

**rachel uffner**



## **Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained**

by 1883 art

**Hosted in the unique setting of the Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello in Venice throughout the 59th Venice Biennale, Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained brings together eleven internationally renowned artists – Darren Almond, Oliver Beer, Rana Begum with Hyetal, Julian Charrière, David Claerbout, Bharti Kher, Arghavan Khosravi, Teresa Margolles, Si On, Martin Puryear, and Rayyane Tabet – whose work addresses a range of current issues: environmental pollution, global warming, systemic racism, uncontrolled globalisation and unregulated digitalisation to rampant consumerism.**

The exhibition, organised by Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art and curated by Dr Ziba Ardalan – who kindly agreed to an interview with 1883 Magazine – hinges on the concept of entropy as it explores how an inexorable, human-induced increase in ‘disorder’ is wreaking havoc in nature and leading towards social and political disruption.

First introduced in 1865 by German physicist Rudolf Clausius, entropy is a wide-ranging concept that can be used to describe the natural decline of all systems from order to disorder where energy is inescapably consumed and lost in the process.

Though bleak as prospect, all things on a macro and microscopic level are subject to entropy; the idea being that our universe itself is gradually moving in the direction of ‘heat death’, the complete, irreversible and – according to many – unavoidable powering down of the cosmos. While there isn’t much we can do to avoid catastrophe on a cosmic level, there is much that can be done to fashion order out of chaos on a daily societal and planetary level – ideas that include replacing fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy resources, or shifting to a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable society.

At a time of unprecedented global challenges, Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained serves as a timely reminder that we must take responsibility for our own actions and come together to find a balance between entropy and human activity before reaching the point of no return.

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**Thank you Dr Ardalan for agreeing to the interview.**

**Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained is the second exhibition you have curated in Venice during the Biennale, the first one being The Spark Is You (2019). Can you tell us how this second show came to be?**

*Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained* is of a wholly different nature and concept to The Spark Is You exhibition in 2019. Although also a group show, The Spark is You was presented in two parallel exhibitions, simultaneously presenting the works of thirteen Persian contemporary artists in both London and Venice. Living and working in different countries, both East and West, the Iranian artists realised the concept of that show, which was to bring to light the important influence our glorious Persian poetry – from over a thousand years – has on every person in Iran, and markedly so on Iranian artists. Its effect could be compared to that of classical music in the West. I very much wanted to do that exhibition for younger people – perhaps those under forty-five – few of whom have had an opportunity to travel to Iran and experience for themselves the wonderful Persian culture.

The current exhibition, which is also a Collateral Event of La Biennale di Venezia, is inspired by the scientific phenomenon known as ‘entropy’ or the measure of disorder in any system. It is really a simple concept but might not have come to my mind if I had not studied science prior to studying art history. Entropy, essentially the second law of Thermodynamics, had always fascinated me and particularly when I started a career in art. During the sixteen years of exhibition making in the Parasol unit gallery space in London, I often encountered artists who expressed concerns for our planet and the evolution of many aspects in our society. Which is why, among the eleven artists included in the *Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained* exhibition, were several who had previously had a solo exhibition at Parasol unit.

**What can we expect from *Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained*? Could you tell us about its themes?**

Visitors to the exhibition will find a dozen or so indoor spaces and two courtyards, where the eleven participating artists, Darren Almond, Oliver Beer, Rana Begum with Hyetal, Julian Charrière, David Claerbout, Bharti Kher, Arghavan Khosravi, Teresa Margolles, Martin Puryear, Si On, and Rayyane Tabet, are showing some intriguing and thought-provoking installations.

Obviously, each artist has tackled a different subject and form of expressing their thoughts and concerns about the growing entropy in our world. Some focus on issues of global warming; others are concerned with excessive consumption and waste, the abuses apparent in so much of human activity; while others react to disturbing and destructive social issues – such as neo-colonialism, racism, and the excessive thirst for power and wealth.

The many separate rooms, often preceded or followed by a small antechamber on the Conservatorio di Musica’s Piano Nobile, provide excellent and generous spaces for each artist’s installation, with enough space between them to think and further reflect on their content. It is important to note that while all these installations are aesthetically incredible works of art, they are also powerful and challenging. Viewing the show can take a rewarding amount of time.

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## **How does the concept of entropy relate to the themes of the exhibition?**

Entropy is integral to everything we homo sapiens do. In reasonable amounts it can be positive and energising – the concept of ‘disruptive innovation’ is a known strategy for increasing business – but entropy can become destructive when it passes beyond a certain threshold with no chance of returning to the initial point. The title of the exhibition Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained expresses exactly that situation. Now, as we have seen in recent years, all the scientific evidence shows that the level of entropy within human civilisation has never been so high, which is worrying and why all kinds of news and writing on the topic are impressing upon humanity the need for urgent action.

What I found interesting in the works of the eleven artists is the objectivity with which they go about systematically creating their works, because they each seem confident about the human potential for finding solutions. Most artists in the exhibition come from the industrial world or have lived in countries where enormous harm has been done and continues to be done to our planet. They know they must be outspoken about these issues.

## **How did you go about selecting the artists, and the artworks, to include?**

During the sixteen years of running the Parasol unit space in London, I was often taken by the concerns artists had about the social well-being of our world and the climatic fragility of our planet. So, although the exhibition in Venice is staged in 2022, the thoughts of creating it have been with me for a while. Several of the participating artists, who had already had a solo show at Parasol unit, come from or have lived in industrialised countries and are therefore highly aware of the damage our civilisation has done in recent decades.

Naturally, there are other great artists I would gladly have included in the exhibition, but even though the Conservatorio is a very large space, we could only show so many.

## **Why did you choose the Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello (a conservatory housed in Palazzo Pisani a Santo Stefano in the sestiere of San Marco, Venice) as the venue for the exhibition?**

Both of the exhibitions that I curated in Venice have been in the magical spaces of the Palazzo Pisani. I simply love the Conservatorio di Musica, its building and its mission, because although it is an historic building, the atmosphere there is also active and challenging. Every day, countless numbers of young people, often carrying a musical instrument on their back, come into this building to learn, to practice, to work on improving their skills. I love that sense of striving because it prevails in everything else. Which other building in Venice could come close to the marvellous spirit and vitality of the Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello?

## **And what, in your view, does the conservatory add to the quality and narrative of the show?**

Anyone entering this building will first hear the sound of musical instruments or someone

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singing. In short, this place is full of uplifting life. The symbiosis between music, voice and visual art is simply unbeatable. It takes anyone into a high world of education and culture, which we need absolutely to protect and venerate. In addition, two of the exhibiting artists, Rana Begum with Hyetal, and Oliver Beer, have made works that are interactions between visual art and music.

## **What do you hope audiences take away from visiting *Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained*?**

First of all, I hope visitors will take time to enjoy the show, to discover its poetry, and find themselves far beyond the problematic issues of modern life. They can even interact with an artwork by creating their own music within the Little Gods (Chamber Organ) installation by Oliver Beer, set up in probably the smallest, most enticing chapel you could find in Venice. We have also created work labels and explanations in Italian, English, and Mandarin in the hope of welcoming Chinese visitors. We mustn't forget that we all have a common cause and need to come together to create a better world.

Then, I hope that the powerful and thought-provoking artworks will visually inspire people to grasp the fragility of our planet and act in order to leave a better world for future generations. It is crucial to realise that these artists are not scolding anyone nor trying to induce guilt, but rather through their amazing works are suggesting that we can do better.

***Uncombed, Unforeseen, Unconstrained***, at Conservatorio di Musica Benedetto Marcello in Venice, until 27 November 2022.

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