

The best and worst of the Biennale

All the World's Futures: the inelegant title of the 56th Venice Biennale. It's broad enough to sweep anything into its embrace. Yet if contemporary art offers us a glimpse of what's coming, then what we can look forward to, it seems, is a lot of looking back.

The 2015 biennale is as huge and unmanageable and multifaceted as ever. It begins the moment you pass through border control at Marco Polo airport and find yourself walking over images of ornate Venetian ceilings. Having tramped from Iceland (Christoph Büchel transforms a historic church into a mosque) to Antarctica (even an uninhabited wasteland has its own pavilion) and anywhere from Angola to Zimbabwe in between, it ends only when your stamina finally gives out.

The overall mood is anti-consumerist and anti-elite. Even the luxurious yachts that usually jostle for moorings appear to be missing. Environmental issues are salient.

Yet perhaps the most marked — if unintentional — message is that the contemporary needs the past as a springboard. The way to the future is found by looking back.

Don't miss

Portable Classic

Honey, I shrunk the Hercules! A fascinating exhibition of scaled-down replicas of classical sculptures starts with the massive Farnese Hercules in a series of ever smaller iterations. The towering marble giant ends up as a tiny porcelain figurine. This show speaks of our need to feel intimate with our culture. *Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner Della Regina, to Sept 13*

Cy Twombly: Paradise

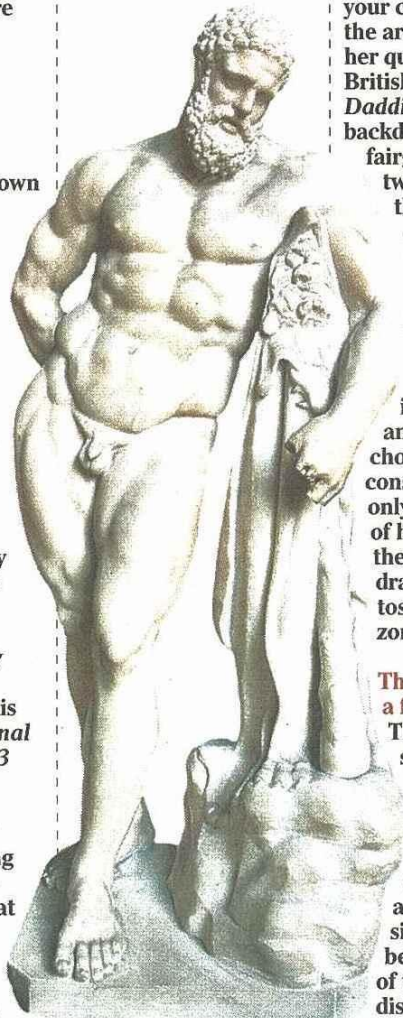
The full weight of history bears down on the present. A sense of the contemporary artist's inability to match up pervades a small but beautifully hung survey show of Cy Twombly. The visitor moves entranced from understated early collages to the huge, blowsily romantic roses that bloomed as his swansong. *Ca' Pesaro International Gallery of Modern Art, to Sept 13*

Proportio

Climb to the upper floors of a magnificent palazzo that, doubling up as a cabinet of cultural curiosities, hosts a show looking at fundamental geometries. The systems of proportion that have governed Andreas Vesalius' anatomical drawings, Sol LeWitt



Untitled painting from Cy Twombly's Paradise. Below: the Farnese Hercules sculpture



murals or Anish Kapoor installations are dramatically exposed. *Palazzo Fortuny, San Marco, to Nov 22*

Doug Fishbone's Leisure Land Golf

Combine pitch-and-putt with art that invites you to ponder political issues on a mini golf course in which each hole — from a Checkpoint Charlie-style assault course to a tropical paradise that makes you ponder the meaninglessness of luxury — has been designed by a different artist. *Arsenale Docks, San Pietro Di Castello, to July 26*

Venice Biennale 2015 Guide by The Art Newspaper

Save time and your temper by downloading *The Art Newspaper's* iOS app. Details of artists, locations of pavilions and events are all free. And for £4.95 extra you can get all the market information (galleries, dealers and prices). However ostensibly lofty, contemporary culture is also a lot about cash.

Give it a miss

The British Pavilion

If you hope either to feel proud of your country or to see Sarah Lucas, the artist chosen to represent it, at her quick-witted best, then skip the British Pavilion show *I Scream Daddio*. Custardy walls are the backdrop to sculptures that look like fairground balloons with a smutty twist. Cigarettes are inserted into the orifices of bisected body casts. It feels dissonant and outdated. *The British Pavilion, Giardini, to Nov 22*

The International Pavilion

The Biennale's theme "is informed by a layer of three intersecting filters", a panel announces. "Their iterative choreography... represents a constellation of parameters." It only gets worse. There are plenty of high-calibre works, but amid the jumble the eye is helplessly drawn towards the "look at me" tosh. The overdosed visitor zones out.

The whole thing, for at least a few weeks

There is, as always, too much to see, and far too many people.

Better to wait and visit either just before or just after the school holidays (if you can).

Let your love of the contemporary lead you on a voyage of exploration — the single most important discovery being the seldom-seen parts of the fantastical city that you discover on the way.