

REVIEWS

VENICE

“Imago Mundi”

Fondazione Querini Stampalia // August 28–October 27

PHOTOGRAPHER OLIVIERO TOSCANI once likened Luciano Benetton to a modern Medici, and the fashion entrepreneur's history of arts patronage has reached ever more ambitious proportions in the new global-art mega project “Imago Mundi.” A collateral event to this year's Venice Biennale, the exhibition presents more than 1,000 works from contemporary artists in Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, and the United States.

Although Benetton has always collected art, especially Futurist and Aboriginal paintings, his ambitions did not extend to commissioning such a vast number of works until he retired as president of the Benetton Group in 2012, bought a yacht, and set out on a world tour. On his journey, he began to collect miniature artworks, 4 by 4¾ inches each, that functioned as cartes de visite from the artists he met in places as disparate as Latin America, Eastern Europe, Russia, China, and Mongolia. Not your typical souvenirs, the tiny canvases are partially inspired by a 15th-century Flemish tradition in which artists painted miniatures for travelers. The collection on view includes both well-

known and more obscure artists. Among the Americans' contributions are a sketch of a mixtape by musician David Byrne, a marker drawing of a penis by Ari Marcopoulos, a Polaroid collage by stylist and designer Maripol, a portrait of Brigitte Bardot by filmmaker Steven Soderbergh, and a block print by Swoon. The Australian section focuses entirely on Aboriginal art. While the works use canvas as their support, the materials run the gamut from mixed media to sculptural reliefs. Presented in five gridded Tobia Scarpa-designed display cases that fold up for easy shipping—Benetton hopes eventually to bring the exhibition to every continent—each of the collapsible displays is devoted to a particular country and functions as a portable cabinet of curiosities for the globalized world.

Benetton plans to collect the work of 10,000 artists from 50 countries by the



RIGHT:
Tetsuya Noguchi
Someone
Samurai, 2013.
Acrylic and
paper on panel,
4 x 4¾ in.

year 2016; the show's title, “Imago Mundi,” is a Latin phrase that means “image of the world.” Ultimately, the exhibition is a lighthearted and populist approach to distilling the ever-growing scope of the art world into miniature artworks by artists great and small. —**Ashton Cooper**



MARGATE, U.K.

“The Writing Is on the Wall”

Jonathan Viner // July 21–September 21

THE EXHIBITION TITLE evokes impassioned posters of May 1968 and the raw energy of graffiti before it became Street Art. These references are among the many to which the project space's inaugural show in Margate, Kent, knowingly nods. And the 15 featured artists—including Natalie Czech, Brendan Lynch, and Oscar Tuazon—don't stop at historical citation but instead enthusiastically embrace many of the possible interpretations of *wall* and *writing*. The result is a sophisticated interplay considering, in turn, writing as shapes and as statement, and the wall as a structural element, surface, and locus for expression—and, more prosaically, as a place to hang a painting. A teasing out of the differences between a wall and a painting (or the lack thereof) naturally follows—as does, ultimately, the question of the pictorial medium itself.

ABOVE:
Aaron Bobrow
Untitled (five star), 2013.
Two embossed
book pages,
each 20 x 30 in.

Yet, thankfully, “The Writing Is on the Wall” is not weighed down by its self-aware conceptualism. Lighthearted humor is an important element. Sebastian Black names his geometric compositions, which feature apostrophes, commas, and full stops, “period pieces.” (One is tempted to add “for the Twitter age.”) Here, the artist pins his punctuation to the works' surfaces like extinct butterflies, preserved for the generations who will grow up without them. Oliver Osborne's green-and-white diptych *Oh! Ich muss einkaufen. Kannst du mir helfen*, 2013, functions on the tension provoked by a found-language book cartoon collaged on a monochrome redolent of Modernist abstraction. “Oh, I need to go shopping,” says the character in the vignette. “Can you help me?”

The hierarchy of taste and the class system that goes with it (particularly in Britain) permeates much of Dan Rees's work. In his “Gravel Master” series, the artist covers the surface of a brightly colored painting reminiscent of Willem de Kooning's early work with pebbles of the kind used in roughcast, an exterior wall treatment associated with suburban houses. That art can be as little (or as much) as a shift in perspective is an old idea, but it remains one of its most convincing definitions. In *Papercrete (Untitled)*, 2012, Tuazon frames the eponymous construction material, a mix made by combining pulped paper and cement that is particularly popular with DIY builders. Against a gallery wall, the papercrete slab becomes a territory, a “texturology” à la Jean Dubuffet, contaminated and enriched by its speckles of printed materials. A tribute to an art tradition and the poetics of vernacular architecture, Papercrete also revels in its sheer materiality. This poised balance between idea and form, homage and innovation, runs through most of the pieces on display, and it is the show's greatest success. —**Coline Milliard**