

DIPLOMAZIJA ASTUTA — ARCANGELO SASSOLINO
@PADIGLIONE MALTA, BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2022

Arcangelo Sassolino takes part to the Biennale di Venezia 2022, Malta Pavilion (in the Arsenale exhibition area) with *Diplomazija astuta* (2022), a work that re-imagines *The Beheading of San Giovanni Battista* (1608), Caravaggio's paramount masterpiece, as an immersive sculptural installation that juxtaposes biblical narrative to the present. By transposing the zeitgeist of the Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato in Valletta into the Malta Pavilion, *Diplomazija astuta* relocates the inherent themes of Caravaggio in modern life, inviting spectators to cross a space to the present time in which one can experience the tragedy and brutality of John's execution, the injustices of the past are reconciled, and shared humanistic principles can be vindicated in the future. A project that elevates art to a potential guide, capable of accompanying us in the complex vicissitudes of time.

Using induction technology, Arcangelo Sassolino's kinetic installation produces drops of molten steel that fall from an overlying structure into seven tanks filled with water, each representing a subject of *The Beheading*. The molten metal creates a vivid light and when it comes into contact with the water it hisses, cools and withdraws into the darkness.

Diplomazija astuta thus builds a bridge between the stories of Malta and Italy. As curators Keith Sciberras (MLT) and Jeffrey Uslip (USA) declare, "*Diplomazija astuta* transforms the Malta Pavilion into a reverent and spiritual space in which the public is asked to immerse themselves in the aura of *The Beheading*, to dialogue with metal and silence, with fire engulfed by water. Sassolino's intervention invites the audience deep into the very heart of the work, capturing the delicate balance between emotional intensity and austere stillness".

Diplomazija astuta represents the first ever case in the world in which an artwork applies a voluntary international regulation (ISO 14067 *) and certifies CO2 emissions through the verification of a third party. Concerned with the urgency of the climate and environmental crisis, the artist Arcangelo Sassolino worked with his team to reduce as much as possible the impact of the work *Diplomazija astuta* on the environment. For further information, please refer to Attachment I.

ABOUT ARCANGELO SASSOLINO

Arcangelo Sassolino (1967) was born and lives in Vicenza.

Sassolino's work revolves around the interpenetration between art and physics. His interest in mechanics and technology opens up new possibilities for configuring sculpture. Speed, pressure, gravity, acceleration, heat are the foundation of his research, always aimed at probing the ultimate limit of resistance and point of no return. His works usually consist of devices that generate inorganic performances. The materials (often of industrial nature) come alive, wear out, live on contrasts, forces and intrinsic conflicts, contemplating the risk of collapse as a fundamental part of the experience.

Through different states of matter, Sassolino's large-scale works manifest a state of tension, suspension, unpredictability, danger and possibility of failure: equally unavoidable aspects of the human condition.

"We are in an era in which the composition of molecules, atoms and cells is increasingly studied in depth. We try to reveal the origin of substances to find alternative possibilities, new solutions, hidden truths. It is an era based on the speed of supersonic and imperceptible magnetic waves, we are connected by billions of invisible clicks within microcircuits; I am therefore looking for new possibilities for sculpture within the very physics of matter.

I wonder what is the point of producing shapes again: what is the use of sculpture to still work on the now abused shortcut to the concept? I build machines and devices with the intention of revealing an intrinsic potential in the nature of each material.

In their impassive inanimate being, even a stone, a glass bottle, a wooden beam, a plastic tank or a steel plate hold their own specific figure, they have their own reaction time, a sound, sometimes a perfume, they preserve something unpredictable and can be bearers of metaphors attributable to the human being. If subjected to a certain treatment they can become an expression of anxiety, fatigue, pain, transience".

Arcangelo Sassolino has held solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, USA; at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, Germany; at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; at the MACRO Museum, Rome, Italy; at the Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, Belgium.

His works have been exhibited in public institutions such as the Grand Palais, Paris, France; Broad Art Museum, East Lansing, USA; Doge's Palace, Venice, Italy; Fundación Pablo Atchugarry, Punta del Este, Uruguay; Le 104, Paris, France; MART Museum, Rovereto, Italy; Art and The City, Zurich, Switzerland; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy; FRAC Museum Regional, Reims, France; Tinguely Museum, Basel, Switzerland; CCC Strozzi, Florence, Italy; Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venice, Italy; Kunsthalle Bonn, Germany; ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany.

ARCANGELO SASSOLINO'S STUDIO

Sassolino's studio, located in Trissino in the province of Vicenza, is a former spinning mill from the late nineteenth century. Son of northeastern Italy, Sassolino grew up in Trissino, in the province of Vicenza, surrounded by the industrial areas that today characterise a large portion of the Veneto region. The Agno valley, where Sassolino still works, is a deep but cosmopolitan province: it generates hundreds of laboratories and companies capable of hyper-technological industrial production, competitive on a global scale.

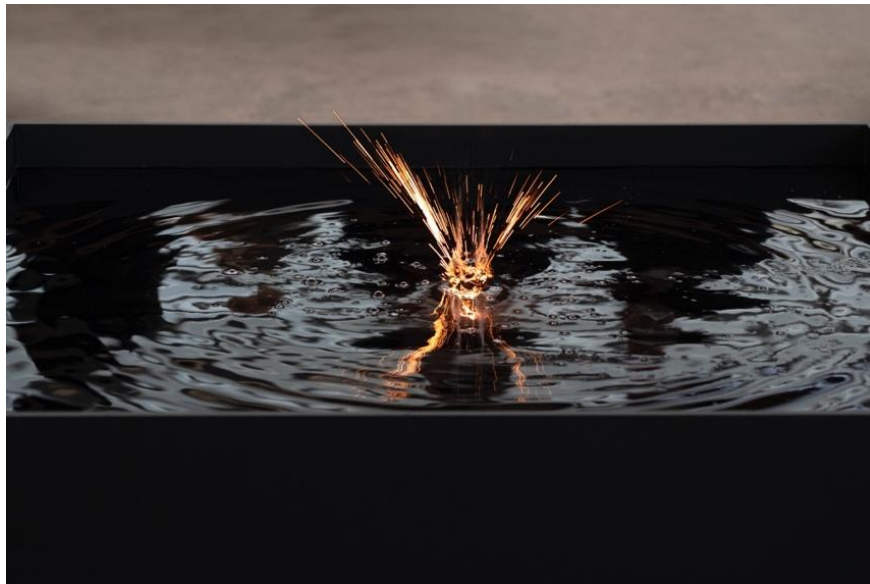
Arcangelosassolino.it



PAVILION OF MALTA

at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

DIPLOMAZIJA ASTUTA



Diplomatijza astuta/ Cunning diplomacy (2022)

Press Release, February 2022

Curators: Keith Sciberras (Malta) and Jeffrey Uslip (USA)

Exhibitors: Arcangelo Sassolino (Italy), Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci (Malta), Brian Schembri (Malta)

Arts Council Malta, under the auspices of the Ministry for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government is pleased to announce that the Malta Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2022, will be co-curated by **Keith Sciberras** (MLT) and **Jeffrey Uslip** (USA) and will feature artists **Arcangelo Sassolino** (ITA), **Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci** (MLT) and composer **Brian Schembri** (MLT).

The Malta Pavilion, titled *Diplomazija astuta*, reimagines Caravaggio's seminal altarpiece *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist* as an immersive, sculptural installation that overlays biblical narrative onto the present—

traversing 1608 to 2022, from the noetic to the metaphysical. By transposing the zeitgeist of the Oratory of the Decollato in Valletta onto the Malta Pavilion, *Diplomazija astuta* re-situates Caravaggio's immanent themes within modern life, prompting viewers to traverse a space where the tragedy and brutality of St. John's execution is experienced in the present, the injustices of the past are reconciled and shared humanist principles can be upheld in the future.

Through the use of induction technology, Arcangelo Sassolino's kinetic installation conjures molten steel droplets that falls from a structure overhead into seven basins of water, each representing a subject in *The Beheading*. Upon contact with the water, the bright orange embers hiss, cool and recede into darkness. Brian Schembri created a "percussive score" based on "*Ut queant laxis*," the Gregorian chant hymn attributed to Guido d'Arezzo in honor of John the Baptist and rhythmical motifs derived from Carlo Diacono's two hymns composed on the same Latin text and Charles Camilleri's "*Missa Mundi*," to choreograph the timing and frequency of each descending ember, while Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci's incisions into the installation itself (a sculpted ciphertext) proposes a daunting salve that embeds knowledge beyond and within our grasp.

Diplomazija astuta posits that the skirr of Modernism's industrial progress culminated in humankind's capacity to destroy itself. In turn, for society to embody its future self in the present, the signal material of Modernism—steel—must be physically, metaphorically and spiritually melted to create space for new progress to occur.

Diplomazija astuta is haunted by the specters of John's beheading, competing political agendas, cultural mores and instrumentalized geopolitics. Through the re-presentation of St. John's beheading in a contemporary sculptural language, biblical tragedy resonates with current world events, revealing the blind spots and failures of the humanist project across millennia: deceit, media malpractice and the weaponization of ideas.

Diplomazija astuta—anchored in Maltese creative talent and art history—elevates the potential for art to lead us forward through complex moments in time. The Minister for The National Heritage, The Arts and Local Government Dr. José Herrera states, "*With the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at the forefront of our minds, this iteration of the Malta Pavilion demonstrates how art can represent society's ideologies and ideals. Our Malta project presents a transcendent cultural experience where beholders imagine a path towards reconciliation; it brings us great pride to put forth this salient project at one of the largest exhibitions of contemporary art in the world.*"

Arts Council Malta Executive Chairman Albert Marshall notes, "*This extraordinary and timely installation—an invention of the collaborative creative effort between our curators and artists—puts forth a Malta Pavilion that layers that which is said to have passed with that which is still unfolding. Diplomazija astuta creates a palimpsest that uniquely operates within the realms of Caravaggio's altarpiece and contemporary Maltese visual culture.*"

-ENDS-

CREDITS

Commissioner: Arts Council Malta

Curators: Keith Sciberras (MLT) and Jeffrey Uslip (USA),

Exhibitors: Arcangelo Sassolino (ITA), Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci (MLT), and Brian Schembri (MLT)

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Dissipatio

The empty darkness of that wall, of those stones, of everything inanimate – in Caravaggio's painting, that void seems to be the very condition of the scene, what makes possible the vibrant, throbbing light that makes those bodies live and move. This radical contrast between light and darkness makes the scene into something that happens before our eyes, and not merely something that will happen or has already happened.

It is this contrast that interests me, or rather the idea that only through the conflict and unresolved tension of forces we can see, even if only for an instant as a blinding light, the origin of things—an origin that, coming from nothing and destined to return into nothing, exists only in the 'here and now' of its appearance. An origin that appears and that at the very moment of its appearance is no longer there.

What I am trying to capture is the change of state, that instant in which something is becoming something else, that energy and power that exist in the flash of absolute instability between the moments of equilibrium that are the before and the after.

That is why I decided to work on metal and its transformation.

About eight millennia have passed since human beings began to use metals: copper, gold, iron, aluminum. Metals are characterized by strength, but also by ductility. They appear inert, but they conduct energy and heat.

The fork on our table, the wheel of the train, the airplane, the components of an engine, the ring on our finger, the monument in a square, a scalpel, a bullet: before being what they are, all these objects were incandescent liquid. All the metal that we see, that we touch, that we use, and that constitutes the skeleton of the living world within which we move, has solidified in the darkness of a mold to then pass through a die and cool against, or inside, something.

I want to free metal from that closed form, to expose its luminous liquid origin.

Once melted, metal is no longer simply static, no longer something that merely exists, unchanging – instead, it expands within a chronological dimension of appearance and disappearance: it becomes time itself.

Steel is created only at very high temperatures, and when energy and heat bring it back to its original liquid state, it glows with red-hot light; it becomes stolid hardness only when that light goes out.

Only in the change of state, and therefore only in living time, does steel become light.

This is a work about continuous loss, about the impossibility of holding back, about the inexorable and unstoppable flow of all things. But it's also about the fact that being is only revealed in vanishing, that light is an evanescent interval of darkness.

Something keeps dissipating, consuming, yielding; the molten drops ceaselessly appear, fall, and vanish. I am trying to scan time – that which both creates being and consumes it – through something equally elusive.

Maybe mine is, at its core, a work about the open wound that is life.

Why can't sculpture flow like time instead of being a cold, rigid monolith devoid of the vital energy that produced it?

Instead of fixing the instant of the passage, making it once again something static, I show the passage itself, the appearance and the disappearance, the glowing, ephemeral limit that divides and connects the twin darknesses of the before and the after.

Arcangelo Sassolino

Diplomazia Astuta
59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia
The first Carbon Neutral Art Installation

Diplomazia Astuta is exceptional also in its being responsible: in fact, for the first time a work of art applies a voluntary international standard (ISO 14067: 2018 *), certifies the equivalent CO2 emissions produced during its construction and preparation through the verification of a third party body, and then offsets these emissions through a forest protection project. Having at heart the urgency of the climate crisis and being aware of the environmental impact of his work, the artist Arcangelo Sassolino worked with his team to reduce as much as possible *Diplomazia Astuta*'s effect on the climate.

With the collaboration of Susanna Sieff, sustainability consultant for large national and international events and companies, a series of actions have been identified to preventively reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These practices include the use of energy deriving from entirely renewable sources during the Venice Biennale's seven months and the complete recovery of the steel, which will be melted and then totally recycled in a nearby production circuit. The residual emissions have also been calculated with the help of the Tetis Institute, a consulting spin-off on LCA studies and carbon footprint.

After calculating the residual emissions of *Diplomazia Astuta*, certified with the independent verification by DNV - an international certification body - these emissions were offset with the support of Carbonsink, an Italian company accredited internationally in the development of mitigation projects capable of generate carbon credits certified with the main international standards. The credits that Carbonsink used to balance the residual 81 tons of CO2 are of the highest quality, generated by the Ntakata Mountains REDD project, launched in May 2017 in the district of Tanganyika, western Tanzania, with the main objective of involving and supporting local communities in the protection of the forest reserves of their villages. The project was chosen for its proximity to the astute diplomacy message. By focusing on the creation of development opportunities and the land management rights of local communities, Ntakata Mountains combine the fight against climate change with a commitment to tackle inequalities and social injustices. It contributes to the achievement of 11 out of 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition to reducing emissions of climate-causing gases from deforestation, the project contributes to the conservation of the local ecosystem, protecting biodiversity and wildlife habitats.

**ISO 14067 was published in 2018 and defines the principles, requirements and guidelines for the quantification and reporting of the CFP (Product Carbon Footprint), based on the international reference standards for LCA studies (ISO 14040 and ISO 14044). The carbon footprint is understood as the sum of the emissions and removals of greenhouse gases (GHG) over the life cycle of a product.*

TEAM

SUSANNA SIEFF

A sustainability expert with twenty years of experience, she works on the definition and implementation of environmental and social responsibility strategies for Italian and foreign institutions and companies, with a particular specialisation in major events (Olympics, World Championships, Expo etc.)

TETIS INSTITUTE

Tetis Institute is a Spin Off of the University of Genoa that provides specific consultancy on Carbon Footprint, Climate Management, Ecodesign, Life Cycle Assessment, Environmental Labels and Circular Economy. It has its roots in CESISP (Interuniversity Center for the Development of Product Sustainability).

<http://www.tetisinstitute.it>

DNV (Det Norske Veritas)

DNV is one of the worldwide leading certification bodies. Through management systems certification and training services, it helps companies ensure compliance and sustainable performance of organisations, people and supply chains across any industry.

<https://www.dnv.it>

CARBONSINK

Carbonsink is a consulting firm that guides companies in their climate strategy and it is internationally accredited in the development of mitigation projects capable of generating carbon credits certified by the main international standards. In January 2022 it joined South Pole, forming the world's largest group in the development of solutions and projects that reduce climate emissions.

<https://carbonsink.it/en>