Ariane Michel Il Concerto dell'acqua

3 Easy Pieces #3 Curator: Silvia Guerra



Il Concerto dell'acqua

a project by Ariane Michel

Third part of the 3 *Easy Pieces* series Produced by Lab'Bel during the 2022 edition of the Venice Contemporary Art Biennale

This is a cine-concert that takes place at night in a small square in Venice, under cover of darkness.

The film opens with images of mountain glaciers under a moonlit sky. Snow crackles, crevasses creak, drops fall. Drawing closer to the elements, one can see and hear water distinctly and in different registers.

As the audience becomes engrossed in this nocturnal film, while the water begins to flow in streams, and eyes adjust to the darkness, one discerns the proximity of a choir. The sounds that "emerge" from the images on screen are actually made by people, via some fifteen mouths and twice as many hands! Equipped with plastic items, metal scraps and old objects, as well as some more dynamic and complex instruments, this choir of Venetians succeeds in making the water sing, louder and louder, as if it were crashing down to the Venetian Lagoon, ready to engulf it. Hyper-realistic sounds fill the square and create the sensation of the presence of water. Yet these sounds are made by people! A diffuse sensation of music emerges from the ensemble.

The film makes water the leading character. A mobile aerial camera showcases water's body in various guises and perspectives. Alternate micro and macro shots depict the ice melting as the climate warms. Awoken from its icy immobility, the water emerges, drips, trickles, glides and rushes together, forming a wave and gaining strength. Here, water is less a thing than a being or a becoming: it wells up, eddies, hisses and then explodes. Here, the water speaks, elusive and alive in its multiple states. This is water as a verb.

Like the flowing water, the film too runs its course amidst images of real landscapes, and fragments of painted and sculpted landscapes. Occasionally, the details, backgrounds and the edges of certain Quattrocento and Cinquecento artworks and paintings can be recognized, evoking the figures, religion and history of Venice's golden age. We can almost see the paintbrush as it depicts the water in a flurry of strokes.

The performance, by allowing students, musicians and friends of Venice to recreate exactly what the water "could be saying" in these images, offers a kind of sound painting, mirroring the pictorial approach of Renaissance artists, a kind of ceremony of address, an invitation or exchange, evoking an animistic ritual. Plunging performers and spectators into the sensitive realities of water, this event promises to allow them to be momentarily in tune with the element and thereby, produce a moment of co-animation and co-perception. It remains to be seen whether the music that emerges from this shared narrative can transport the public to a kind of dreamtime*. Perhaps it may be possible to rebuild, in a fragment of night, the geography of a wild thought encompassing this city and its rivers, the continent and its mountains, the earth and its glaciers, just as the latter are in the process of melting, causing the sea level to rise in this very place.

* Dreamtime: in Aboriginal mythology, this term refers to the "golden age" when the first ancestors were created.

Il Concerto dell'acqua

Ariane Michel's Water Concert is the third installment in the 3 Easy Pieces series of performances in Venice, Italy that started in 2015. Presented in public spaces, they are developed in partnership with non-institutional actors most of the time, although they take place during the Venice Biennale. They stand as alternative efforts to present current and living art through other modi operandi in an overcrowded historic city with dated means of transportation and aging pavilions. These « three easy pieces » pay homage to Stravinsky's original music of the same name, written for his own children. The project has grown in close collaboration with present-day Venitians-locals who still strive to live in such a precarious city. In 2015, Michael Staab's Concertino Unisono took after Fluxus in having the orchestras of Piazza San Marco perform a waltz in unison; in 2019, David Horvitz traced a path across the city's 435 bridges, making children play the pipe organ of Chiesa di San Rocco among other interventions; now in 2019, David Horvitz traced a path across the city's 435 bridges; now the time has come to encounter the water flowing under our feet in the "Floating City," beneath its streets and palaces-but also sometimes above ground.

Is there a more utopian city in Europe than Venice? It is unrivalled in its postcard-like appearance, its bidimensional perfection. Built on water and exposed to moon cycles and the related *acqua alta*—its arrival being announced by a siren whose sound varies according to the water level—, the *Serenissima* always adapted to changing flows and fluxes. Let's remember that mythological sirens were actually bird-like monsters: they have since become underwater creatures. Yet the piercing eyes of birds remain at the heart of Ariane Michel's film *Il Concerto dell'acqua*, a work-in-progress taking flight from the glaciers of Mont Blanc, in the dead of night. The artist has always been fond of confronting or sharing her vision with that of birds, as evidenced by the owl featured in her film *Les Yeux ronds* (2005), perched on the roof of the Jeu de Paume museum in Paris.

Upon seeing the first images of the film Ariane Michel is currently composing for our Venitian project, I was instantly reminded of Caspar David Friedrich's painting titled *The Sea of Ice*. We all feel the weight of climate change and the practical issues it raises globally in the age of the Anthropocene: we feel haunted by it. But the artist's film never includes human beings or animals. And we are tempted–as avid consumers of art forever in service to Mnemosyne–to compare the two artworks. One thing sets them apart, however: the Romantic never saw the icy desert he painted, whereas Ariane walked across the glacier she shot.

What this project traces is not exactly the path of water, tumbling down from faraway glaciers to end up beating against the marble of San Marco. It springs from another journey, from the sounds and the steps the artist has taken along the way. In the same way David Horvitz walked across the 435 bridges of the city, Ariane Michel started at the Mont Blanc and filmed her way down alongside the water. As I am writing these lines, she is on her way to Venice, traveling by foot, train, or car. Our bodies cannot be separated from their being present in the world.

I see Romanticism again in the gaze of those who lament Venice's expected demise, even though they live elsewhere. And some Venitians see the disappearance of the city as something natural, as does my friend Nicolo Zen: "Before Venice, there was Torcello, another urban area, gone and submerged today; after Venice, there will be something else." His words remind me of Timothy Morton's introduction to Realist Magic, where the scholar asserts: "Losing a fantasy is much harder than losing a reality." For this might be the cause of our greatest sorrow: aren't we mourning our fantasy of Venice, our fantastical worldviews, our ancient dreams?

Ariane has often told me how close she feels to Donna Haraway's "string figures," especially in attempting to "weave anew the link between reality and fantasy, draw anew the map of our unconscious" through her artworks. Her moving images are silent, harking back to cinema's early beginnings, but the Concerto dell'acqua is also a soundtrack, a score full of voices. Voices with fleeting timbres, sounding neither human nor animal-speaking the langage of water. Its sounds nevertheless have faces and bodies, those of the young Venitians who lended their vocal chords and hands to the project, imbuing it with the vitality that dying cities always have in excess. Material objets vanish, but the aura of sounds remains audible. It's a lively concert of noises: ice cracking, melting, flowing; water dripping, trickling down, splashing. Sounds that compose a full landscape, doubling up on the details found in Tintoretto's paintings. They create a vibrant space in-between, humming like an orchestra moments before the opera starts, suspended in time like a plane about to land.

I think that, nowadays, the spaces we live in echo this space inbetween; a space for *fine-tuning*, between the images at our fingertips on electronic screens and the actual places we walk through, each step making us more present.

The project goes beyond the performance–an aquatic concert within a *campiello* or courtyard where marble and humans will trade places–and conjure up the street concerts of Antonio Vivaldi's time, when the young "Red Priest" would gather whole neighborhoods around a few musicians. Maybe such an idea is also romantic and dated. But it might be more closely linked to our growing desire of getting to know our neighbors in this town that resembles a great big house. My desire, my hope is that you will join us and see for yourself, whether you live a couple streets away or are just here a few days for the Biennale. Come away from the Giardini or the Arsenale and you will find our space in-between, suspended in time, where you will hear all our cells and their grand vibration.



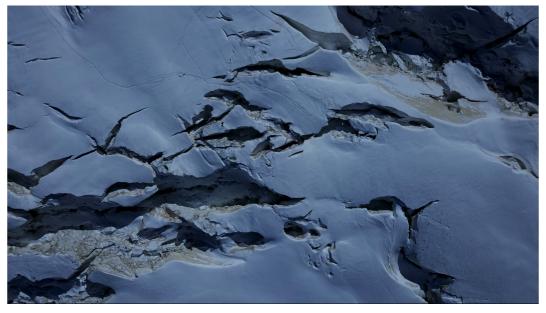




Image from the film *Il Concerto dell'acqua*, Ariane Michel, 2022

Biography of Ariane Michel

B. 1973 in Paris, lives between Paris and Finistère.

For the past fifteen or so years, Ariane Michel has enjoyed a certain proximity to animals, plants and minerals, equipped with recording tools, and objects or scrap items that she puts to use for their "living" potential. Carefully elaborated, her films, installations and performances recompose sensitive systems believed to be capable of "de-anthropocentrizing" us (Philippe Descola). Like a shaman, she deploys perceptual webs and weaves intersecting trajectories based on watching and listening. In so doing, she enables us to latch onto the world in fragments, to breach holes in our "modern" and European conceptions, and subsequently, to gradually weave new mental geographies.

Ariane Michel's works have been shown in art centres, as well as festivals and cinemas, forests, the corridors of the subway, shop windows, places of worship, or on shorelines. Some of the venues that have presented her work include the Fid Marseille, Festival de Locarno, Art Basle, Jeu de Paume, Fondation Ricard, Jousse Entreprise, the MAMVP (Paris); MoMA, Anthology Film Archives and Bronx Park in New York; Centre d'art La Criée (Rennes); HKW Garden (Berlin, Les Rencontres Internationales), as well as various cinemas in Hong Kong and the Grande Mosquée in Paris for the 2020 edition of the Nuit Blanche (Culture Night) event.

For more information on the artist's work, below are two links to videos by Ariane Michel:

La Forêt des gestes (2020) https://vimeo.com/357334977 Password: viewing235 The Screening (2007) https://vimeo.com/ 28541768/01a1280d43

3 Easy Pieces

A series of artistic interventions proposed by Lab'Bel in the Venetian public space

Three Easy Pieces is the title of an ensemble of three pieces for two pianists, comprising a waltz, polka, and a march, composed in 1915 by Igor Stravinsky in order to teach his children to play the piano. It was adapted, a century later, by Lab'Bel, the artistic laboratory of the Bel Group, under the name 3 Easy Pieces to refer to a series of artistic interventions, organized since 2015, in the Venetian public space.

Three artists, three in-situ interventions, concerts and films, in a single city: Venice

The works, events and happenings of 3 Easy Pieces are based on a thorough knowledge of Venice, its inhabitants and networks, and invite the public to reconnect with the very particular rhythm of this special city. Even the very tempo goes against the frantic pace of mass cultural tourism, which has nevertheless been impacted by the recent pandemic, and is a way of reimagining the city with and through its inhabitants. Based on discreet proposals that are fully integrated into local life, this project offers a counterpoint to the large-scale productions that occupy public spaces for the duration of the Venice Contemporary Art Biennale. In 2015, Michael Staab had the orchestras of the three historic cafes in the Piazza San Marco perform in unison; in 2019, David Horvitz asked children to play on the ancient organs of the famous San Rocco Church, as well as a number of other events and happenings scattered around the Dorsoduro district; and in the spring of 2022, Ariane Michel will offer a Concert d'eau, consisting of a film and concert around the *campos*.







Ariane Michel, screen shot of Les Yeux ronds, 2005







Image from the film *Il Concerto dell'acqua*, Ariane Michel, 2022

Brief presentation of the previous projects -Concertino Unisono (2015)

It was on the iconic Piazza San Marco, one of Europe's most beautiful architectural decors, that the *Concertino Unisono* took place. This was the brainchild of German artist, director and curator Michael Staab. The intervention, both ephemeral and participative, was intended to last only in the memory of those who experienced it or took part, without leaving any other tangible traces.

This musical happening with a performative dimension took into account the characteristics of the site and the presence of its three orchestras. Indeed, for several centuries, musical ensembles (for the most part consisting of five musicians) have played in fine weather outside the three most famous cafes on the square: the Caffè Florian, Gran Caffè Quadri, and Caffè Lavena. Usually, one after the other, they play a medley of tunes to entertain the customers at the terrace cafes, thereby creating a perpetual musical performance that has become a tourist attraction in and of itself.

As part of this intervention, at 5pm as the bells of the clock tower rang out, a conductor dressed in tails appeared in the middle of the square, beckoning to the three orchestras on site. Surprisingly, they began to follow his lead, and started playing at the same time. The resulting musical chaos soon organized itself into the strains of the well-known *Blue Danube* waltz. The music of the three orchestras mingled with the babble of tourists' voices, the cooing of the pigeons, and the noises of the lagoon to form the soundscape of this *Concertino Unisono*. Once the waltz was over, Michael Staab, joining the conductor in the middle of the square, banged two cymbals very loudly together, causing the flock of pigeons gathered there to take flight. This emblematic moment signalled the end of the performance.

Once this convivial shared experience came to an end, the passers-by and public returned to their discussions, the habitual sound ambiance of the Piazza San Marco. There is no artefact or relic today that bears witness to this ephemeral art performance but it lives on in the memories of those who were there.

The artist had reflected on this project for about fifteen years, over the course of his different visits to the city. He carefully chose the moment of the performance, its duration, and the way in which this was to insert itself into what Napoleon once called "the finest salon in Europe."



Brief presentation of the previous projects - 435 Ponti e qualche scorciatoia (2019)

The second part of *3 Easy Pieces*, called *435 Ponti e qualche scorciatoia*, allowed the public to discover or rediscover Venice with the help of a map drawn by Californian artist and poet David Horvitz, who crossed all of the city's bridges on foot.

The project was the result of a lengthy period of preparation in collaboration with numerous artisans, musicians, institutions, and Venetian locals. Designed as an antidote to the major events of the Biennale, *435 Ponti e qualche scorciatoia* emerged as a promenade conducive to fateful encounters, for the artist and spectators alike.

Over the course of this poetic peregrination, several events were programmed, including a reading in a book store and the collective recital of a poem on a boat to celebrate the Festa del Redentore. There were also gastronomic projects, such as the creation of a specially commissioned sea flavoured ice-cream at the Gelateria Alaska, and sweet treats from the Colussi pastry store, wrapped in a paper designed by the artist, amongst others. A whole host of micro-events and performances were on offer to visitors in authentic rather than touristy Venetian locations.

Beyond this programme, the project was presented in the form of a map of the city, indicating the places where these events and performances were likely to occur. David Horvitz's artistic perambulation exalted the proximity enjoyed by Venice's inhabitants, for whom the private space merges into the public sphere.

In short, in order to fully take advantage of 435 Ponti e qualche scorciatoia and its situations, the spectator needed the luxury of time; sometimes they even had to retrace their steps, as the different elements of the project were scattered over the *calli, campi* and *campielli* of Venice, in sites removed from the traditional nerve centres of contemporary art.



Rendezvous from 20 April - 25 August 2022 at the Officina dell'acqua, Campo San Fantin 1894 in Venice (just next to La Fenice), where the artist has set up her studio. Evenings are the best time to visit.

Ciné-concerts are organized for 22 April at 9pm at the Palazzo Pesaro Papafava (Calle de la Racheta, 3764), 25 June, 25 & 26 November (time and venue TBC).

Open rehearsals take place at the Officina dell'acqua on 20 & 21 April at 9pm.

More information on www.lab-bel.com/en



About Lab'Bel, the artistic laboratory of the Bel Group

Lab'Bel was created in the spring of 2010 to support contemporary artistic creation. The activities of this impertinent laboratory of ideas and innovation lie between the constitution of a Collection, currently on long-term loan to the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dole, and the production of exhibitions and artistic events in France and Europe. Lab'Bel is also at the origin of a series of performative, transversal projects, exploring topics as varied as Modernist architecture, poetry, music, etc.

At the same time, Lab'Bel is the author of a number of artistic publications and editions. Some of them–like *The Laughing Cow*© *Collector's Edition Boxes*, created every year by great contemporary artists–are carried out in close collaboration with the Bel Group's teams and serve as the framework for different types of research and experimentation.

www.lab-bel.com/en/

Communication : Virginie Burnet and Juliette Delpech for L'Art en Plus <u>v.burnet@lartenplus.com</u> - <u>j.delpech@lartenplus.com</u>

L'Art en Plus 5 Rue Tronchet, 75008 Paris +33 1 45 53 62 74 <u>lartenplus.com</u>





LABORATOIRE ARTISTIQUE DU GROUPE BEL

