

## Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy

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# The Question of Space in the Chilean Representation and Pavilion in Venice Biennale

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**Abstract** How significant is it to have a National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale? The question of exhibition space is crucial in defining the representation of a Nation, its cultural politics and geopolitical power. A study of the history of the Giardini and Arsenale pavilions reveals the status of nations and their importance over time. It is only since 2009 that Chile has had its Pavilion in the Arsenale. Before this date, the country's representation in the context of the Art Biennale was marginal or almost absent. However, it must be remembered that Chile is the only country to which the Biennale dedicated an entire edition in 1974, titled *Freedom for Chile for a democratic and antifascist culture* to denounce Pinochet's military coup in 1973. The military dictatorship (1973-89) also meant cultural isolation of the country and is since the 1990s that Chile has started to interlace its international cultural network again. The return to democracy represents an ongoing political and cultural process called *transición* (transition). This paper will discuss the case of Chile, its representation at the Venice Biennale and how the possibility of having a National Pavilion at the Arsenale influenced the country's aesthetic production.

**Keywords** Chile. Venice Biennale. National Pavilion. Biennial Art. Transición.

**Summary** 1 Introduction: The Venice Biennale as a Unique Model of Exhibition. – 2 The 1974 Biennale *Libertà al Cile per un cultura democratica e antifascista*. – 3 The Chilean Pavilion and the Construction of a Post-Dictatorial Aesthetic. – 4 The Aesthetic of the Chilean Pavilion (2009-19). – 5 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction: The Venice Biennale as a Unique Model of Exhibition

The Venice Biennale's model is a unique case in the artworld based on national representations in a specific territory, and was founded in 1895 in the Giardini of Castello. Since 1907, the Biennale allowed to construct the first permanent pavilion in the Giardini and within a decade the most major European and North American countries had one: Belgium in 1907, Hungary in 1909, Germany in 1909, Great Britain in 1909, France in 1912, and Russia 1914 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022). In the subsequent years, especially after World War II, the number of international pavilions in the Giardini has increased as the actual number of twenty-nine.<sup>1</sup> In 1980, for the 1st International Architecture Exhibition, opened the Corderie dell'Arsenale, the other major venue of the Biennale.<sup>2</sup> The history of the pavilions in the Biennale is a first attempt at the geopolitical and cultural influence of nations in different historical moments. The national pavilions held in the Giardini circuit represent the power and the change of status of those countries during the twenty's century, while the Arsenale space symbolises the post-globalisation world and its increasing importance.

It should be noted that the South American Pavilions were among the first extra-Europeans to be included in the Giardini: Venezuela in 1954, Brazil in 1962, and Uruguay in 1964. Argentina was the first country to be invited in 1901 and had several participations (twen-

**1** This is the chronological order of construction (the author's name in brackets): 1907 Belgium (Léon Sneyens); 1909 Hungary (Géza Rintel Maróti); 1909 Germany (Daniele Donghi) demolished and rebuilt in 1938 (Ernst Haiger); 1909 Great Britain (Edwin Alfred Rickards); 1912 France (Umberto Biondo); 1912 Netherlands (Gustav Ferdinand Boberg) demolished and rebuilt in 1953 (Gerrit Thomas Rietveld); 1914 Russia (Aleksij V. Scusev); 1922 Spain (Javier De Luque) with facade renovated in 1952 by Joaquín Vaquero Palacios; 1926 Czech Republic and Slovak Republic (Otakar Novotný); 1930 United States of America (Chester Holmes Aldrich, William Adams Delano); 1932 Denmark (Carl Brummer) expanded in 1958 by Peter Koch; 1932 Venice Pavilion (Brenno del Giudice), expanded in 1938; 1934 Austria (Josef Hoffmann); 1934 Greece (M. Papandreou, Brenno Del Giudice); 1952 Israel (Zeev Rechter); 1952 Switzerland (Bruno Giacometti); 1954 Venezuela (Carlo Scarpa); 1956 Japan (Takamasa Yoshizaka); 1956 Finland (Hall Alvar Aalto); 1958 Canada (BBPR Group, Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers); 1960 Uruguay; 1962 Nordic Countries: Sweden, Norway, Finland (Sverre Fehn); 1964 Brazil (Amerigo Marchesin); 1987 Australia (Philip Cox), rebuilt in 2015 (John Denton, Bill Corker, Barrie Marshall); 1995 Korea (Seok Chul Kim, Franco Mancuso) (<https://www.labiennale.org/en/venues/giardini-della-biennale>).

**2** The Arsenale currently host the National Pavilions of Albania, Argentina, Chile, People's Republic of China, Croatia, United Arab Emirates, Philippines, Georgia, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Kosovo, Latvia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Republic of Slovenia, Republic of South Africa, Tunisia e Turkey (<https://www.labiennale.org/en/venues/arsenale>).

ty-two) between 1901 and 2001.<sup>3</sup> The question of space and national pavilions in the Venice Biennale initiated with its foundation. The demand for expanding the exhibition space outside the Giardini, began in the 1950s and grew stronger in the 1970s (Martini, Martini 2013, 22). In 1995, a new attempt of expansion outside the Giardini took place, when the Biennale allowed nations that requested to have their official pavilion in venues located in the city's private or historical buildings. Since 2005 Arsenale space has been used as a location of national pavilions. Why is it so important for a nation to have a pavilion in the main circuit of Giardini or Arsenale?

National pavilions have grown in number ever since, increasing to seventy in 2015 and ninety in 2019. The scholar Edgardo Bermejo Mora claims that

when a nation presents a pavilion at La Biennale, it demonstrates economic stability and a strong interest in developing its artistic and cultural production. The process requires economic resources, tough negotiations, international logistics, promotion of the events at home and abroad, and mediating the voices of many actors without losing sight of the diplomatic importance of the event. For those involved, a national pavilion is a tremendous source of pride. (Nieto Ruiz 2019, 380)

Chile's first attempt to have a pavilion in 1946 in Giardini failed prioritises others South-American countries (Martini, Martini 2013).

## 2 **The 1974 Biennale *Libertà al Cile per un cultura democratica e antifascista***

The case of Chile is indeed a singular one. The 1974 Biennale *Libertà al Cile per un cultura democratica e antifascista* (Freedom for Chile for a democratic and anti-fascist culture), also known as 'B74', was the first edition after the reform of its statute in 1973, in response to the events of 1968,<sup>4</sup> which through the appointment of eighteen counsellors from different political parties, redesigned the Biennale

<sup>3</sup> The list of all the national representation between 1895 and 2001 in Vecco 2002, 203-11. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations into English are by the Author.

<sup>4</sup> In 1968 artists from different countries protested against the so-called fascist Statute of the Biennale, a legacy of the past, inadequate and limiting with respect to the demands of the artists and to a new idea of the Biennale that was emerging in those months. They wanted the abolition of the Grand Prizes and the sales office, symbols of the commodification of art, and demanded the transformation of the Exhibition itself into a permanent workshop for research, encounters, and film experimentation active all year round.

as an autonomous entity.<sup>5</sup> Starting from 1970, several changes were progressively introduced into the Biennale's model following the protests against the 1968 edition: first, the sales office that had previously been incorporated into the Biennale was eliminated (1970), and began a trend of geopolitical decentralisation with the introduction of new exhibition and multidisciplinary spaces. Finally, in July 1974, the Biennale organised an international meeting, with the representatives of all the countries that owned pavilions in the Giardini, to discuss new proposals and new guidelines for the Biennale.<sup>6</sup>

The B74 was not only the first edition with a new statute, but the first to show many elements of an aesthetic reformulation. Aside from including the former representation of Chile in the Biennale, the B74 was characterised by the absence of other international delegations, a unique exception since the foundation of the institution. Additionally, compared to previous editions, significant changes were made to redesign its spaces. The Giardini circuit was closed for the first time in the history of the Biennale except for the Italian Pavilion, which displayed the exhibition *Mostra del manifesto cileno* (Exhibition of the Chilean manifest) with graphics and propaganda of the Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular government in Chile (1970-73). The Brigada Salvador Allende's murals were exhibited on large-format panels in different Venetian squares (*campi*) and streets [fig. 1], while the film festival entitled *Testimonianze cinematografiche sul Cile* (Cinematographic testimonies about Chile), as well as the theatre program and musical concerts, were held in a tent in Campo Santa Margherita. The artistic events also included a selection of photographs by Luis Poirot (1940), Allende's official photographer, and the Italian photographer Gian Butturini (1935-2006), entitled *Imma-*

<sup>5</sup> The Board of Directors was composed of nineteen members representing local agencies, government, Biennale staff and trade union confederations. The members were Carlo Ripa di Meana, Giorgio Longo, Matteo Ajassa, Mario Baratto, Ennio Calabria, Mario Roberto Cimnaghi, Osvaldo De Nunzio, Francesco Maselli, Giuseppe Mazzariol, Roberto Mazzucco, Mario Monicelli, Ermanno Olmi, Guido Perocco, Neri Pozza, Domenico Purificato, Giuseppe Rossini, Adriano Seroni, Manlio Spandonaro and Pietro Zampetti ("Piano quadriennale di massima delle attività e delle manifestazioni (1974-1977)", in Dorigo et al. 1975, 61-2).

<sup>6</sup> The new Statute of the Biennale was therefore approved by the Italian Parliament on 26 July 1973, but it was not until 20 March 1974 that the 18 members of the Board of Directors were nominated by all political parties. Carlo Ripa di Meana was elected President, while Christian Democrat Floris Ammannati, former superintendent of La Fenice Theatre, was appointed Secretary General. Vittorio Gregotti took over the direction of the Visual Arts and Architecture sectors. With this reform began an attempt at programming aimed at decentralisation, interdisciplinarity and the overcoming of the seasonal cadence. The traditional venue of the Giardini was joined by new exhibition venues at Giudecca (former shipyards), at Dorsoduro (Magazzini del Sale), and other spaces in the city where happenings, debates and performances were held ("Legge 26 luglio 1973, n. 438. Nuovo ordinamento dell'Ente autonomo «La Biennale di Venezia»", in Dorigo et al. 1975, 15-22).



**Figura 1** Murales, Venice 1974. Eventi del 1974. La Biennale di Venezia, *Annuario*, 1975. Photo by the Author

*gini e parole dal Cile: da Allende alla Repressione* (Images and words from Chile: from Allende to Repression) exhibited on panels in the streets of Mestre, Marghera, Chioggia and in Campo San Polo (Venice). Almost all the cultural events were conceived within the public space. The use of public space meant not only a major change from the previous editions, but also the introduction of decentralisation as a way of breaking through the elitist barriers of the Biennale and approaching a new audience: students and workers, to fulfil the concept of a democratic culture.

The decentralisation of art into public spaces and the collective experience, are also fundamental aspects of the artistic practices in Chile during the years of the Unidad Popular. The Chilean philosopher Sergio Rojas referred to the role of art in Chile shortly before the coup:

There are [...] two kinds of art: the elitist, at the service of reaction, hidden in the false scheme ‘of art for art’s sake’, and the artistic expressions within a socialist society in which the so-called ‘artist’ is just another worker. (Rojas 2021, 11-12)

The Chilean muralists also known as the *brigadas muralistas*, played an important role during the years of Allende’s government, acting mostly in public spaces as a form of “art at the service of the people”. The murals had the characteristic of being collective and collaborative, almost anonymous works, in response to the criticism of conventional art and artists considered *bourgeois*. Art should some-

how represent reality as an expression of its political commitment to the contingency, hence contributing to the social transformation in which popular classes were engaged.

The importance of the collective gesture and its impact on reality and historical contingency, is certainly one of the strongest meanings of this Biennale. There is no formal aesthetic research, but an almost exclusive focus on the production processes of the artworks.

Art critic Mario De Micheli refers to the participation of the Chilean *brigadas* at the B74 as

One of the moments that aroused the most interesting discussion, consensus, and dissent during last year's edition of the visual arts biennial was the intervention of the *Brigada Salvador Allende*, integrated by exiled members of the *Brigada Ramona Parra*. The murals painted in Campo San Polo and Campo Santa Margherita, on the walls of Chioggia and Mira, and on the industrial warehouses in Mestre did not really go unnoticed. This *Brigada* was composed of young Chileans, who were joined by the internationally renowned Chilean artist Roberto Sebastián Matta. (De Micheli 1975, 915)

The text suggests the wide range of events dedicated to Chile throughout the whole area of Venice and its neighbouring cities, and it emphasises the anonymous nature of the artistic work, which also took place together with local students and artists.

From a representational perspective, the exhibition of archive's documents in the Biennale context, such as photographic reportages, graphic manifestos or documentaries, denotes the aestheticisation of history as a form of contemporary art. This shift of the narrative and aesthetic paradigm in the B74 responded to the debate over the role of art in the late 1960s and 1970s and, specifically, over the definition of what contemporary art means.<sup>7</sup>

The B74 was therefore important for different reasons: for the reform of the Biennale statute, the redesign of the exhibition spaces, the decentralization of the museography in the public space and the inclusion of Magazzini del Sale<sup>8</sup> as a new venue. At the same

<sup>7</sup> This debate is largely discussed in the interdisciplinary critical contributions section of the catalogue: "Condizioni e ruolo delle arti contemporanee nella crisi di trasformazione del mondo" (Conditions and role of contemporary arts in the world's transformation crisis) which includes texts of Wladimiro Rodrigo, Pierre Restany, Francesco dal Co, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Eugenio Barba, Heinz-Klaus Metzger, Gillo Dorfles, Franco and Franca Basaglia.

<sup>8</sup> Magazzini del Sale space was restored on occasion of the B74 Biennale and held the exhibition of Ugo Mulas *Verifiche*, a series of photographs on the Biennale taken during various openings.

time, from an aesthetic perspective, it is relevant for its interdisciplinary concept (including art, cinema, music, theatre and architecture) and the centrality of documents and historical archives displayed as artworks. These characteristics also concern the political and collective aspect of art versus the individual and the 'art for art's sake' model.

In relation to the press of the event, it is significant to underline that its political aspect aroused strong criticism from journalists and art critics of the time, both nationally and internationally.

Numerous articles were written, 142 pages of press reviews, which represents a considerable number since the short duration of the event (16 October-17 November). The main criticism has been towards its political propaganda, but also against the decentralisation of exhibitions in public spaces and factories. The art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, interviewed by the newspaper *LE ARTI* in November 1974, expressed his contrary respect to the public space program:

I do not believe that bringing art to Porto Marghera means making popular art. On the contrary, it creates a big misunderstanding. Art must remain in its designated spaces because the museum paradoxically helps art to decode itself [...]. Displaying artworks in the streets, bringing the Biennale to Porto Marghera means making pure demagogy. (Bonito Oliva 1974, 780)

### 3 The Chilean Pavilion and the Construction of a Post-Dictatorial Aesthetic

The cultural isolation of Chile during the years of the dictatorship (1973-89) influenced not only the representation of the country in the international art scene, but also the local artistic production. After the B74 edition, Chilean artists no longer participated in the Biennale until 1986. This was due to the country's difficult diplomatic relationships, and also to a radical change in terms of artistic output, which distanced itself from the denouncing and confrontational art and, for this reason, was unsuitable for an antifascist and political narrative. Chile went from being a left-wing cultural and political reference to being almost completely ignored during the dictatorship period.

The return to democracy in the 1990s signed a period that has been defined as *transición* (transition) and that brought Chile back to the international panorama. During this period, democratic institutions were strengthened and the political power of the military was slowly rolled back. In addition, the economic consensus around neoliberal economy was followed by a rapid economic growth, and the decline of anti-dictatorship insurgencies that rejected the new demo-

cratic and political rule of a centre-left coalition, were the main characteristics of that decade.<sup>9</sup>

In these years there were also several transformations in the public sphere that determined the post-dictatorial artistic production. Chilean Art critics Guillermo Machuca (1961-2020) and María Berrios (1978) have defined the state's cultural politics as a business based on the media and massive impact, transforming culture into a spectacle. The international art circuit has become fundamental and has changed Chile's local artistic paradigm. Chilean artists passed from a closed and endogamic model during the dictatorship, the *Avanzada* scene defined by the art critic Nelly Richard (1943), to an international one. The 1990s artistic scene developed following international trends and the compulsion of being recognised worldwide (Berrios, Machuca 2006, 65-103). The possession of a national Pavilion was consequently crucial for Chile's cultural politics and artistic circuit. The first Chilean Pavilion opened in 2001 during the 49th Biennale. The exhibition was a tribute to Juan Downey (1940-1993), an experimental Chilean artist and video-maker who lived and died in New York. It was held at Thetis space, a private location rented during the Biennale and located in the Castello district. Finally, in 2009, during the 53rd Biennale, Chile opened its official Pavilion at the Arsenale.

This achievement was crucial not only as regards national representation, but also granted the possibility for Chilean artists, curators, and scholars of having a space to establish international relationships.

Analysing the aesthetic of the Chilean Pavilion during the last ten years (2009-19), it is possible to observe that the centrality of the political discourse that has characterised the B74 edition, which to date is also the most important representation of Chile in Venice Biennale, has been replaced by the institutional program of a cultural reconciliation during the years of transition.

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<sup>9</sup> The preparation for the 1990 transition began within the dictatorship itself when a constitution establishing a transition itinerary was approved in a plebiscite. From 11 March 1981 to March 1990, several organic constitutional laws were approved, leading to the final restoration of democracy. After the 1988 plebiscite, the 1980 Constitution (which is still in effect today) was amended to ease provisions for future amendments to the constitution, create more seats in the Senate, diminish the role of the National Security Council, and equalise the number of civilian and military members (four members each). Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin served from 1990 to 1994 and was succeeded by another Christian Democrat, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (son of Eduardo Frei Montalva), leading the same coalition for a six-year term. Ricardo Lagos Escobar of the Socialist Party and the Party for Democracy led the *Concertación* to a narrower victory in the 2000 presidential election. His term ended on 11 March 2006, when Michelle Bachelet of the Socialist Party took office. Centre-right investor and businessman Sebastián Piñera, of the National Renewal, assumed the presidency on 11 March 2010, after Bachelet's term expired. Bachelet returned to the office on 11 March 11, being succeeded by Piñera in the following term (2018-22) (Pecinar 2022).



The main purpose of the institutional narrative during the *transición* period, is to position Chile as a stable, peaceful, democratic and emerging country avoiding internal political and social tension and minimizing the problems of the past, and the aesthetic of the Chilean Pavilion was in line with this purpose.

#### 4 The Aesthetic of the Chilean Pavilion (2009-19)

Iván Navarro, Fernando Prats and Alfredo Jaar, were the three artists who represented Chile respectively in 2009, 2011 and 2013, selected directly by a special commission composed of government cultural bureaucrats. It is also important to note that between 2009 and 2011, President Sebastian Piñera's right-wing government was in office for the first time.

Iván Navarro (1972) belonging to the post-dictatorship generation of the 1990s, but living in New York since 1997, presented for the 53rd Biennale (2009) the installation called *The Threshold*: a series of multicoloured neon doors, and a neon sculpture reflecting a specific word: "BED" [fig. 2]. The use of neon is reminiscent of the works of Dan Flavin (1933-1996) and of the American and European conceptual art scene. The choice of Navarro as the first national artist of Chilean Pavilion, reinforces the idea of a young, cool and new country, looking ahead to a brighter future. The multicoloured neon lights and the conceptual use of English words suggest a multicultural, refined, sophisticated and artistically advanced nation. There is no correlation or reference to the B74 Chile. It seems that memory disappeared in a postmodern present, aspiring to enter the list of rich countries belonging to the first-world, moving away from the Latin American stereotype. Once economic and cultural wealth was established, Chile stimulated its touristic industry by presenting its monumental landscapes to the world. The *Gran Sur* (Great Sur) project by artist Fernando Prats (1965), who represented the Chile Pavilion during the 54th Biennale (2011), summarises the iconic images of Chile: Antarctic territory, volcanoes, and glaciers. The montage is composed of three pieces: an intervention about the impact of the volcanic eruption in Chaitén (2008); a series of pieces that allude to the mega earthquake in the central south of Chile (2010); and a neon lettered installation displaying the mythical job advertising by Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton, published in 1911, looking for men for his Antarctic expedition [fig. 3].

Chilean geography is a strong cultural reference shared by the entire society, regardless of their political orientation. The conservative aesthetics of the dictatorship is based on the exaltation of the landscapes and the local folklore, while leftish artists refer to the territory as a topic of political contention. Chile is presented as a wild coun-



**Figura 2** Ivan Navarro, *Death Row*. 2006. 53rd Biennale di Venezia, Pavilion of Chile. Installation, 218.4 × 1,524 × 11.4 cm. Courtesy Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris. Photo Sebastiano Luciano

try, a land of opportunity to explore or conquer again, as Shackleton did. At the same time, this epic and transversal theme reinforces the need for social unity, especially after the 2010 mega-earthquake.

Alfredo Jaar represented Chile during the 55th Biennale (2013) and was also the last to be directly nominated by the government commission. Jaar is probably the most famous Chilean artist internationally and his appointment is not only due to his career but it's also a strategy to give relevance to the Pavilion. The project *Venezia Venezia* (2013) refers to the obsolescence of the national pavilions showing a reduced-scale architectural reproduction of the Giardini circuit that sinks under the sea [fig. 4]. The catalogue highlights as well the artist's international connection, inviting intellectuals such as Jacques Rancière and Toni Negri to reflect on the worthlessness of the national pavilions at the Biennale. However, the criticism of the obsolescence of the national pavilions model in the Biennale appears as a purely academic debate that does not correspond to the growing request for representations of the countries or to the desire of artists to be part of it. No references to Chile were presented at the exhibition, as a form of distancing from the government narrative and as a veiled critic of the artist to the efforts to have a National Pavilion.

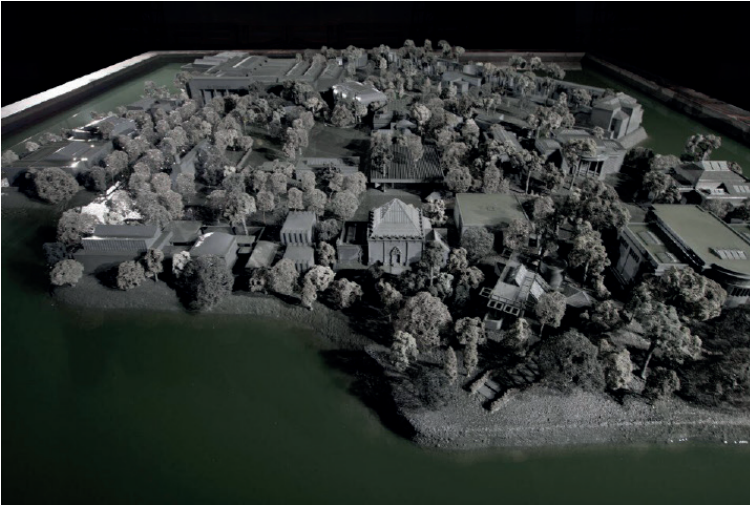
Michelle Bachelet's second term government (2013-18) introduced changes to the management of the Chilean Pavilion. A curatorial international contest was established, examined by a jury of professionals, granting autonomy to the selection process. Emphasis on the



**Figure 3** Fernando Prats, *Great Sur*. 2011. Neon, aluminium, wood structure, electric generator, 200 × 1,600 × 400 cm. Courtesy Fundación Engel

local history instead of the international ambitions was the new institutional discourse. In political terms, a general public discontent demanding for social reforms has begun to question the *transición* narrative of a prosperous and reconciled country.

The 56th Biennale (2015) is particularly interesting within the Chilean perspective. Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019), the curator in charge, inspired his exhibition *All the world futures* to the political narrative of solidarity of the B74. Nelly Richard's curatorial project *Poética de la disidencia* (Poetics of dissidence) won the first edition of the public contest by presenting the works of Paz Errazuriz (1944) and Lotty Rosenfeld (1943-2020), two exponents of the *Avanzada* scene. It certainly represented a turning point for the symbolic aspect of an all-women Pavilion, as well as for the centrality of the political theme: explicitly referring, for the first time after the B74, to the period of dictatorship. The works of the two artists showed intimate and poetics political aspects of these years: Photographer Paz Errázuriz showed the project *La manzana de Adán* (Adam's Apple) (1982-87): portraits and biographies of underground transvestite and prostitute community. Lotty Rosenfeld presented her work *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (A mile of crosses over the pavement) (1979), in which white tape transformed the dividing lines of Santiago's highways into crosses. However, memory seems something that belongs only to the past, avoiding the growing social problems of the moment. Dissidence as a form of nostalgic, radical attitude,



**Figura 4** Alfredo Jaar, *Venezia, Venezia*, 2013.  
55th Biennale di Venezia, Pavilion of Chile.  
Courtesy Domusweb.it . Photo Italo Rondinella

while maintaining the *status quo*, represents perfectly the political agenda of the left coalition at the time. Nelly Richards declares that the aim of her curatorial project was to install a local discussion in line to the new political cycle in act (Quezada 2014). She also recalls that the previous artists who represented Chile - Navarro, Prats and Jaar - live and work abroad, while Paz Errázuriz and Lottie Rosenfeld reside in Chile, emphasising the necessity to value local artists.

This attention to the enhancement of regional and local culture became evident during the 57th Biennale (2017) when the artist Bernardo Oyarzún (1963), a native Mapuche descendant, was selected, together with the Paraguayan curator Ticio Escobar (1947) to represent the Pavilion of Chile with the *Werken* project. The installation consists of over a thousand wooden *kollong* masks (used principally in Mapuche rituals and ceremonies), and a list of Mapuche names [fig. 5]. The installation dignifies the Mapuche cultural traditions and identity, but evades the increasing political problems related to the possession of land in the south of Chile. The exhibition represents Bachelet's government attempt to pacify the conflict with a cultural native oriented political program, while the government repression on the Mapuche community is still a very difficult national issue.

Sebastián Pinera's second period government (2018-22) was in office during the 58th Biennale (2019) a few months before the major social outburst (18 October 2019) that brought Chile to international attention.



**Figure 5** Bernardo Oyarzún, *Werken*. 2017. 57th Biennale di Venezia, Pavilion of Chile. Courtesy La Biennale di Venezia. Photo Italo Rondinella

Artist Voluspa Jarpa (1971) and Spanish curator Agustín Pérez Rubio (1972) were chosen for the Chilean Pavilion. The *Altered Views* exhibition is an investigation into the history of Europe, colonialism and the Western cultural paradigm. *The Subaltern Portraits Gallery* (2019) shows a series of paintings of different historical European moments while the installation *Hegemonic Museum* (2019) denounces colonialism as a cultural and political disposal of Western society perpetuated in the concept of the Museum. This academic and in a way elitist posture of the Pavilion was in line with Sebastian Pínera's slogan that "Chile is an oasis", economically and culturally, in the problematic and unstable South American situation. A narrative that coincided with the international artistic and curatorial trends of the moment: postcolonialism critique of the Western world, but that completely ignored the Chilean situation that only a few months later turned into a social outburst demanding 'dignity'.

## 5 Conclusion

By analysing the curatorial choices of the Chilean Pavilion, it is possible to evidence the cultural policies of the government and the changes in the local art scene. The National Pavilion is thus an extraterritorial space that makes the cultural policies of the state visible and hides or minimises its problems. The representation of Chile in the Art Biennale during these ten years (2009-19), and the aesthetic related to the National Pavilion evidenced the difficult political situation of the country, still struggling with the dictatorship heritage and stuck in a never ending *transición*.

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