



## STRESS IN VENICE.

Like no other takedown of an exhibition, like no other dismantling of an installation, this experience was unique in so many ways and undertaken under such strange and unusual circumstances, it made the film 'Don't Look Now' seem like a rom-com. Right down to the appearance and re-appearance of the red-caped dwarf, the appearance and re-appearance, the eyes say it all, hundreds of masked people passing you by in the shadowy Calle. Catching your own masked reflection in a shop window would send shivers down the spine.

From personal experience installing and dismantling an exhibition is stressful. Some are more stressful than others and for a variety of reasons. Access to difficult sites for the work and the plant requirements vary and health and safety measures (oh the bane and pain of health and safety), dealing with awkward and often difficult personalities, and you must deal with many personalities from architects and designers to clients and plumbers, from project managers expect a special kind of interference, and the worst of all, local laws and restrictions!

SCIA, the acronym for Segnalazione Certificata Di Inizio Attività, a certificate you need from the city of Venice before doing any work on the Riva del Schiavoni where a weight of 300kg per square meter is the maximum tolerated. Where pedestrian traffic must be able to pass simultaneously and safely is paramount. Many more assistants than such a task requires than when you can deliver cranes and forklifts by road.

*Venice is water!*







Everything arrives and departs by water. The cranes and forklifts, the sculptures and timber. A lot, a lot of timber because you must build timber roads across the Riva to spread the weight, timber platforms and paths to takes the weight of the cranes when they pass from pontoon to pavement, are stationary or from where they will operate.









Arrival of the large crane after the timber road had been laid.

All the time considering the pedestrian traffic, the safety of the assistants. Cranes lift cranes and forklifts that hover waiting for the timber roads to be laid down and Claudio is wringing his hands, with an expression of 'I really don't want to watch him now' while I dart, hardly, I use a cane to walk, between lengths of timber, cranes and a forklift, interfering, advising the professionals who respond and banter in Chioggia, none of which I understand!





Naturally the assistants are Italian and from Venice where they speak Venetian but as with all countries, dialects may vary even within a city. I speak a passable Italian learnt in Tuscany and learnt in the stone industry in Querceta and Pietra Santa. I am familiar with technical terms, just as I am with restaurant Italian. What I am not familiar with is Venetian and what I am most certainly not familiar with is Chioggiotto, the dialect from those who live on the island of Chioggia, where most of the assistants came from.



Venetian pensioner disputing where to cross.







*I was not in control.*



*I like to be in control!*



But Claudio was in control, and I drove him nuts!

This is his domain I doubt whether anyone knows more about the logistics of this business in Venice. Except for myself, patent nonsense of course. Alessandra my indispensable assistant kept trying to get my attention, to get me out of the way, but to no avail.

I cannot stop from interfering.









Unfamiliar, scary and frightening, the everchanging spectre of the pandemic, of Covid 19. My works were installed during the first lockdown in Italy when the Architectural Biennale was cancelled.

I was showing with ECC, and they asked if I could do something that would express my reaction to the pandemic. It would be outdoors which made this possible. I made **Earth Lung** and the five stone sculptures remained in situ until the opportunity to open in the Giardini Della Marinaressa alongside the Biennale could be realized.

We had all lived with the tedious but necessary changes to our lives. Lockdowns, self-isolation, travel bans and more for two years.



But normal life had to go on. The opening.



The takedown was being done just as news of the Omicron virus hit the deadlines, I mean headlines of course! Nasty perhaps but not so misplaced when you consider that even though we were working outdoors we numbered well over twenty in very close contact, moving weights, filling and closing crates and aside from almost everyone smoking and being short of breath, myself guiltiest of all, we huffed and puffed and spat our way through the two days. In proximity and mainly unmasked!







Earth Plug weighs almost seven tons. It needs to be wrapped in bubblewrap and treated with great care. It's a pampered monster!





Each sculpture has its own specific requirements, each sculpture must be handled with care and crated for its journey down to my studio in Tuscany.







Jane's Japanese Love Boat had suffered damage when it was delivered, now repaired it still had to be treated with kid gloves.







Claudio attempting to roll Earth Plug into the crate.  
Needless to say, the crane did the job.









Yes, Venice is water, we know that. Yes, the centuries of living on the islands, commuting between the islands, transporting citizens, tourists and workers and the centuries of trade from East and West and North and South, a centre of international diplomacy and the crossroads for this trade that brought with it architectural styles and extravagant artistic beauty with influences from as far afield as the known globe, all needed development of specific building systems, the cultural influences that over centuries informed Venetian rulers, a city with its own specific methods of crisscrossing Venice. It is like no other city.





Venice is like no other city and I'm firmly on the side of those who love it.



A special thanks to Interlinea and all their assistants and to Alessandra, my assistant for organising and directing everything.