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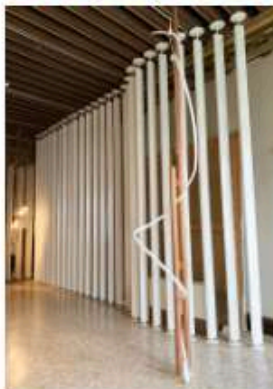
Visual Arts, Design and Architecture



Leonor Antunes: a seam, a surface, a hinge or a knot – Venice Biennale 2019



Leonor Antunes combines her sculpture and craft to open up conversations within architectural spaces. Here she discusses the 20th-century figures, both known and lesser known, who inspired her Portugal installation for the Venice Biennale



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Link

Pavilion of Portugal,
Venice

Architecture, craft, and design history collide in Leonor Antunes' elegant installation in the ancient reception rooms of the Palazzo Giustinian, which overlooks the Grand Canal and was created by Baldassare Longhena (1598-1682), one of Venice's most celebrated architects. It is Antunes' (b1972, Lisbon) second appearance at the biennale: she exhibited in the Viva Arte Viva exhibition in 2017, but this time she is the sole occupant of Portugal's flagship space. She has taken the bold move of stripping out all the heavy drapes and Renaissance paintings (or turning them to face the wall), the better to let her sculptures breathe.

Studio links

Remy Jungerman and
Iris Kensmil: The
Measurement of
Presence – Venice
Biennale 2019

Shu Lea Cheang: 3x3x6
– Venice Biennale 2019

Shirley Tse:
Stakeholders – Venice
Biennale 2019

Renate Bertlmann:
Discordo Ergo Sum –
Venice Biennale 2019

Eva Rothschild: The
Shrinking Universe –
Venice Biennale 2019

Sean Edwards: Undo
Things Done – Venice
Biennale 2019

Angelica Mesiti –
interview: 'I really want
to maintain ambiguity
and possibility in my
work'

Birgitta Hosea: Erasure
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Leonor Antunes: 'I'm
interested in ancient
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Tania Kovats and
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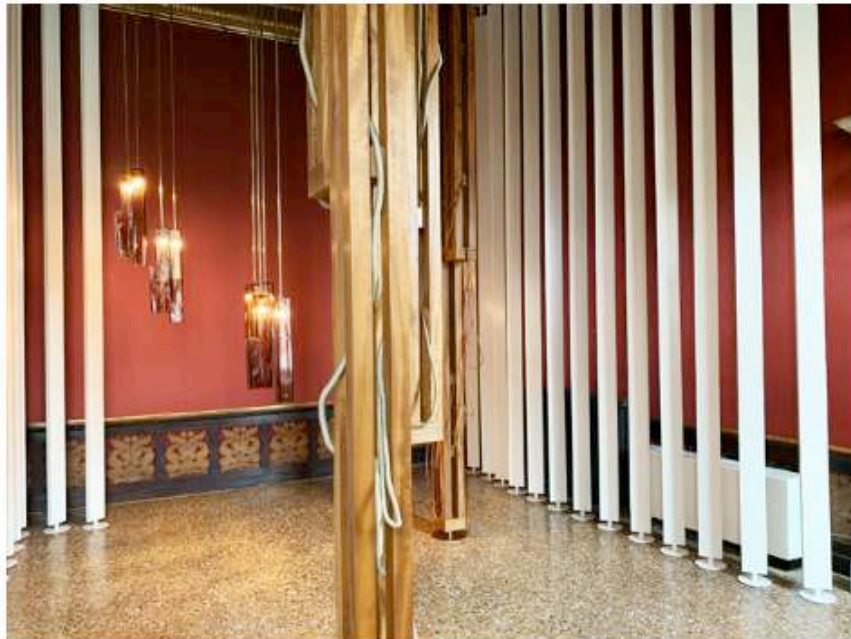
Leonor Antunes: a seam, a surface, a hinge or a knot, installation view, Portugal in Venice 2019. Photo: Martin Kennedy.

She says: "I've never dealt with this period of history before. It is so charged ... quite baroque. It's a negotiation - this is the term that describes it best - a negotiation between me and the space, daily to imagine how can I insert another layer in the room ... Putting another time frame into the room which is more modern, creating a dialogue. Not hiding anything, creating movement in space and another time."



Leonor Antunes: a seam, a surface, a hinge or a knot, installation view, Portugal in Venice 2019. Photo: Martin Kennedy.

Antunes' work celebrates craft and craftsmanship – weaving, geometric patterns, artisanal techniques – as a way of expressing the immense patience, labour and repetitive gestures that go into craft knowledge and learning. She often works with the same Portuguese artisans. However, for her Venice installation – a seam, a surface, a hinge, or a knot - she has worked with local artisans to create chandeliers of thick, solid glass, and sculptures incorporating wood, leather and even rubber. The leather and rubber elements are draped and folded or woven around and between slim wooden or bronze poles that fill the entire three-metre room height of this medieval first floor suite of rooms – a main hall/reception and two anterooms. The poles are fastened to floor and ceiling with simple discs. They weave through the rooms in such a way as to choreograph movement and gaze, inspiring reflections on both the richness and simplicity of these objects and their setting – emerging as pure form and material, rather than decoration. What Antunes seeks, she says, is to create a “frisson” between people, sculptures and space.



Leonor Antunes: a seam, a surface, a hinge or a knot, installation view, Portugal in Venice 2019. Photo: Martin Kennedy.

She researched key 20th-century figures in the cultural history of Venice, including Carlo Scarpa (1906-78), Franco Albini (1905-77) and Franca Helg (1920-89), whose modernist, rationalist spirits are present in the sleek contours and restrained gestures of her sculptures here. But she is always particularly interested in overlooked female figures, and here she also summons the spirit of Savina Masieri, a great patron of the arts and architecture, and Egle Trincanato (1910-98), who was the first female student at Venice's Royal Institute of Architecture, as well as the author of highly regarded tomes on architectural history. She became the director of Palazzo Ducale and president of Querini Stampalia.



Leonor Antunes: a seam, a surface, a hinge or a knot, installation view, Portugal in Venice 2019. Photo: Martin Kennedy.

Antunes, who now lives in Berlin, studied sculpture at the University of Lisbon and the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe. She has seen a steady rise to prominence in the past decade, with solo shows at the Reina Sofía in Madrid (2011), the Kunsthalle Basel (2013), the New Museum New York (2015), San Francisco MOMA (2016), the Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm (2017) and in London in 2018 at the Marion Goodman Gallery and the Whitechapel.

Leonor Antunes: a seam, a surface, a hinge, or a knot
Portugal in Venice
Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, San Marco 2893
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Filmed by MARTIN KENNEDY