



PRESS RELEASE

VEGETATION AS A POLITICAL AGENT

an International Exhibition curated by Marco Scotini

Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri, Imre Bukta, Amilcar Cabral, Filipa César, Critical Art Ensemble, Emory Douglas, Fernando García-Dory, Piero Gilardi, Daniel Halter, Adelita Husni-Bey, Bonnie Ora Sherk, Claire Pentecost, Marjetica Potrč, RozO (Philippe Zourgane & Séverine Roussel), Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas

from 31 May to 2 November 2014

On Friday, the 30th of May, at 6.30 pm, as part of the 2014 *Commons Art* programme, PAV opens ***Vegetation as a political agent***, a group exhibition curated by Marco Scotini.

The exhibition seeks to investigate the historical and social implications of the plant world in light of the ever-increasing resurgence of "green" as an agent of change in relation to current economic processes. To place a plant within a historical context means to consider not only its biological constitution, but also the social and political factors which see it already positioned at the centre of the earliest forms of economic globalisation. The colonial plantations and maritime trade of the 17th and 18th centuries gave rise to the first systems of species control, and saw the emergence of cases of land expropriation and exploitation in the pursuit to monopolise spices. The exhibition seeks to shed light on the various stages in history in which vegetation served as a symbol of social emancipation.

Focussing on the dual contexts of the past and the present, *Vegetation as a political agent* harmoniously combines artistic and architectural works by thirteen international artists, documents pertaining to the historical pioneers of the first ecological revolutions, and scientific equipment relevant to the botanical world. As well as art works and installations, the exhibition includes a vast series of illustrations and samples of vegetation, and archive materials and posters produced in a wide variety of cultural contexts. The geopolitical areas to which the exhibition relates range from the Indian Ocean (Mauritius and Reunion Islands) to Guinea-Bissau, from South Africa to Mexico.

The historical and documentary section of the exhibition is the result of collaboration with the Botanical Garden of Turin that – under the scientific supervision of Director Rosanna Caramiello – facilitated the identification of a selection of protected species, at risk of extinction (including the Peony and the Marsilea), that are native to foothill regions and are on display in the PAV greenhouse. Charts of herbs taken from the works of Carlo Ludovico Allioni (who served as the director of the Botanical Garden at Valentino Castle in the second half of the 18th century, and corresponded closely with Linnaeus regarding classification systems) are displayed alongside images, posters and extracts from texts that emphasise the potential narratives of the plant world in terms of regulation, conservation and the officinal use of plants such as Cinchona and Coca.

Inside and outside the walls of the PAV, the interaction between agriculture and popular movements is investigated: documents relating to the figure of **Amilcar Cabral**, an agronomist and Guinean politician who led Guinea-Bissau and the islands of Cape Verde to independence from Portugal; the work of **Nomeda** and **Gediminas Urbonas** that explores the role of ecological activism through the figure of **Mel King**; the murals of **Emory Douglas**, a representative of the American *Black Power movement* in defence of the rural proletariat; and **Adelita Husni-Bey's**

study of the tree-sitting protest camps in the United Kingdom. **Fernando García-Dory's** research, meanwhile, focuses on the revolutionary model of waste recycling proposed by pioneer **George Chan**, while forms of expression and collective imagination on themes relating to the green revolution are presented in the masks and costumes designed by **Piero Gilardi** and worn in the theatrical animations that challenge the use of GMO in maize cultivation (*G.M.O. Free*, 2014).

The courtyard of the PAV hosts two environmental installations created for the exhibition by RozO (Philippe Zourgane & Séverine Roussel) and the Critical Art Ensemble. **RozO** has developed *Salle verte*, an architectural creation of a vernacular nature in the form of a plant sanctuary that visitors can explore, built from bamboo and palm leaves (woven together on site by a farmer from the Reunion Islands). The installation includes a series of video documentaries on the French ex-colonies of Vietnam, Algeria and the Reunion Islands. The far end of the courtyard will house the *Sterile field* installation by the **Critical Art Ensemble**. This piece involves a portion of earth – consisting in part of a patch of grass taken from the PAV park for this purpose – that has been treated using the *roundup ready* method, an invasive chemical weed killing process which, over an extended period of time, destroys biodiversity.

In relation to the plant world, *Vegetation as a political agent* raises issues concerning the resurgence of creative subjectivity through horticultural practices as considered, for example, in the work of **Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri** that focuses on the launch onto the market of organic seeds to restore the equilibrium of the soil; **Claire Pentecost's** study on transgenic corn in Mexico; and the work of **Marjetica Potrč** who, through her involvement in community participation projects, established a self-organized community garden in the Ubuntu Park in a village-area of Soweto in Sudafrica (2014). The 1970s is represented through figures such as the Hungarian **Imre Bukta** and the Californian **Bonnie Ora Sherk**, and approached from the perspective of the pioneering interaction between art and agriculture against the contrasting backdrop of the Cold War, cultivating the human and ecological gardens. Bonnie Ora Sherk, left *Crossroads Community (the farm)* at the end of 1980 and began working on *A Living Library* in 1981 in New York City. She later formed *Life Frames, Inc.* in 1992, the non-profit sponsor of *Branch Living Library & Think Parks* in diverse communities - locally and globally.

A Living Library, or *A.L.L.*, for short, provides a powerful, systemic framework for incorporating local resources: human, ecological, economic, historic, technological, aesthetic - seen through the lens of time - past, present, future - that results in a *Community Living Library Master Plan* for making place-based, ecological change in communities and schools. All sectors of community are engaged in research, planning, design, implementation, use, maintenance, management, and communications of their unique *Branch Living Library & Think Park*. Through hands-on, interdisciplinary, standards-based, involvement of all ages, PreK-18, all subjects come to life: math, science, language arts, history, all the arts, technology, nutrition, health, youth leadership, and the public realm is greatly improved (<http://www.alivinglibrary.org/blog>)

Over the course of the exhibition, PAV Education and Training activities will include a series of workshops, open to the public and facilitated by the artists themselves. A detailed schedule will be published on www.parcoartevivente.it The first event features **Daniel Halter** who is involved, together with **Marjetica Potrč**, in the international cooperation project *Nine Urban Biotopes*. The event will see the South African artist working in a residence in Turin (Mirafiori sud), participating in a collective work of *urban gardening*. Slovenian Potrč, meanwhile, will present the results of the *Community space* project, an initiative involving the *Design for the Living World* school in Soweto. Later, **Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri** will present their research on the collection and distribution of seeds, an essential asset that is currently at risk due to the global monopoly of a small group of companies.