

2nd day we worked through these and presented actual pieces of work.

The 3rd and final day gave us an in depth private discussion with Lia, then a wrapping up session discussing long and short term goals and how to keep ourselves on track, maybe getting help from the group to do this. Any goals we came out with or new routes chosen were very much choices which we made for ourselves, not given to us by any other, although of course a stream of suggestions of things we hadn't thought of widened the selection of possibilities. Everything we left with was something we had come for ourselves and we had the memory of the journey to reinforce our understanding of the results.

Taking a critique type of class like this isn't necessary to go forward. Answers we came to as individuals came from within through the questioning / articulating process we went through together. One advantage was to have the journey witnessed and guided by someone with a vast amount of experience in our field, and validated by a peer group. Another was simply to dedicate time to focus on our work for an uninterrupted period. Something not many of us manage to do at home.



Belinda Rose 'Bottle'

We were 4 in number after absence though illness, and although we enjoyed plenty of time for personal attention, it would have been good to have had a couple more people to balance out personalities, opinion and experience. I am very glad I did this course. It is still giving me food for thought and I have now a small mixed network of people to touch base with in the future. The class reinforced thoughts I have had for while, but not been confident enough to follow. It opened my eyes to other opportunities.

I recommend taking a class like this. Lia Cook brought great understanding from her years of working with students and made it enjoyable, even when occasionally a little knotty. Be prepared though, if you are thinking of taking on an intensive critique like this. I was not alone in coming home and doing practically nothing but sleep for a week.

## Fibre Art As Seen in Venice by Renata Pompas, Italy

It has now been quite a while since the most important exhibition of contemporary art in the world, the International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale with its numerous collateral events, has exhibited interesting works of Fibre Art, which are never reported as such by critics. Therefore, I would like to report a brief overview of what can be seen at the Biennale: in the *Giardini* in the *Arsenale* in the National Pavilions sides of the Biennale, in the lagoon and in the concurrent exhibitions.

At the *Arsenale* side, the Italian **Giulia Piscitelli** is present with *Spica*, a delicate installation made of 20 coloured fabrics corroded with bleach, to reveal the imprint of wheat inspired by ancient coins. The South African **Nicholas Hlobo** in *limpundulu Zonke Ziyandilandela* (All the Lighting Birds Are After Me) shows an image of a terrible dragon with wings deployed in flight, a mythological creature of the Xhosa culture made of leather and rubber car tires stitched together with satin ribbons. The Paraguayan **Claudia Casarino** in *Pynandi* (Barefoot) homages, with a work composed of three white dresses inserted into one another - dedicated to daughter, mother and widow - the heroism of the women of his country, who during the nineteenth century rebuilt their war-ravaged country where

the male population was decimated. The Argentinian **Gloria Argeles** creates some metal portraits with cut wire. The German **Olaf Holzapfel** exhibits a *Temporary house* made by some women of the Argentinian Wichi community weaving the fiber of cactus.



Photo Anna Colnaghi

In the Swiss Pavilion, **Thomas Hirschhorn** expresses the chaos of the globalization in *Crystal of Resistance*, a crowded and chaotic accumulation of objects. In the Israeli Pavilion, **Sigalit Landau** symbolizes the history of his homeland in *One man's floor is another man's feelings* using water, ice, sand, and a fishing net crystallized by Dead Sea salt. In the Korean Pavilion stands out the army camouflaged among lush flowers of *Angel soldier* by **Lee Yongbaek**, pledged to denounce the violence of wars. In the Central Asia Pavilion, **Alexander Nikolaev & Lika Panava** create 12 small naive panels, *World of Kind people*, illustrating crafts and folk customs; while in another room, strewn with blankets quilted with mystical and politicians symbols from around the world, **Said Atabekov** reflects on religious faiths in *Bosphorus Prayer*.

At the "Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa", the collective **Men Hijig** narrates the history of a imaginary geographical location that combines East/West and covers the furniture of the location with a sea blue cloth.

There are three sites that have devoted particular attention to Fibre Art: Palazzo Mocenigo, Palazzo Grassi and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

At the Palazzo Mocenigo, the "Arte & Arte" association has organized the exhibition

*Miniartextil: a textile experience*, with 54 mini-textiles and 7 large installations. At the Palazzo Grassi, in the exhibition *The World Belongs To you*, the "Francois Pinault Foundation" reserves the most space of the great hall, the staircase and the railings to *Contamination*: the giant textile work of the Portuguese **Joana Vasconcelos** which is displayed like a strange merry, soft, friendly and prolific creature. The "Fondazione Giorgio Cini", on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, dedicates an exhibition to the manufacture of textiles tapestries designed by contemporary artists; unfortunately using in the title the abused metaphor of Penelope as in *Penelope's Labour: Weaving Words and Images*. When in the early sixties the Aubusson manufacturers asked for the collaboration of Jean Lurçat to revive the tapestry, the French painter decided to ask some famous contemporary artists for designs which were produced by professional weavers.



Photo Anna Colnaghi

In 1962, the first *Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie* was inaugurated in Lausanne, making fashionable in contemporary people's perception this ancient and glorious production. At the exhibition, next to the ancient tapestries and carpets of the Cini Foundation and other private collections - including valuable Flemish, Persian and Anatolian pieces - it is possible to admire the transcripts of some well-known contemporary artists cartoon. Like one of the *Maps* that the Italian **Alighiero Boetti** ask to be embroidered by the women of Kabul, with precursor choice. Or the *Carpet of War* made with machine guns, bombs, tanks and other



means of attack, that some anonymous Afghan woman made themselves for housekeeping.

The Austrian born in Sarajevo **Azra Akšamija**, architect and architecture historian, conceptual artist and curator, explores the representation of Islamic identity in the West and sets in the *Monument in Waiting* (2008) a kilim woven by hand in the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina with 99 beads. **Simon Peers**, a British art historian and textiles expert who has long worked in Madagascar to revive the textile traditions of the island, and **Nicholas Godley**, an American fashion designer, showed weaving by local craftsmen, *The woven web* (2009): a lightweight gold and precious brocade fabric, made entirely by hand with a fine silk yarn made from more than a million spiders, the first documented example of this material.

Other artists have worked with *Flanders Tapestries*, a manufacture of tapestries of ancient tradition that, in addition to the reproduction of the most famous Flemish design, produces on commission. Among these are the Egyptian-Lebanese-born **Lara Baladi**, who designed in 2001 *Sandouk el Dounia* (The World in a box), a collage made up of 900 small prints on a black background: a dramatic image of a fragmented world, global and contradictory. **Craigie Horsfield**, an English artist living in New York who usually works with large dimension photography and often makes translation of his images into a textiles medium, exposes *Above the road east toward Taibique* (2008), a fragment of sky where the clouds run after each other, and *Via Gianturco, Naples* (2010), the image of a crowd where appears a mysterious hieratic and mystical figure. The English artist **Grayson Perry**, winner of the Turner Prize 2003 and known for his transvestism, made *Walthamstow Tapestry* (2009): a tapestry which recounts in comic style the contemporary life, from birth to death, through the seven ages of man. The composition is full of different characters, with references to modern life and its excesses: a "ship of fools" surrounded by the names of troubled financial institutions such as RBS, HSBC, Northern Rock and Enron while hundreds of other famous brands are scattered among the figures. **Carlos Garaicoa**, a Cuban thermodynamic engineer who has worked extensively making maps for the army, presents

an installation of 5 tapestry and 2 video projections, *Fin de Silencio* (2010) which reproduces the streets of Havana. The Spanish **Manuel Franquelo**, an electrical engineer who works with photography, has many things in



Photo Anna Colnaghi

common with Garaicoa: the artist presents *Palimpsest and Palindrome* (2011): an installation with a technologic tapestry developed on both sides and connected to 2 video screenings. On one side of the tapestry there are calculations and mathematical operations, on the other side is reported a sentence of Plutarch in the Morse code that compares the speeches of men and rugs: clear if lying, wrapped if twisted. Finally, the two tapestries of the English **Marc Quinn**, whose figures *The woven web* (trial 1) and *Pixelation of a Hybrid*, respectively from 2009 and 2011, reproduce the giant brightly colored camel and sensual orchids, whose weaving knots are read by Quinn as being composed of tactile pixels of wool.

To conclude, this year Venice has devoted much attention to Fibre Art.