarding any referential elements, is part of the artists' response to the curatorial framework.

It is through these aesthetic interpretations of and interactions with the curatorial framework that the works of art offer the opportunity to wade through the waters of concerns, uncertainties, and fears. Each piece of luggage becomes a container of a work of art and a case file from which and through which we can begin to pack and unpack the dystopian and dysfunctional reality of a self-righteous mass-capitalism of finite resources and a blatantly ignorant progress devoid of knowledge and full of false assumptions and undelivered promises.

The viewers are free to interpret the works of art in the context of global ecological turmoil, local memories, and cultural interpretations of the element of 'water', uncovering the complex fluidity of the cultural notions and assumptions that humanity shares of water.

MoCC in the forthcoming years will continue to develop artists' cases on the other three elements, (Air  $\triangle$ , Earth  $\nabla$ , and Fire  $\triangle$ ). This research trajectory will lead to an exhibition program comprised of international artists who will continue to make the case for alternative visions of our planetary conditions and the irreversible alterations of its basic elements.

Thanks to the the efforts of the artists, the support of the Venice Architecture Biennale, and CRAC Puglia that MoCC has been able to make the case for a vibrant aesthetic interpretation of the crisis of water and an analysis of the future waters through which we will have to wade.



Lanfranco Aceti, *Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Young Revolutionary as Performed by Francesco Sacco*, 2021. Digital photography and mixed media. Dimensions: 100 cm. x 67 cm.

## Lanfranco Aceti, Biography - Curator

Lanfranco Aceti works as an artist, curator, and academic. He is Editor in Chief of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac (MIT Press, Leonardo journal), for which he has edited more than twelve volumes. He worked as the director of Kasa Gallery in Istanbul, where he exhibited a range of innovative artworks including *75 Watts* by Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen (acquired by MoMA) and Paolo Cirio's *Loophole4All* (awarded the 2014 Golden Nica at Ars Electronica). Recently he performed and curated *Hope Coming On* at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, as well as curated *The Small Infinite* at the John Hansard Gallery.

In 2011, he curated the exhibition *Uncontainable* as part of the 12th Istanbul Biennial and an exhibition of digital artworks on the media facade of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb. In 2017, Aceti curated a series of exhibitions and projects including a large public installation on the promenade of the city of Thessaloniki, coinciding with the Thessaloniki Biennial, and curated a public intervention at documenta14. In 2020/2021 he exhibited a large body of works of art at the Venice Architecture Biennale, challenging established notions of white cube and public space. As a result, he is now curating *ad infinitum*, together with Alessandro Melis, the Italian Pavilion 2021 for the Museum of Contemporary Arts and completing *Empty Pr(oe)mises* for the EMST, Athens.