

PRESS RELEASE
23 JUNE 2011

ROMA PAVILION, CALL THE WITNESS: DIGITAL VENUE
WWW.CALLTHEWITNESS.NET
EXHIBITION DATES: 1 JUNE–9 OCTOBER 2011
PALAZZO ZORZI, UNESCO VENICE OFFICE,
4930 CASTELLO, VENICE

la Biennale di Venezia

54. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte
Eventi collaterali



Call the Witness, Roma Pavilion, installation view in Palazzo Zorzi, Venice with detail of Aernout Mik's Exhibition architecture (After Constant's *Design for a Gypsy Camp*), 2011, photo: Victor Nieuwenhuys

The Roma Pavilion and its project *Call the Witness*, a critically acclaimed collateral event in the framework of the 54th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2011, is now accessible via its Digital Venue www.callthewitness.net, a dynamic online site realized in parallel to the physical exhibition venue in the Palazzo Zorzi, UNESCO Venice Office.

The Roma Pavilion came to life through a three-day series of testimonies—art works, performances, conversations, statements, and readings by artists, thinkers, and activists of both Roma and non-Roma origin, delivered in the course of the Venice Biennale preview days on 1, 2, and 3 June 2011. The contributors bore witness to the injustices against and hardships of the Roma people in contemporary Europe. Equally they shared diverse experiences of overcoming discrimination, a commitment to activism and the fight for human rights, community solidarity, and artistic achievements. Collectively offering both an empowering imaginary and a plea for realizing a future world that would embrace differences through the measure of equality, the testimonies were filmed and then gradually added to both the physical exhibition on view in the Palazzo Zorzi, Venice and simultaneously to the project's Digital Venue, where they can now be viewed online in their entirety.

The Roma Pavilion in Venice was built as a site for artistic experimentation and generosity, a space for art, thinking, and action proposed against the harsh political realities all around us. It is conceptually based on the (unrealized) design for a “nomadic settlement” by Dutch artist Constant (1920–2005) from the 1950s, which was inspired by a fellow artist who, in a remarkable gesture of hospitality, offered the use of his land to Roma families driven from the Italian city of Alba. If we have learned anything from recent political events, it is that shockingly little has changed in the attitude of the so-called democratic governments in Europe in their relationship to the Roma, whose fate can be linked to immigrants and refugees, for example. In light of these political and social realities, the project of the Roma Pavilion aimed at recovering some of this artistic responsibility for our generation.

The archive that can be encountered in the project's Digital Venue is an essential document of the intensity of the testimonies, and provides insights into the remarkable physical site where the project developed, evolving as it did beyond the formats of traditional exhibition-making as a contingent, makeshift, dynamic, and unfolding forum of solidarity.

CALL THE WITNESS, ROMA PAVILION
54TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION –
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2011,
COLLATERAL EVENT

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la Biennale di Venezia

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With contributions by: THOMAS ACTON (Emeritus Professor of Romani Studies, United Kingdom); DANIEL BAKER & PAUL RYAN (artists, United Kingdom); MAUD DE BOER-BUQUICCHIO (Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe, France); LYNN HUTCHINSON LEE (artist, Canada) & HEDINA TAHIROVIĆ SIJERČIĆ (artist and author, Bosnia and Herzegovina) (chirikli collective); CRISTINELA IONESCU (journalist and TV producer, Romania); MILUTIN JOVANOVIĆ (film director, Serbia); ROBERT KUSHEN (Roma rights activist, United States); KIBA LUMBERG (artist, Finland); TOM MCDONOUGH (art historian, United States); ROSEANNA T. MCPHEE (educator and activist, United Kingdom); SHAMUS MCPHEE (artist, United Kingdom); AERNOUT MIK (artist, The Netherlands); BORIS ONDREIČKA (artist, Slovakia); TANJA OSTOJIĆ (artist, Serbia/Germany); NIHAD NINO PUŠIJA (artist, Bosnia and Herzegovina/Germany); SALMAN RUSHDIE (author, United Kingdom/United States); MARIKA SCHMIEDT (artist, Austria); GEORGE SOROS (financier and philanthropist, United States); STALKER/ON (art and architecture collective, Italy); ALFRED ULLRICH (artist, Germany); MONA VĀTĀMANU & FLORIN TUDOR (artists, Romania); and ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK (film director, Serbia).

The Roma Pavilion is organized by Open Society Foundations, and developed and realized by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht under the artistic directorship of Maria Hlavajova, in collaboration with Daniel Baker (artist, theorist, and activist, London), Tom McDonough (art historian, Binghamton University, Binghamton), and Suzana Milevska (theorist and curator, Skopje; initial idea and title *Call the Witness*).

ALSO ON VIEW:

The exhibition *Call the Witness*, which is part of the research trajectory leading to the realization of the Roma Pavilion in Venice, is on view at BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht until 24.07.2011. It includes art works by seven artists—LYNN HUTCHINSON LEE & TAHIROVIĆ SIJERČIĆ (chirikli collective), MILUTIN JOVANOVIĆ, KIBA LUMBERG, NIHAD NINO PUŠIJA, MARIKA SCHMIEDT, and ALFRED ULLRICH—who are actively operating from within and beyond their Roma identities. The exhibition *Call the Witness* was curated by Suzana Milevska and includes a reference room on Constant's *Design for a Gypsy Camp* curated by Tom McDonough. For more information please visit: www.bak-utrecht.nl.

The Digital Venue is developed by web designer Tomas Celizna, Amsterdam drawing on the visual identity of the project designed by Kummer & Herrman, Utrecht.

For more information on the project please contact:
Esther Deen: esther@bak-utrecht.nl

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