



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 4 EPISODE 3 (June 2022)

MARCO FUSINATO with ALEXIE GLASS-KANTOR

VENICE BIENNALE

Speaker 1:

Please note this edition of the podcast contains coarse language, which some listeners might find confronting.

Marco Fusinato:

In this project, there's no real theme as such, but I'm hoping that it's open enough for the audience to try and make sense of that when one image rubs up against another, what you've seen, one, the person next to you may not see. And then that becomes part of the work that you form your own narrative. And there is some kind of intention through all this, and that is to create some kind of hallucination or yeah. Exhaustion from confusion and...

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

Static intensity.

Marco Fusinato:

There is that too.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

Yeah.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. There is a level of intensity involved in this. It's the images can move quickly, rapidly anywhere between one image a day up to 60 images per second. And I can control that and the sound potentially can be super loud.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

I'm going to take a step back, Marco, if we can, just to give them a bit of a sense, because the images occur on a structure that is essentially a sculptural form. We've set up an Instagram account for this project called `desastres_desastres`. But, Marco, your family are from the Veneto. This is your third time participating in the Venice Biennale. You've done an edition with the architecture Biennale. You did an edition with Okwui Enwezor with a very pivotal work "From the Horde to The Bee". But this is your first time representing the country of your ancestors and the country of your birth.

Marco Fusinato:

Mm.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

And can we speak a little bit about the role of language and that kind of journey that you've had through this project and what it means for you to be representing Australia?

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. One thing that's really struck me is that with this project I'm returned to exactly the place my parents migrated from to represent the country they migrated to. So my parents and my extended family come from the Venetian region of Italy, which has seven provinces. And we're from the Northern most one called Belluno. The villages my parents are from are just under 100 kilometres north of Venice at the foothills of the dolomite ranges. A very beautiful part of the world, but economically deprived. My parents migrated with my brother in 1960. And one thing that's become really evident through this process is language. My parents are Contadini, which is a form of pre agricultural farmer or peasant. Meaning there's no engines. There's no plumbing. There's donkeys, the language they speak and migrated with and we always spoke at home is a dialect.

Marco Fusinato:

Well, actually it's a language. It's a language that's thousands of years old. And in my lifetime, that language is disappearing. Why? Because many things. But mass media, Mussolini's idea of the Republic, the way proper Italian is taught in schools. So my parents are the last of the generations to speak this language. And because I grew up speaking this language at home, it's kind of in a time capsule. So when I go back and speak the way I speak, my friends and relatives all can't believe it. Because it's like I'm something from the past. So that's been really interesting to kind of think through with this project. And this language that I speak now is only heard in age care facilities because that generation are all in their late eighties, nineties or gone. And it's a beautiful language, a really beautiful language. And it just

makes me think of the history and culture of this place and how much has been lost over many, many thousands of years. And that's really been something to think through.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

I think you know, Marco's father was born in 1916. His mother was born in 1933. Marco and I travelled to Italy together to do a project in 2010 called Still Vast Reserves in Rome. And it was the first time when I travelled with Marco that when I heard Marco speak, taxi drivers would kind of tear up because the language that he spoke is one that really isn't heard. He's a bit like a time traveller when he's there. And when we returned together, we did one site visit together in December, 2019. Marco was performing in Milan and we got the train to Venice. And the manager of the Pavilion gave us the keys and we got inside. And we were like, "Who let a couple of punks like us have the keys to the Monaro?" And we were so kind of overwhelmed and honoured by this opportunity.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

And so that kind of connection back. But this project, the role of language in this project, which is about things that can be spoken, but not spoken. Things that have felt as intensities through time that speak to us all individually and collectively in different ways with force through both the combination of sound and image is such a strong and recurrent kind of amplification and intensity in your work. And I suppose, on the back of that, Marco, we did actually, I will tell you one thing we did launch the title for this project in Il Global, which is the Italian national syndicated newspaper. We wanted his mama to have the scoop. So that went ahead of the AFR, but she thought the font was too small.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah, she... And then the image was appalling.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

So Marco and I are not so concerned about audiences liking the work, but we are concerned with audiences responding to the work. And something that Marco and I, when we applied to do this project, someone said the other day, "You would've done a slap dash proposal," but nothing about this has been slap dash. Everything has been considered. And something that was always really important to us was that the audience know that they have a pulse. And there was always an element to this work, which was a combination of installation and performance. And in this work, we have a 200 day durational performance, but when Marco is there or not there, it's still a performance. It's not about the artist as hero or about the performer as star, but it's as much about labour, perseverance, absenteeism. Do you want to talk a little bit about how the performance and installation come together?

Marco Fusinato:

I guess I can talk about the previous project where this is coming from. Well, there's quite a few different projects that this has been influenced by. One is a project from 10 plus years ago called Spectral Arrows, which I continue to do, which is this occupation of a space, like a gallery or a museum where I set up amplification and perform noise for the entire duration of the working day. So usually eight hours. And it's this idea of labour, turning up and working. And that came out of the frustration of playing improvised music, touring, traveling 24 hours on a plane, getting over there, performing for 30 minutes and getting off and thinking, "Hang on, I've got more." And it just seemed ridiculous to be traveling so far and doing something for... Doing so little with my time. So I thought, "Fuck this. Next time I travel, I'm staying all day. I'm going to set up and make something of it."

Marco Fusinato:

And so this is kind of an exaggerated version of that, where I'm turning up and I'm staying, and trying to make something epic out of it. And the idea is to make something with vibrations, traveling through air and pushing out radiant light from projection. So it's those two elements coming together, light and air, which usually are ephemeral, but I want them to be physical. That you feel it, that it's really felt. That it's not just about seeing or hearing, but that your chest experiences the work, not just your eyes or your ears. There's a certain physicality and brutality to it. And that's really important, and that I really want the audience to remember that they're alive. That's really important for me in my work, that you have a pulse. And a lot of the time we forget that we're alive.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

And the past couple of years have been a really hard time in terms of acknowledging mortality, in terms of acknowledging the risks of contamination. Marco's work thinks a lot about binaries of chaos in order and maximalism and minimalism, contamination and purity. And it's been a really complicated time at a global, social, and political scale to think about the impact of care around these ideas of kind of what it is to be alive, our accountability to the lives of others. And that's something we took very seriously with this project. In May, 2020, we realized that the world had changed and we knew that things were different. And we spoke to the Australia Council and we decided to merge the work together into an installation and performances one work in the Pavilion, and it can be one person in a room or a hundred. And do you want to speak a bit about that, Marco? And that kind of process of transforming this project and what Desastres is?

Marco Fusinato:

Oh yeah. I'll speak about the title first, because I give some indication of the spirit. Desastres came from a few different sources. One is my obsession with a Japanese doom metal band called Corrupted who are from Asaka, they're all Japanese, but all their song titles, lyrics, literature, everything is in Spanish. It's like, "What the fuck? Why?" But I've always found that intriguing. Huh? The other thing is that going through so many lockdowns in Melbourne and they were super extended, and I was locked out of my studio working from a bedroom. Well, I started thinking about Goya because one of the first words I searched for this for the archive of images was the word disasters, which led me onto Goya, his series 'Los desastres de la guerra.' And when he made that work, he was banished to a farmhouse after he went deaf.

Marco Fusinato:

So he lost his job as the court painter. And he was sent off to the farmhouse, deaf and there he did a few series, one of them being Disasters of War. But he made that from his imagination. He wasn't in the battlefield, he was in a farmhouse. So this idea of making work from your imagination, which I was doing from a bedroom as well, kind of made sense. I did start thinking about the parallels of that. And a lot of the images that I've sourced start from art history, ancient history, natural history, and so on. And I was thinking about Goya being the link between the classical and the modern, let's say. And so, that connection with the making work through imagination, there's no site visits, have to kind of imagine this piece, how it's going to sit in the pavilion.

Marco Fusinato:

There's no meetings with any of the engineers, technicians on site. It's all done from a bedroom through the pus of Zoom meetings. So it's kind of, yeah. Like Corrupted, Goya, disasters. The world's, in these last two years, has been in upheaval. So it kind of made sense and the images that I was grabbing fitted that theme. So it just seemed appropriate for a title like that. The other thing is in Venetian dialect, the Italian, what is desastre, but in Venetian it's kind of desastre. It's kind of said more like the Spanish. So all these thoughts are going around in my head and it just seemed appropriate to kind of use that as the title.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

It's kind of given the Spanish, who occupied Europe, they had a treaty with the Venetians. And so that kind of Creole as well. The irony is not lost in us that we're calling the Australian Pavilion Desastres. And I will also acknowledge that the Australian Council didn't flinch from there. They're the commissioner for the Pavilion now, that was a radical decision a few years ago to take that kind of position more actively from the Australia Council. And Marco and I have been able to work with the teams at the Australia Council over the past three years in a very integrated way. And it was a 'pus' of Zoom meetings. It is now a verb.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

It really required a lot from Marco. He was very honest and vulnerable at every stage. And he took the Australia Council, often teams of up to 20 people in a room listening to why the work was changing. Even when Marco was in the world's longest lockdown and stuck in the spare bedroom, he would sit in those Zoom meetings and be honest with our collaborators at the Australia Council. And that takes a lot from somebody to do that. And I think it is really worth acknowledging that this opportunity for artists is one that requires them to lean into being vulnerable. And there's a degree in the performance as well, Marco. We talk about vulnerability, fragility, frailty, because this is a fuck off marathon. Can you talk a little bit about what that is?

Marco Fusinato:

I've made quite a few projects now, which are live and alive and they're very satisfying because I set up the framework template and then let's see what happens. And this is kind of a mega version of that. And I find that really compelling and interesting because it's alive and anything could happen during it. And, for me, it's exciting as the artist, but also for the audience, things are unpredictable and the direction the work may take. So it's only at the end that the work makes sense. And the last project I did in Venice was very similar called From the Horde to the Bee, where it only made sense at the end. And that work basically was trying to launder money from the Venice Biennale and send it across the country to an anarchist squat in Milan. It's a longer story than that. I won't go into it here, but it worked, but it didn't make sense till the end, till I had tens and tens of thousands of euros on a table, shoved them into a garbage bag and gave them to the guys at the squat.

Marco Fusinato:

And so this similarly, and I'm thinking of it in its entirety, as in, "Okay, I can sit on that kind of sound for X amount of time. Then I put morph into this, morph into that. Change images quickly, slowly, whatever." But I'm thinking of it as a kind of nine month work or whatever. And it's paced out. And I'm thinking through all those things with all the contingencies in place, just in case. Just in case. But for me, that idea of it being alive open, that will always be different. No matter when you walk in. That what you experience on day one will be different what you experience on day 1.1. But towards the end obviously it's just changing all the time. And I can't predict it. And I think that's always a good thing.

Marco Fusinato:

It's not dead. It's alive. It's really an active studio workshop laboratory. I might bring things in and out of the Pavilion that I gather along the way that I think are relevant to it. It might be, I don't know,

newspaper clipping, a dog, I don't know. But I certainly want it to be open to whatever's going on. Invasions. I don't know, whatever.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

I think, yeah. I think something that we do really want audiences to know is the old rules are off. There is an amazing generational change happening in this Venice Biennale, there's other artists working in the space of experimental noise and music like Dumb Type with the Japanese Pavilion, which are an incredible collaboration and Laetitia Akarsh with the Swiss Pavilion. There's an amazing focus on trans historical practices, particularly through feminist, non-binary, intersectional, and LGBTQI through Chachili Alamani curated exhibition, but that trans historical kind of way of working with the material of time speaks very keenly to Marco's work.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

There's a very strong focus on first nations. People can come and experience the Biennale in a way that works for them. And that's a really exciting thing. It's a little bit more open. It's a little bit more horizontal having the artists there every day, come for the last week, for the Australian Pavilion, and see what's happened to Marco's performance and work through that seven months duration. Because what he will have embodied in that time will be quite remarkable. And we did think a lot about these things in the development of this work.

Marco Fusinato:

We've developed a kind of this custom unit, which takes the sound in and then pushes the sound out with the images tightly synchronized. And with that device, I can kind of run sound through it. For example, I can run feedback through it from the guitar and I can walk away. So I'm out at the toilet or whatever. And then it doesn't sting. So there's the possibility where I can interact, pull back a bit, come back, alter, shape shift it. It's intense. But it's also something I'm very excited and engaged with and I want to see and do.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

Yeah, he's built a remarkable, yeah. Marco comes out of this kind of DIY subcultural kind of expanded music community as well as his kind of practice in the visual arts. And the infrastructure that's been built for this project is both entirely kind of lo-fi and high end.

Marco Fusinato:

The equipment, in this installation, and I've used these references before where it's the infrastructure from staging, from spectacle. And I'm interested in bringing that into the gallery because in my lifetime, again, it's the museum and the gallery's gone from one of contemplation to one of entertainment. And so I'm interested in playing with that idea. A lot of people, older people get pissed off that that shift has happened, but I feel like, well, deal with it. And so I'll amplify that. I want to amplify that and really play on it. So I'm bringing in kind of, in this instance, some huge elements from those worlds to kind of saturate the audience with spectacle and, again, make them feel something.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

There is a magical moment when you're working as the artistic team on the Venice Biennale where they ask you to do a stakeholder matrix. And it's a fun exercise for an artist. And apparently we were the first artistic team for whom 60% of our first stakeholders were people who don't like the work. And it's not because we don't want you to be engaged with the work. And it's not because we don't take responsibility for the work, but we are aware that when people walk into the Pavilion at Venice, they look for three seconds. There's so much work in Venice that people judge quickly, and we want you to walk in and if you're going to hate it, hate it right away. And if you're going to like it and want to stay longer, or push yourself, do that. Come back the next day, come back the next day, it's up to you. But we are interested in that process of self-determination and if audiences being able to be invited to make up their own minds, and that's kind of important to us.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. But there's an assumption for an artist that an artist makes work to be liked, which I find completely absurd and ridiculous.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

Likes on social media, likes everywhere.

Marco Fusinato:

I'm aware that my references are bleak, marginal, unpopular. I come from experimental music underground in the sub genre of noise. There's like 20 people in each city around the world that are into it. That's the reality.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

Doom death metal.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. And these kind of extreme forms of metal, grind, core, doom metal, black metal. That's what I'm interested in along with conceptual art, so that's kind of wanker territory from a lot of people. So I'm operating in these worlds, which are down there. And so, I get it. A lot of people don't like that stuff. It's not about an applied craft where, "Oh, how did he do that? How did she do it?" It's not about the craft, it's about ideas and using the appropriate materials to best present that idea. I have to go into it thinking, "Fuck everyone. I'm here and I'm into it. And this is what I'm doing. I don't care."

Marco Fusinato:

And that's probably why one of the reasons in these durational performances, I perform with my back to the audience, because I can't take on who's there. I can't care who's there. I've got to really concentrate on what I'm hearing and feeling in order for me to drive it and push it around in the way I want. As soon as I see someone I don't want to see, then I get frazzled or whatever. So it's really important that I'm in the zone and oblivious to any external distractions.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

I would say to that though, Marco grew up in Noble Park. He began his working life in a sign writing factory. This work's not elitist. We're not... It is intelligent, rigorous, complicated, risk taking, experimental and downright hard work. It's hard realism. It is accessible because you do recognize the images that come up. If you look at the desastres feed, if you look at the score, the images are there. They're taken from everything, from art history, through subculture and popular culture, mainstream media and news. They exist in the public domain, but it's not just there to tell one easy singular, linear version of history or encounter or theme. It's not there to reduce the complexity of the times in which we live. It completely engages with the full and layered and granular and constantly shape shifting nature of the times in which we find ourselves, which are complicated. And that's important.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

And you can do that. The work is very accessible in its physicality. It's more complicated in its layers. And that's good. We can do that as Australians. Our artists are incredible. We make great art in Australia and our artists present complicated ideas that operate at a number of registers. And this work will do that in the Pavilion. And it will do it with a level of integrity and showing up each day and walking away each

day, that actually says something about who we are. That's actually really important. Marco has a loathing of narrative and romantic cinema. And he hates pop songs. And we're not telling you a simple story, but we are giving you something to encounter. And that's important.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

And encounters are really rare after we've all been locked in our bedrooms for two years. 260 days in Melbourne, Marco sitting up there with a Canon printer, printing out images of the score. A series of burnt out ink jet printers in the wake which Kim and the family take down to recycling. We want you to be able to engage. We want audiences to be able to be included, and we want it to be open.

Marco Fusinato:

The archive of images is vast. And I have the ability to add images along the way. Because of the amount of images, and then the way they're manipulated in the machine, is such a huge job I got frustrated along the way of downloading images. Computers would crash, hard drives would fail and so on. At a certain point, I just thought, "Fuck this." And I got my phone and just started taking shots off the screen. And the photos, the images are moiré'd, out of focus. They're terrible. So they're perfect. So a lot of the images are also kind of granular, distorted. But they're always of something from that portal that's shining back at us, no matter how pixelated and granular, you can still make it out.

Marco Fusinato:

And it's the spew of the world coming back at you. It's all noise. Everything is noise. So my idea of entertaining with noise is just the world coming back at you. It's a purge. But it's also a negation and I've never worked out if I'm purging or negating, it kind of sits in between. And I kind of like that tension, those tensions.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

I think it's also important, in a work like the infinitives where you have subjects about to release a handmade missile, it doesn't identify particular uprisings or moments, but instead represents a particular action that happens through the collective history of uprisings. So Marco, we've worked very closely as he does in... We've worked together a number of times over the years. And Marco always works closely not to instrumentalize particular examples of social or political uprising to illustrate them as examples of anything. Instead, he's working more with the ubiquity of certain gestures or recurrent movements or moments of collapse or tension through time. So we don't want to appropriate anybody else's trauma. We don't want to reinstate that trauma through instrumentalizing conflicts or moment of political tension or uprising. But Marco does want to speak to the complexity of the eternal return of

these moments of crisis, as we are seeing in the Ukraine at the moment. It's a tragedy that this is happening. It's horrific, but it's something that's consistent with a pattern through history. And so Marco won't illustrate the Ukraine moment, but the work speaks to these things through time.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. I'm interested in those kind of tensions around opposing forces. And a lot of that is always in the works. Like Alexie said before, this idea of noise versus silence or the underground versus the institution and minimalism versus maximalism, order, disorder, all these things that are a big part of my thinking and the work. And it's in this work as well. Like when you see the images, you can see that there's this kind of friction and that friction is those binaries coexist and I don't want it to go from the other. Because I think that's humanity. We're always like this, huh?

Marco Fusinato:

Yes. There's a publication and it's about 400 pages. The first 200 are images from the score, which you can also see some on the Instagram handle. Is that what it is?

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

Yup.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. Yeah. Called `desastres_desastres`. And then there are a series of essays and texts in the book. An essay by Brandon W. Joseph in New York. He's a professor of art history at Columbia who wrote a major article featuring in the art forum 10 years ago. And he is an incredible writer around experimental art, around experimental film, music, conceptual art, really amazing writer. Then we have an interview, an extended interview that Alexie and I have done talking about the project. And then we have a series of propositions. One is by Alexie and then we have three texts by Outra Guitarez. That I know that I think have extended the language of the instrument first and more from a band called Sonic Youth, Stephen O'Malley from Avon doom metal band called Sunn and Bruce Russell from a band called the Dead Sea who are kind of seminal noise rock band have been going for like 40 years, 30 or 40 years. Incredible. And great writers, all in their own way. Amazing writers.

Marco Fusinato:

Then we have texts by archaeologists and filmmaker Elizabeth Povene. AI academic Kate Crawford, and beautiful text by the writer, curator, Chuz Martinez and all very distinct different voices. Then we have at the back of the book, is it 160 pages? Of installation images.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

We're publishing with Lens, which is they're co-publishing the Australia Council and Lens. Lens is a really amazing international Milan based publisher with a not-for-profit space called Audette, a man called Edwardo Bonnespette, who founded moose publishing. So it'll be great that this book will have really good outreach. So this has been a long collaboration in friendship. The book reflects those conversations. You had a hilarious conversation with Chuz Martinez about Benny Hill.

Marco Fusinato:

Yeah. He's got sharp wit.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

There's a good sense of humour that runs through things. We're also releasing, I suppose you should be aware. There's no tote bag. Australia is not doing a tote bag.

Marco Fusinato:

It's just not in the spirit of the work.

Alexie Glass-Kantor:

There will be an album of the work. So there's a vinyl that's coming out for Desastres. But yeah. So if people were thinking to come to Venice for the tote bag, save your money and go to Queensland. And it's just been a really great process. We've been able to work with the Australia Council's commissioners to really have the artists supported and to really throw out some of the old rules and come up with different kinds of strategies and ways of thinking about this project and what the Pavilion can be.

Marco Fusinato:

I'm fascinated watching the audiences in galleries and museums and how they take in artwork. And I feel like a lot of the time people kind of just walk through quite quickly and shoulders down and I just feel like maybe it could be different in that context. Can give them a bit of a charge possibly. And I don't mean to say that... I'm talking in general as well, that we have to remember that so many of us take things for granted. And just go about doing your thing. You're doing your thing. I step back sometimes and think, "I'm feeling this. I'm alive and this is a great moment." And I feel like I want to be reminded of that.