

WHITNEY McVEIGH HUNTING SONG

A project for the 55th Venice Biennale
Opening 28 May 2013, 6:00pm
Exhibition runs from 29 May to 24 November 2013
Curated by James Putnam
Ass. Curator Vassiliki Tzanakou

On the occasion of the 55th Venice Biennale, the Gervasuti Foundation is presenting a solo project by London-based American artist Whitney McVeigh entitled *Hunting Song*. This constitutes a site-specific installation in one of the Foundation's adjacent buildings, a former hospice for unmarried women dating back to the 16th century. McVeigh has created a fictional old curiosity shop with a diverse collection of objects from her own 'collection' interwoven with 'found' objects located on site at the Gervasuti Foundation. These have been carefully selected and painstakingly arranged and ordered. Her own objects have been accumulated from flea markets and junk shops on her extensive travels over the last 20 years and have a profound personal significance to her. They include an old typewriter, artefacts from Syria and Africa, old letters, diaries, ledgers, encyclopaedias, neglected photographs and tintypes from New York and numerous other books, such as a Children's *Treasure House*, which all evoke deep memories for her. Some of McVeigh's own monotypes are also integrated with the other found objects and discreetly mounted in old frames including one that incorporates the cover of a book of vintage sheet music entitled *Hunting Song* which also provides the exhibition's title.

According to particle physicists, energy never dies, so it could be said that every object retains an 'energy' or memory of everything it has ever been, of where it has moved and of every person with whom it has come into contact with. McVeigh's installation of found objects celebrates this sense of their interconnectedness, bringing together the building's history and the memories of its former residents. Unlike the sumptuous Venetian palaces where Biennale projects are often staged, McVeigh's project utilizes a more atmospheric derelict building re-opened by the Foundation and situated in the historic Castello region, the oldest community in Venice known for its expertise in woodcraft and its shipyards. This also relates to the notion of psycho geography or how specific geographical environments have a psychic atmosphere that can

affect the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The installation has an eerie sense of presence that the shopkeeper is close at hand and will soon return to open up the shop.

McVeigh's installation reveals her acute observation and attention to detail in her choice and careful arrangement of objects that aptly relate to the Biennale theme, *The Encyclopedic Palace*. As we increasingly struggle to deal with a constant flood of information, there are continuous attempts to reconstruct memories and realities as well as to hold on to concepts and tangible objects that are considered as fundamentals. *Hunting Song* explores both personal history and collective memory and alludes to the layering of time and how the histories of found objects (and implicitly those of their previous owners), can transfer a sense of universality to the person encountering them. As part of the human condition we tend to collect objects in order to enhance our sense of identity and thus to feel more connected to the world.

The Gervasuti Foundation is delighted to present an artist whose work reveals a very personal archaeology and a deep affinity with the Foundation's mission: the preservation and re-evaluation of context and cultural collective memory through contemporary practice.

Whitney McVeigh is an American, London based artist. Her work focuses on the exploration of the physical and psychological elements of the human condition. McVeigh has travelled extensively to carry out her practice and has held residencies in India, Mexico, and Beijing, and more recently in South Africa. Concerned with reinvention, her work often uses found objects, including books and also creates large monotypes embodying a sense of time and human imprint. In 2009, McVeigh has employed the use of video during a trip to Syria to create *Sight and Memory* and in 2012 she visited Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia with the BBC to make a short film about artists. The artist has taken part in international exhibitions such as *David Krut Projects*, NY and *Archaeology of Memory* at *Nirox Projects*, Johannesburg and has worked in residency at NY Arts in their Beijing space. Her work is also featured in 'White Light/White Heat Glasstress' at the Palazzo Franchetti & Murano - a Collateral Project of the 55th Venice Biennale.

GERVASUTI
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