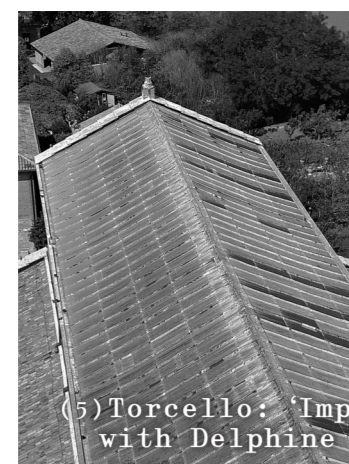


Forme di vita
Voices from the Lagoon



(1) Parco di Villa Groggia: 'Impromptu 1' with Delphine Wibaux



(5) Torcello: 'Impromptu 3' with Delphine Wibaux



(10) Laguna Viva: Conversation with Jane da Mosto



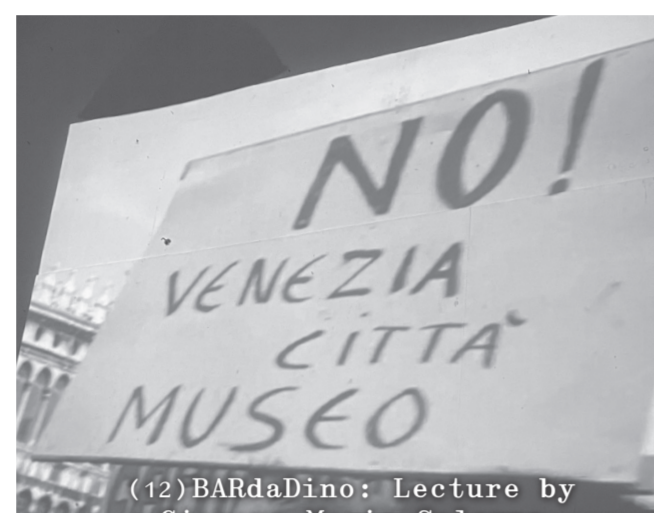
(15) A Heavy Suitcase



(2) Ocean Space



(6) + (7) Sant'Erasmus: 'Letters from Erasmo' a project by Chiara Famengo



(12) BARdaDino: Lecture by Giacomo Maria Salerno



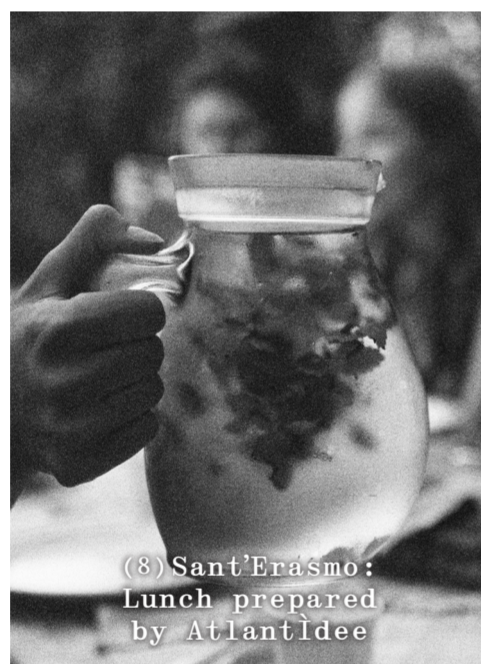
(16) Togetherness



(13) Area of Campo Santa Maria Formosa: 'Wash Your Art, Wash Your City.' by Exbragarbo



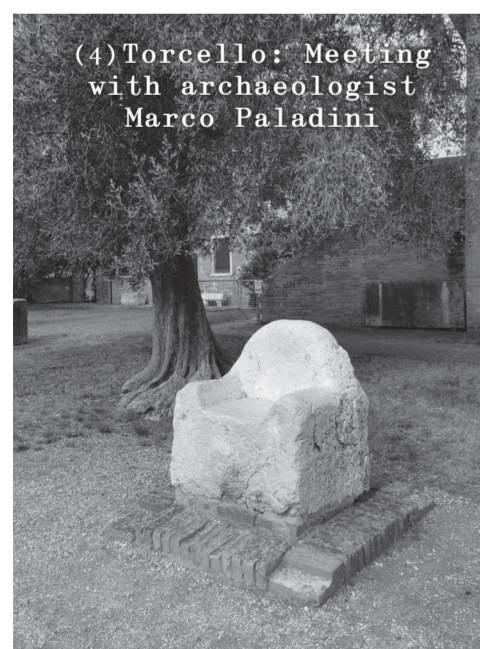
(3) Lio Piccolo: In the wetlands with Barena Bianca



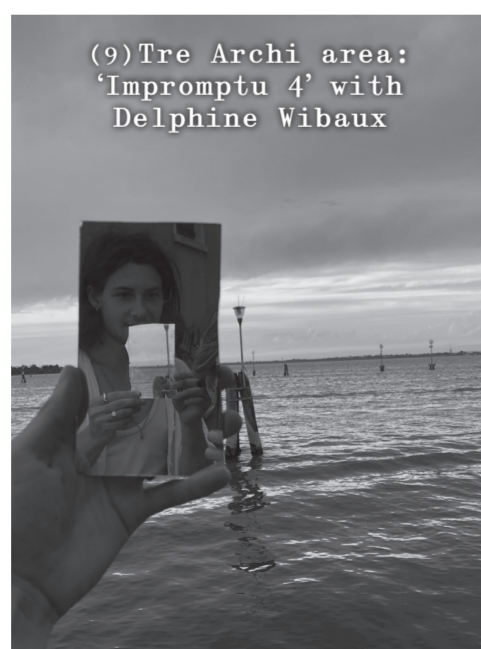
(8) Sant'Erasmus: Lunch prepared by Atlantidee



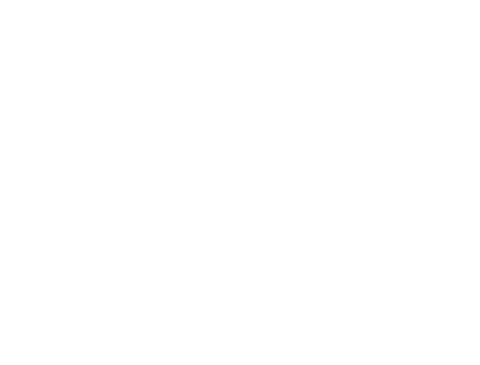
(14) Pavilion of Luxembourg at the Biennale: Visit of Tina Gillen's exhibition



(4) Torcello: Meeting with archaeologist Marco Paladini



(9) Tre Archi area: 'Impromptu 4' with Delphine Wibaux



(10) Tre Archi area: 'Impromptu 4' with Delphine Wibaux

(1) Our bare feet made contact with the roots of a tree and traced them with our touch, as they were lying external on the earthy surface.

They did hold us all so well and we were asked not to lose touch with them, to trace their meandering movements through the earth.

Both feet and roots, as the lowest part of a living entity, were entangled with one another, formed a constellation of connection and energy, as our collective contact with the earth was momentarily linked to the same matter.

(2) I got shipwrecked on an island of black pillows. Islands within an island within an island. Something is singing calmly, welcoming me with a soft caress. Am I sinking deeper into the Church's foundations? The ceiling feels higher and higher for my bones take root in the ground. Shall I fossilise between Dineo Seshsee Bopape [Here she dreamt my love, is alive, is alive, is alive.] and Diana Policarpo [Odette's composition whispered into my ears: 'In the end is it me or the earth that will return to dust?'].

(3) Facing the Lagoon from the peninsula of Cavallino-Treporti, we are in Lio Piccolo. This area is dominated by salt marshes, or *barena* in Venetian. A unique ecosystem of tiny islands is formed by the tidal movements feeding the Lagoon with salt water with each high tide, continuously eroding and reshaping the landscape.

From above, these marshes do not look very different from the city of Venice itself – they look like miniature cities, each with its own 'Canal Grande' and several minor canals; the *barena* are populated with salt-tolerant, succulent plants like *salicornia* (samphire), glowing in shades of yellow, red and green. Being shaped by the same environmental factors, between freshwater and salty tides, the *barena* and the city of Venice share a fate. For Venice to survive, we have to monitor the health of the *barena* closely.

(4) Attila's Throne is an ancient chair in the courtyard of the Church of Santa Fosca; legend says that the king of the nomadic Huns sat on it during their westward migration. The throne is made out of an unornamented slab of stone, almost too humble for a king. Close by is the Ponte del Diavolo, the Devil's Bridge. It is an arched structure typical of Venice, but lacks a parapet; these were added later to most of the local bridges, during the Austrian occupation. The parapets were to prevent drunken soldiers from falling into the water.

Venice is more wandered through than settled in. The locals often refer to it as a museum, shaped to accommodate the ones passing through.

Still, according to the myth, those who sit on Attila's Throne will return to the Lagoon.

(5) At Torcello, Delphine invited us to use the historical site as a place to explore our own artistic practice. We each created a perimeter with found objects or with rope and then explored this territory by linking it to our personal practice. In the second part of the Impromptu, every group member had the opportunity to explain how and why they chose their space and how it connected to their work. Personally, it was a turning point to decontextualise my studio-based way of thinking, as well as an opportunity to see how differently we all explored the same area.

(7) A love letter to seaweed

I choose you
be_cause you make me
go far into unknown waters
you make me

take off ↗
my shoes and feel the ground with my bare feet.

There is nothing softer –
I realise this softness is your dried-out body covering the ground like a carpet, caressing and protecting my so(ul)s

I want to go further to see how far you stretch
I know you reach endlessly into the sea
how far can I go ?
(before drowning)

Intruders disrupting our moment of transsubjectivity (also known as intimacy)
I get distracted
Revenge
by distracting them →

→ directing → their → attention → → → towards → → → a → → → crab
So I can keep running after you
So it can be just you and me again
But you are gone

like the ground
Pulled away from underneath my feet
I can no longer locate you
I am sorry I gave attention away
I beg you to reappear in my reality
ground_less I run after you,

searching with my blind skin:
I know you are somewhere there amongst the living.
You are the softest dead creature alive.
You are loose, defragmented and so entangled.
I want to take a piece of you with me.
Cover all of the ground I'll ever walk with you
so you can hold me
so I can step in full trust and confidence
so I can walk like I'm free

I have never loved anyone as much today.

(6) Fragment (on curiosity)
In the waters of the Lagoon I found a little crab that caught all of my attention.
As I cast my shadow on the water, bending forward to get a better look, he started moving, alarmed.
He raised his beautiful red claws. What a pity, I thought, you don't have to be scared of me! Let me see you! I pushed away the reeds he was trying to hide under.
I recognised his terror, his fast fast beating heart.
But my curiosity again gained the upper hand. Using a branch, which he attacked without avail. I lifted him out of the water.
He fell off and disappeared into the seaweed.
Feeling the guilt creeping up inside of me,
I named him Venice.

Food:
Homemade turmeric bread with seeds from the garden. I remember especially the fennel seeds.
There were Sant'Erasmus sauerkrauts and Sant'Erasmus eggs with samphire salt. Samphire salt is made by Nadia and is a mix of samphire extract and regular salt. It has a green colour.
Aubergine cream.
Aubergine rolls.
And aubergine cake with ricotta (I called it 'tarta').
And the 'tarta' was accompanied with salads made of vegetables from the garden (peppers, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes and yellow tomatoes).

Dessert:
'Tomato jam.
Red tomato jam.
Dandelion honey.
Grape syrup.
Nadiah's apricot cream.

(9) When looking in the mirror, we see what's behind us. When what is behind us is a mirror, we see what is in front of us. Like in Arvo Pärt's musical composition *Spiegel im Spiegel*, echoes bounce off of one another, multiplying. Three suns now share one horizon. In a mirror lying on stone water is rippling through the sky. A kaleidoscopic collage of the elements, we see the surroundings both dissected and merged. Three hands holding up shards of mirrored glass, they capture, shatter and re-unite the light in a single frame. One eye sees something different than the other.

(10) To follow the light, to follow the life. Often we experience the Impromptu through 'seeing without seeing'. We activate a dialogue that has not yet been discovered. A new way of communication, a new form of life. In saying goodbye to Venice on the edge of the city, breathing the salty air, we were traveling through the space of the city via the optical alternatives proposed by mirrors, lenses, cameras and paints. A discovery of dimensions, a discovery of light was revealed to us. With the sun setting, we welcomed twilight as our dear friend. The light. The waves. The sounds.

texts:

- (01) Pieter Eliëns
- (02) Charles Wartelle-Sentenero
- (03) Paul Müller
- (04) Kristi Fekete
- (05) Pit Riever
- (06) Witold Vandenbroeck
- (07) Maria Sawizki
- (08) Malena Guerrieri
- (09) Max Beets
- (10) Alexandra Vitalyevna Samarova
- (11) Nina Gross
- (12) Laurence Petrone
- (13) Rafaela Figurski Vieira
- (14) Laurence Petrone
- (15) Maren Rommerskirchen
- (16) Oona Oikkonen
- (17) Rune Tuerlinckx

images: Forms of Life research group
editing: Max Beets, Pieter Eliëns, Christophe Gallois, Tina Gillen
graphic design: Kristi Fekete, Charles Wartelle-Sentenero, Maren Rommerskirchen

(8) On the island of Sant'Erasmus Nadia and Titi, two locals and passionate herbalists, cooked for us. Here is a list of things we ate that day:

Drinks:
Mint water.
Rosemary water.
Fennel water.
Basil water.
Lemon verbena water.
Red basil water.

(11) Jane da Mosto is the co-founder of We are here Venice, an organisation dedicated to keeping Venice a living city. They raise public awareness through research projects, lectures, activism and collaborations with universities, cultural institutions, residents and public authorities to help communicate about and unite against the issues that Venice is facing.
As Jane da Mosto said, 'unfortunately the population of Venice is decreasing, but only collectively can we initiate ecological, economic and physical change'. Venice is nothing without its Lagoon, they are inseparable. Therefore, We are here Venice tries to bring the Lagoon and its natural capital back into the centre of considerations about the future of Venice as a living city.

(12) Giacomo shares his view on the issues and conflicts caused by the touristification of Venice with us. 'Venice might be the first city that sells nothing other than itself and its multiple images', he says at the beginning. Later in his lecture, he shows us excerpts of a documentary from the 1970s. We see protesters. A slogan reads: 'No to Venice as a museum city'. An inhabitant praises her neighbourhood because the residents know each other, there is a sense of living together. Our talk with Jane da Mosto echoes in my mind. When I asked her what the pandemic brought out in Venice, she replied that among many things, neighbours got to know each other again.

Giacomo knows the literature, the statistics, the long-term developments that are apparently impossible to overturn, and I am moved by his ability to maintain the mild stance of what he calls 'rational optimism'.
I read the tattoo on his arm: 'La libertà è una forma di disciplina.'

(13) A tower in a Venetian square blown up by Marvel Studios for the new Spider-Man movie while everyone was asleep and busy with Covid: this is a story told during the performance 'Wash Your Art, Wash Your City.'
Theresa Maria Schlichtherle gave us a guided tour through Venice. She made it seem plausible: the Marvel story, a staircase built out of books, the origins of the ATMs, ancient graffiti on walls causing a death in the canal and the start of the cemetery island. The stories were very detailed, and who would question a tour guide?
Some sort of magical, speculative realism confused us. It was after we looked at each other's faces that we realised something was off and started to question her information, but I still couldn't point out exactly what was true and what was added to the story. Does it matter?

It is a great exercise to walk through a city and see each corner with its magical history. Venice is the perfect place for such stories, it is the place to get carried away in some sort of narrative and to create a connection between the way stories were told in the past (orally) and how the Venetians pass on their experiences in (to, or of) their city.

(14) Although we are in the Arsenale, Tina's words bring us to her studio. She introduces us to the different topics of her paintings and how each painting imposed its own difficulties. The process of painting trains her ability to look.

I am not a painter. By looking at her paintings she invites me to look anew at everything that is. How can it be that one large brushstroke enables me to see a mountain? How can it be that two ideas of forest can come together? How can she weave this moment in a painting? How do I, as a sculptor, appropriate material, weave textures? While I question my own practice I sense joy and generosity, seeing how Tina pushes herself to the limits of her discipline and skill and finds technical solutions and an embodied thinking for what she wants to paint.

(15) My suitcase was already full when arriving in Venice. I packed it with a good amount of anticipation for what was awaiting us, and it also contained a heap of curiosity for the people I was about to meet and for the group's participants.
Returning back home from the island, I needed more muscle strength to carry the same suitcase; it had gained weight. My anticipation was replaced by amazement in being welcomed with open arms, and the delight it made me feel. My curiosity was replaced by happiness, thinking about how our group had grown into its own form of life. My suitcase got loaded with the encounters we were lucky to have and that allowed us to be similarly apart and in the midst of it all, to understand the enthusiasm for the island and to expose its problems. We mingled with the life forms in Venice.

(16) On my way home I thought about the Lagoon, the new friendships I made and all the new insights I gained. I wondered what geographical distances do to our feeling of togetherness?

Delphine's Impromptu moments were important for our artistic practice, enabling us to explore freely what happens when we decide to learn from each other.

Working together can trigger new ways of thinking regarding already existing problems.

We need a serious wake-up call for everyone about what we are doing to this Earth, but it feels like we are already on the path of destruction and there is no way back. What was once hard to find is now impossible to escape.

I want to say to all the people we met: thank you for the work you do, it is extremely precious!

(17) Looking now with increasing distance and climbing altitude, there is nothing to write about the city that Goethe hasn't written before me nor is now a common view.

There is nothing I can write about the Lagoon that hasn't been published and peer-reviewed in scientific papers.
The only thing for me to offer is a hint of my experience to be submerged in the shallow waters and marshes of the salty bogland, as a traveller among a flood of tourists swamping the streets. Two legs of a stampede.

I tried and shed newfound and old skins. Heard the shaping voice of strikingly present minds, those who I may call companions. Happy that others took notes so our collective mind can recall with more ease, make the picture more complete.

Us, carrying out *impromptu*s. Weaving the edges of the banks for them not to wash away. Acknowledging the rippling effect of every facet, every journey, every plane we came to see. The bugs in the system, the intertwining roots of causes and solutions surfacing where they can grow; from the periphery through the heart.

We were handed the fruits of the Lagoon, balanced yet undeniably salty. The flavours are strong, and we enjoyed every last bite.

There is lots of sediment to settle. When it does, we can again reach into the stratigraphy of the soil and discover its produce.

No judgement is final – and even if it is, it doesn't exclude an experience of great beauty. Where there is love there is beauty, and compassion shows us the kindest way.

A new day has begun, we saw the sun rise in all its glory and it will continue to dawn as we return to our own habitats, fulfilled and inspired.
The sunfire is there – as we ate it – we carry with us a renewed desire to voice and encounter possible forms of life.

We head home, spread out and stay
Far away
So close
And I can only say:

Grazie mille.