

PRESS
KIT



La Biennale di Venezia

58. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Eventi Collaterali

~~TO
LOSE
YOUR
HEAD
(IDOLS)~~

CATALONIA
IN VENICE

CATALONIA IN VENICE— TO LOSE YOUR HEAD (IDOLS)

EVENTO COLLATERALE
DELLA 58. ESPOSIZIONE
INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA.

A PROJECT BY THE INSTITUT
RAMON LLULL CURATED BY
PEDRO AZARA:
MARCEL BORRÀS, ALBERT
GARCÍA-ALZÓRRIZ WITH
THE COLLABORATION OF
DAVID BESTUÉ, LÚA CODERCH,
LOLA LASURT, DANIELA ORTIZ,
PEREJAUME AND FRANCESC
TORRES

The Institut Ramon Llull presents *Catalonia in Venice—To Lose Your Head (Idols)*, an exhibition curated by Pedro Azara for the *Eventi Collaterali* in the 58th edition of the Venice Art Biennale. This exposition will take place between May 11th and November 24th. The project is a reflection, from an aesthetic and art theory point of view, about the particular and intense relationship that human beings have with statues.

The project is located at the Cantieri Navali in San Pietro island in Venice, and includes the participation of the artist Marcel Borràs as well as various other artists who collaborated in the artist book.

To illustrate and contextualise the statue workshop and destruction phenomenon in Catalonia and worldwide, various sculptural examples are exhibited. The exhibition space, designed by the architect Tiziano Schürch, evokes the atmosphere of a warehouse full of fallen statues.

THE THESIS

The title of the project, *Catalonia in Venice—To Lose Your Head (Idols)*, already gives us an idea of the theme of the exhibition - because of the double meaning of "to lose your head." Through history, when a political or religious system has fallen, or when conquests and destructions in wartime have been held it is usual that the armies or people destroy the statues that symbolised or personified the fallen regime. We all have memories of statues literal and non-literal ways being destroyed falling from their pedestals, by hammers or being blown up during a revolution, *coup d'état* or an invasion.

These statues are also often decapitated, they lose their heads. In their euphoria and desire for change and also with the intention of humiliating the enemy or regime that they want to overthrow, the destructors also often lose their heads. And the same happens, but the other way round, when we passionately worship a statue or a monument that represents a historical figure or a god, as if the object were in fact the subject of said worship. Iconoclasm and icondulism are as current and as present as in ancient cultures. *Catalonia in Venice—To Lose Your Head (Idols)* is an exhibition that documents the complex lives of statues, which some present-day artists recreate and reflect upon.

In the words of the curator Pedro Azara, "the destruction and worship of images is a universal phenomenon" and often it's very difficult to "keep a cool head" because it's very possible that "the image is capable

of imposing itself on us and if this occurs our first reaction is to lose our head." It is as if the statues have their own lives, regardless if the object is more or less artistic. "Statues are artificial bodies. Like strange beings they awaken passions, desires and fears. Statues dominate us. They expose us to that which we don't always want to see. They are pleaded with or they are decapitated. Desperate before their disdain, or thankful before an unexpected awakening, we react, either by gracing them with our gratitude or delivering them a final *coup de grace*," adds the curator about the exhibition.

However, Western art theory, inheritor of the Enlightenment, maintains a very cold vision of images. Starting in the 18th century, and with the new theories about aesthetic and art, like those of Emmanuel Kant, the artistic object began to be viewed as a human creation capable of reasonably communicating a message or an idea, and not responding to any desire or having to satisfy any need. With Kant's theory, art work loses its sacred character and the spectator has to be able to maintain a certain distance from the art work. "For Kant, if you feel that you want to touch the art, that's fetishism. He negated spontaneous and primary reactions provoked by works of art," says Pedro Azara. However, older Western art and art in some non-Western cultures "belong to the world of magic, and they are pieces that were never conceived to be contemplated by human eyes; only gods and ancestors, invisible beings, had access to these and could look at them."

What the project wants to explore is the fact that despite the 18th century interpretation of art as object that has been upheld up to the present day, human beings have not at any moment lost that "magic" connection with images, and they continue to workshop and destroy them with the same resolve as in antiquity. When they are harmed the damage

that is done is very similar to that which is inflicted on humans: mutilations, beheadings (very often), throwing of corrosive liquids or hot oil, blinding (paint thrown in the eyes, often the colour red to symbolise blood), etc. "Statues are living beings: they seem alive to us. They are either worshipped or bothersome witnesses," says Azara.

The project documents and presents various examples of statue worship and destruction that correspond to the Catalan reality. "A community such as a Catalonia, with its sacred mountains and identity myths, does not escape these human reactions in the presence of images," affirms Pedro Azara.

In a historical moment such a now where humans are completely immersed in the world of images, of every shape and size and type, the idea the project proposes is also a reflection of this human condition from the point of view of art theory, but with anthropological, sociological and psychological connotations. Furthermore, the exhibitory presentation directly appeals the spectator to confront this phenomenon head on.

IMAGE WORSHIP is a sentiment that dates back to ancient times, and at the same time it is complex and ambiguous. Plato was already distinguishing between icons (images that make us see supernatural spirits and beings without confusing the two), and idols (images that are considered to be supernatural beings), which gave rise to different attitudes: reverence and “idolatrous” worship. With religious statues the line between veneration and worship is very undefined - it is difficult to know if one is praying before the statue or directly at the deified effigy, like for example what currently happens with the Easter “passos” (processions of lifelike wood or plaster sculptures that show individual scenes of the events of Jesus’s arrest and burial, or of the Virgin Mary showing grief) or with the “Maredéus” (wooden sculptures of the Mary, Mother of Jesus, and to which there are celebrations and worship). In other cases, sculptures do not directly or faithfully represent the revered person or deity, but this is not a problem. Francesc Carulla, sculptor of the monument, “The Shot,” an homage to Johan Cruyff at the Camp Nou, home stadium of Football Club Barcelona, says: “The figure is not inspired by Johan, but that’s irrelevant, because Johan is everywhere.”

TO BLEMISH INTERVENE OR DISFIGURE are common ways of negating an image. The face tends to be the most affected area. Throwing paint - almost always blood red -, removing or scratching out the eyes to ensure that a statue does not “wake up,”—as was common in the ancient Near East—or to neutralise it. Paint disfigures the face and makes it so the statue cannot look at us.

THE CANCELLATION of a statues supposes its definitive removal from the public space, and its concealment, not for aesthetic reasons but rather political ones. The statue is seen as a dominating living being that must be seized or imprisoned. One recent example is the removal

of the *Antonio López Monument*, by Frederic Marés, from a square in Barcelona, because of López’s history in the slave trade.

THE VIOLENT AND CRUEL DESTRUCTION of statues has also been a common practice through the ages. In antiquity statues that did not respond to human requests were whipped, demolished or destroyed. The extreme cruelty in the mutilation and beheading responds to the consideration that the statue is a living being. If it is destroyed then its power and influence over us is taken away. Attacks on monuments are frequent: the *Monument als Caiguts (Monument to the Fallen)* in Barcelona, by Josep Clarà, has received numerous attacks over the course of history; or the most famous case in recent years, the mutilation and graffiti on parts of the *Equestrian Monument of Francisco Franco*, by Josep Viladomat, during an outside exhibition at the Cultural Center of the Born neighbourhood in Barcelona. This sculpture had already been graffitied and beheaded before.

THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

Catalonia In Venice—To Lose Your Head (Idols) consists of four main parts:

1
THE PERFORMANCE, ‘SHE APPROPRIATES IN PRESENT’ by Marcel Borràs, in which a group of about twenty people are taken on a guided tour around the street of San Pietro di Castello island. There are five stops on the tour where the spectator comes face to face with some of the images that make up the sculptural and theoretical body of the exhibition. During the tour the curator Pedro Azara and the artist Marcel Borràs will contextualise each of the recreated pieces.

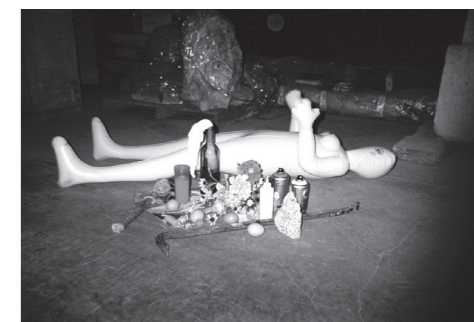
These sculptures are: *Monument to Lluís Companys*, by Francisco López, in Barcelona; *The Shot*, by Francesc Carulla (dedicated to Johan Cruyff, at the Camp Nou stadium); the *Monument to the Fallen*, by Adolf Florensa, Joaquim Florensa and Josep Clarà (which was removed from Diagonal Street in Barcelona); the *Equestrian Monument to Francisco Franco*, by Josep Viladomat, removed from inside the Montjuïc Castle, and which was beheaded and later vandalised a number of times during the exhibition; *Franco, Victory, Republic: Impunity and Public Space*, in the Born neighbourhood in Barcelona; and the *Monument to Jordi Pujol*, by Xavier Martos, removed from Premià de Dalt.

The visitor is invited to recreate acts of worship or destruction to the pieces on the actor’s body with materials (eggs, paint, lollipops, flags, candles, spray paint, bouquets

of flowers...) which they will have gotten from a vending machine of objects to worship or destroy statues. The interactive sculpture (a refurbished vending machine) by ‘E.Y.M (a f***** vending machine)’ will be physically at the exhibition, and will be complemented by a series of photographs that reflect upon the idea of the appropriation that the actor/ quietist makes of the sculptures.

The visits start at the vending machine and will take place over the course of three days - May 8th, 9th and 10th, during the *vernissage* of the Biennale.

Registration required at ids@lull.cat

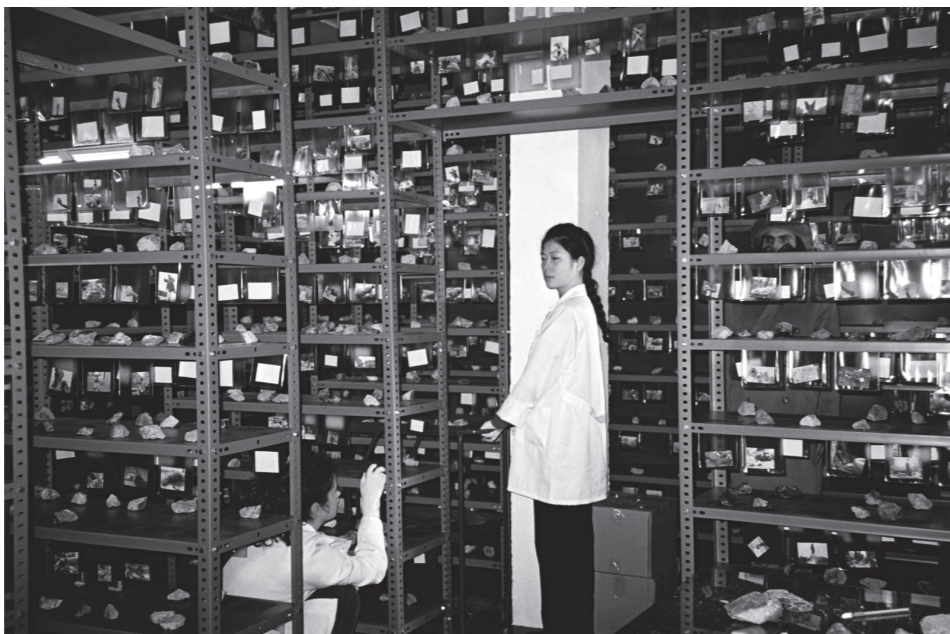


2
 Video EYES / EYES / EYES / EYES, by Albert García-Alzórriz, duration: 30 minutes. Filmed, in part, at the statue depository on Via Favencia in Barcelona. The poet Gabriel Ventura collaborated in the script.

In an archive fragments of demolished statues are conserved. Next to each fragment there's the stone that was originally thrown and did the damage. Through audiovisual language, the video explores the ambivalence of the image, the material and subjectivity. "Two symmetrical calculations, born from one sole gesture. Identical in some ways; it is not known shards one claimed the destruction," explains García-Alzórriz. This is starting point image from where a spiralling narrative will unfold, to which the spectator assists over and over again. A story explained through variations.

The four chapters that make up the video all begin with the myth of Prometheus written by Franz Kafka. The characters (subjects and objects, indifferently) are united by the routine of the archive: archivists, photographs, statues, stones, fans, lamps, fluorescent lamps, neon signs... they all form part of a spacious and temporary labyrinth that houses all of the demolished statues in history. A dense ambiance, saturated with reflections and shadows, where another reality is offered: one where reason is suspended, tensed between the image of resistance and the resistance of the image.

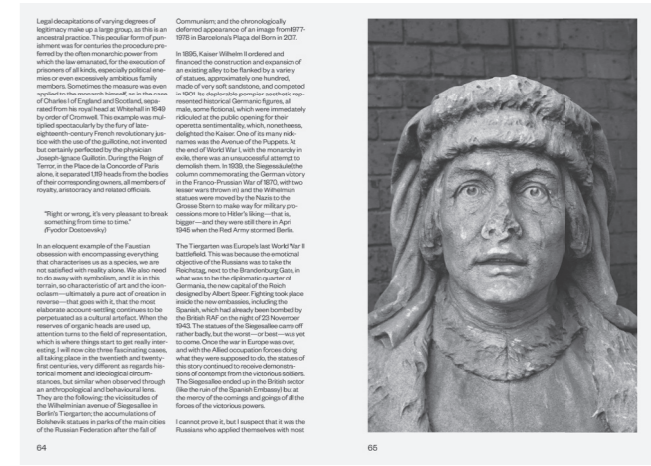
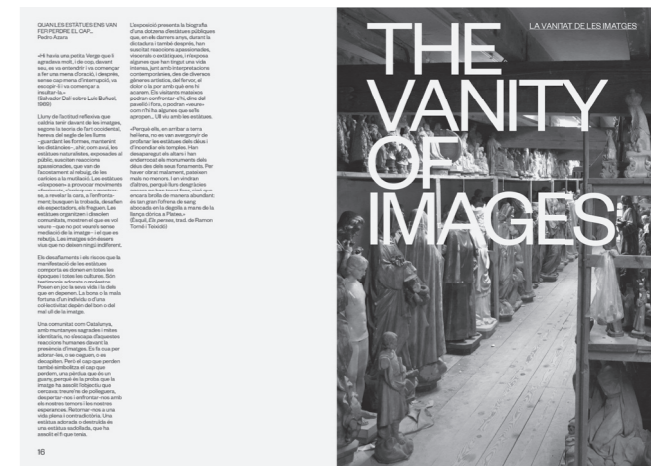
The video is in black and white, with the exception of the epilogue which is in colour. Black and white fuses "the beings that are apparently alive and apparently inert into a chromatic common denominator, participating in the ambiguity of that which is alive and that which is not." The narration is achieved through subtitles and the ambient sound in every scene.



3
 A collective ARTIST BOOK, published by Tenov Books, which includes various written and artistic reflections on the exhibition's theme. The artists David Bestué, Lúa Coderch, Lola Lasurt, Daniela Ortiz, Perejaume and Francesc Torres collaborated in the book. The pieces and the texts present in this publication complement the exhibition and create a dialogue with it. It is like a long visual and textual essay that poses questions about iconoclasm and icondulum from the point of views of doing, of creating, constructing a counterpoint to Pedro Azara's theoretical and historical discourse. Sometimes this counterpoint enriches the discourse and sometimes it overflows it from the world of contemporary art.

DAVID BESTUÉ connects to architecture and art work of the past with a certain devotion, but, as you can glean from his text, he does it in a very natural way, free of nostalgia, from a present continuous. At the exhibition, *Rosi Amor*, which he presented at MNCARS, the artist displayed pieces made with resin (like the ones in the book) that contained dust from other elements. This process allowed him to give new shapes to historical sculptures.

LÚA CODERCH created the piece, *The Magic Mountain*, a plausible story about one of the most venerated architectural icons in the 20th century: the Barcelona pavilion of 1929. The Mies van de Rohe building relived through photo offerings made by tourists, or from a reconstruction, an inflated version, of the famous onyx wall. In this publication she also presents a mainly textual piece that questions the comparison of all works of art with the monument, and patriarchal heroic verticals, at the same as discussing magic and tricks that the artist uses.



The work of LOLA LASURT also presents a certain ambivalence, somewhere between distance and worship, with pieces from the past. *Exercise of Rhythm* uses journalistic fragments (published after the assassination of Francesc Layret in 1920) and put them in the mouths of the four sculptures that were erected in honour of the politician. The piece presented in the book closes a project that began in 2010 with a movie that alluded to a story of love and heartbreak between the four statues, and that converted the inanimate figures that form the monument into desiring subjects.

Throughout his career, FRANCESC TORRES has repeatedly worked with the idea of destruction, fascinated by crashed cars, devastation caused by war, and the rubble of the World Trade Center skyscrapers. His work speaks about collective memory and looks to awaken critical reflection. In the book Francesc Torres visits some statues in Berlin, St. Petersburg and Barcelona that have been attacked, and thus opens up the geographic reach of this exhibition. His piece is called, precisely, *Lose your head*.

DANIELA ORTIZ works from a belief in the power of the totem and the conviction that an image is power, whether it be a photo shared on social media or a museum piece. They are never politically neutral. The work she presents in the book hopes to raise awareness, stating that the survival of a colonial icon in the middle of Barcelona has connections to Catalan immigration policies.

PEREJAUME decided to write without any images, in order to give them a rest, and because we don't need the to explain the intimate relationship that links artists to their work, both solemn and relaxed at the same time. In this text and in his last book, *Bring a Maredeus to the Dance*, he talks lucidly and ironically about wanting and the subjectivity of icons.

In addition, the book documents the Catalan monuments that will visit Venice, accompanied by interventions from the filmmaker Albert García-Alzórriz along with the poet Gabriel Ventura, the playwright Marcel Borràs, and the architect Tiziano Schürch.

4 Exhibition of 4 ORIGINAL MONUMENTS, scenographic examples of public statues in Catalonia that in the past years have provoked passionate reactions, either because they are worshipped or because they've been vandalised and removed from the public space. These works are:

EASTER "PASSO" OF SAINT BURIAL (1942-1944), by Salvador Martorell. Made of polychrome wood and embroidered fabric, it is composed of seven figures that represent the burial of Christ. It belongs to the *Gremi de Marejants* of Tarragona and it is one of the most spectacular "passos" of the Saint Burial procession of Good Friday in the city. It has been declared "a traditional festival of national interest" by the Government of Catalonia.



MONUMENT TO THE FALLEN (1963), by Genaro Iglesias, currently residing in the city depository of the city of Balaguer. The monument, inaugurated by Franco in 1963, was made by the Barcelona sculptor, Genaro Iglesias, who fought for the Republicans and who had settled in Balaguer because the dictatorship sentenced him to a forced exile of 150 kilometres from his house. The first version of the sculpture, a nude male figure, was not accepted. The commission was a soldier with a weapon and a flag, but the sculptor, skilfully, converted the sculpture into a bare-chested peasant with a hoe, a helmet and a pyramid, which is an indefinite representation of a flag. In 1982 the statue was removed for its connection to Francoism. Today, however, it is being reclaimed for its republican past and could be reinstated.



MEMORY OF A NIGHTMARE (1991), by Joan Brossa. Currently part of the permanent collection of the Museum of the History of Immigration in Catalonia, located in Sant Adrià del Besòs. The piece, a local commission by the la Mina de Sant Adrià neighbourhood, shows the decapitated head of the ex-mayor of Barcelona, José María de Porcióles, on a tray on a chair. Under his mandate all sorts of urban disasters were carried out. The piece was finished in 1991 but it was only exhibited one day before it was removed by the mayor and stored away. It later suffered two more removals from the public space, one from the municipal library, before it was placed in the Museum of the History of Immigration in 2004.



MONUMENT TO LLUÍS COMPANYS (1998), by Francisco López. Since its erection on Passeig Sant Joan in Barcelona in 1998, the sculpture has been painted on three occasions, one time by an artist collective that felt that the sculpture was not expressive.



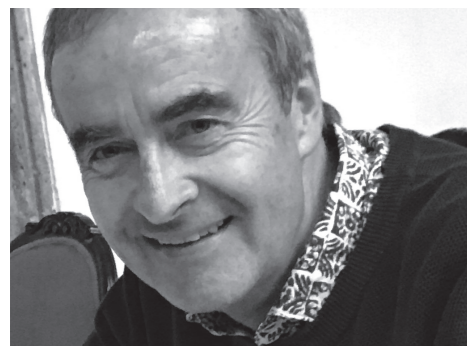
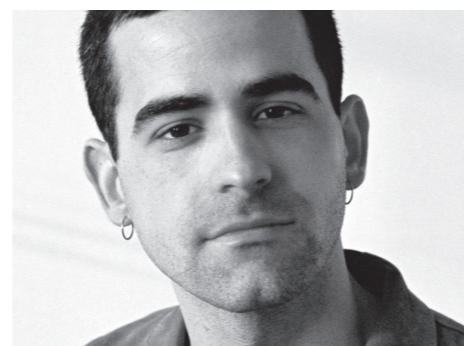
In the exhibition space there will also be a documentary section where 15 of the most worshipped, vandalised and removed sculptures in Catalonia will be documented with press clippings, photographs and videos. In addition, a video with scenes from different movies throughout history that illustrate the destruction and worshipping of statues will be projected.

PEDRO AZARA (Bois-Colombes, France, 1955) holds a PhD in Architecture (1986). Associate professor of Art Theory at the Elisava Design School of Barcelona (1986-87), associate professor of Aesthetics at the School of Optics at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Terrassa (1993-95), and professor of Aesthetics at the Barcelona School of Architecture (ETSAB). He was also the secretary of the Department of Architectural Composition (1996-99), member of the Board of ETSAB (1994-), and of the PhD Commission of the Department of Composition (2017-). He has curated various exhibitions such as, *The House of the Soul* (CCCB, 1997), *The Last Gaze* (Macba, 1997), *Before the Flood. Mesopotamia, 3500-2100 BC* (CaixaForum, Barcelona, 2012), *Mirage City: Bagdad, from Wright to Venturi* (COAC, Casa Àrab, COAMI, Centre for Architecture, Society of Architects, Riwad Biennale, Barcelona, Madrid, Múrcia, Boston, New York and Ramallah, 2008-2012), *Mediterranean. From Myth to Reason Del* (CaixaForum, Barcelona, Madrid, 2014), *From Ancient to Modern. Archaeology and Aesthetics* (ISAW, Nova York, 2015) and *Sumer and the Modern Paradigm* (Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2017-2018).

MARCEL BORRÀS (Olot, 1989). Actor, director and playwright. As an actor he has worked in theatre with the directors Lluís Pascual, Àlex Rigola, Lluís Homar, Georges Lavaudant, Roger Bernat and Carol López, among others. In film and television he has worked under the direction of Agustí Villaronga, Mar Coll and Pau Freixas, among others. As a theatre director he has created nine pieces since 2007 alongside Nao Albet. His most recent ones were *Falsestuff. The Death of the Muses*, which premiered at the National Theatre of Catalonia during the 2018 Grec Festival, and *Mammón* which played at the Teatre Lliure of Barcelona and more recently as the Canal Theatres in Madrid. Along with Nao Albet he received the RNE Ojo Critico award in theatre in 2016 for the risks taken in their work and their commitment to contemporary language.



ALBERT GARCÍA-ALZÓRRIZ (Barcelona, 1992) graduated in Fine Arts and Architecture. He was a teaching assistant in the Department of Architectural Projects at the ETSAB (2014-2017), as well as assistant to the artist Jordi Colomer during the realisation of the Spanish Pavilion for the 57th Art Biennale of Venice (2017). He was a finalist in the second edition of the CCCB's International Award for Cultural Innovation for his collective project *<3 EARTH* (Barcelona, 2017). Amongst his recent work the following projects stand out: the architectural project for the creation, research and artistic production laboratory, La Infinita, in Hospitalet; the scenography for the play, *Here* (Sala Beckett, Barcelona/Volksbühne, Berlin); and the documentary, *Tras los Eucaliptos* (2018). Amongst other places, his work has been shown at the Valencia Institute of Modern Art, at the Alcances 50th Festival of Documentary Film, and at ROVER, a project by Víctor Ruíz-Colomer and Joe Highton for Manifesta 12 in Palermo.



Since 2009 the Institut Ramon Llull has produced and organised the Catalan participation in the *Eventi Collaterali* of the Venice Art Biennale. The Institut Ramon Llull is a consortium dedicated to promoted the Catalan language and culture aboard.

Like every year, in order to choose the project *Catalonia In Venice_ To Lose Your Head (Idols)*, IRL nominated a committee of experts presided over by the artist Dora García, and chaired by João Fernandes, assistant director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; Carles Guerra, director of the Tàpies Foundation, and Celia del Diego, art critic and director of the art center, La Panera.

This will be the sixth time that IRL presents Catalonia at the Venice Biennale, which takes place between May 11th and November 24th, 2019. The director this year is Ralph Ruganoff. At last year's Biennale IRL presented the project, *La Venezia che non si vede*, by the artist Antoni Abad, curated y Mery Cuesta and Roc Parés.

CREDITS

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Agrupació d'Associacions de Setmana Santa de Tarragona
Ajuntament de Balaguer:
Museu de la Noguera
Ajuntament de Barcelona:
Museu d'Història de Barcelona (MUHBA)
Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona
Ajuntament de Sant Adrià del Besos:
Museu d'Història de la Immigració de Catalunya (MHIC)
Arxiu del Port de Tarragona
Arxiu Municipal de l'Ajuntament de Tossa de Mar and anonymous collectors.



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CATALONIA IN VENICE—
TO LOSE YOUR HEAD (IDOLS)
CALLE QUINTAVALLE,
CASTELLO 40, VENICE.
FROM MAY 11TH
TO NOVEMBER 24TH

OPENING HOURS

From May 11th to November 24th
From 10am to 6pm.
Closed on Mondays
(except May 13th, September 2nd
and November 18th)

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PRESS CONFERENCE

Wednesday, May 8th:
11am, Press conference
12pm, Performance

INAUGURATION

Friday, May 10th:
6pm, Inaugural act

PERFORMANCE

AND INTERACTIVE SCULPTURE,
SHE APPROPRIATES IN PRESENT

Passes open to the public:

May 8th at 5pm

May 9th at 12pm and 5pm

May 10th at 12pm.

Reservation required: idols@llull.cat

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