



BRITISH

ELECTION SPECIAL

'George Osborne is a very dangerous man'

ALASTAIR CAMPBELL
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GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

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FASHION

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VILLAIN
EVER

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Waltz

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REPORT

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transition

BY MICHAEL WOLFF

SEX

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CHRISTOPH WALTZ PHOTOGRAPHED FOR BRITISH GQ BY MATTHEW BROOKES

In Venice, no man is an island

War. Slavery. Refugees... The Biennale is using national pavilions to face down international crises

By Sophie Hastings

To present contemporary art through a series of national pavilions seems anachronistic in our globalised age. A jumble of architecturally incongruous buildings like tiny embassies dotted about a Venetian garden is not a natural context for groundbreaking work. It feels small and isolationist, more UKIP than U-bend. Yet the deadpan humour of Marcel Duchamp's urinal continues to resonate and resurfaces in Sarah Lucas, who plumbed a loo into the ICA gallery in 1997. Lucas is representing Britain at this year's Venice Biennale and may or may not fill her pavilion with toilets, rude jokes and pokes at tabloid culture: it's under wraps for now. Paradoxically, it is her quintessential Britishness – irreverence, class-consciousness and wit – that makes Lucas universal.

Artists override the outdated concept of the Venice Biennale, but the curator's role is crucial too. Nigerian-born scholar Okwui Enwezor, 51, whose job it has been to curate a standalone exhibition in the Arsenale and select collateral events, is well placed to disrupt any sense of cultural superiority.

An autodidact who's never attended a history of art class, Enwezor was invited to curate *Documenta*, "the Mount Olympus of exhibitions", in 2002, and is currently director of Haus der Kunst in Munich. His theme for the 56th Venice Biennale: "All The

World's Futures". By placing the Giardini at the centre of the disordered world, Enwezor hopes to "grasp the current disquiet of our time", and at least two of his events are resonant with conflict and unease.

Tamara Chalabi, chairman of Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq, returns to Venice having commissioned the 2013 pavilion.

"All people know of Iraq is the ancient civilisation of Mesopotamia or the war – we want to look at what is in between," she says. After Isis targeted the Yazidi community in August 2014, displacing 1.8 million people, Chalabi and her Ruya co-founders visited four Yazidi refugee camps in Iraq with art materials, and asked them to express themselves. "The response was unbelievable: silence descended," she says. They collected 500 works and will show them in an unedited slide show. Chalabi is also working on a book of the drawings with Ai Weiwei, who has agreed to endorse the project.

Meanwhile, the historically combative nations of India and Pakistan coalesce at Palazzo Benzon, in Venice. Neither country has a permanent pavilion and many citizens felt "worried and ashamed" by this, says Feroze Gujral, of the Gujral Foundation. "My East Is Your West" brings acclaimed artists Shilpa Gupta (India) and Rashid Rana (Pakistan) together to "express the essence of a people divided," says Gujral. "They've



Cornelia Parker
Whitworth Art Gallery
Until 31 May.
manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

Leonora Carrington
Tate Liverpool
Until 31 May.
tate.org.uk

Dan Flavin
Tate St Ives
23 May - 27 September
tate.org.uk

Grayson Perry
Turner Contemporary
23 May - 13 September.
turnercontemporary.org

The Non-Conformists: Photographs by Martin Parr
(above)
Compton Verney
Until 7 June.
comptonverney.org.uk

Bruce Nauman
Fondation Cartier
Until 21 June
fondation.cartier.com

met, but you can't cross the borders without a visa so they couldn't work together physically. They used the concept of *jugalbandi* – a term meaning a twinned or eternal call and response.

"At a time when the Nobel Peace Prize was won by a Pakistani girl, this is a landmark project about soft power. We will place a magnificent artwork on the roof so that everyone can see us from a vaporetto."

Follow your ears from the Ca' d'Oro vaporetto stop and you will find the new location for Scotland's pavilion, the Palazzo Fontana. A sound-clash of classical and Jamaican music will pour on to the Grand Canal but inside, viewers will be unsure if the musical arrangement is art-related. "Until they reach the fourth room – then they'll see it differently," says artist Graham Fagen, who is under some pressure, given that his predecessor, Duncan Campbell, won the 2014 Turner Prize on the strength of his pavilion.

Fagen's installation is a journey through sculpture, drawing and painting, culminating in audio-visual collaborations with composer Sally Beamish, dub producer Adrian Sherwood and reggae star Ghetto Priest. A recasting of Robert Burns' 1792 song, "The Slave's Lament", is testament to Fagen's preoccupation with the slave trade, history and counter-history: "In the past, I've used trees, nooses, rope and even hung a real guy off a tree," he says. "Here, I've made a tree of rope cast in bronze. I'm looking at the social and political history of trade with a wee nod to Venice." Namely, the door handles shaped as negro heads that abound in Venetian interiors and the blackamores in souvenir shops.

Chalabi describes Iraq's cultural development as having been "lop-sided, interiorised, such a difficult country to access." But there is darkness at the heart of every nation and if we need pavilions on a gilded island to examine "the current state of things", as Enwezor would have it, then perhaps Venice is indeed all the world's futures. ☞



Kings of neon: 'Natural Anarchy' (2013) by Graham Fagen, who has been chosen to represent Scotland at this year's Venice Biennale contemporary art festival

Venice Biennale, 56th Edition, 9 May - 22 November 2015. labiennale.org