

left GALLERY WALL: LARGE DRAWINGS left to right.

TEXTS FOR LTS IN MITCHELL ALGUS SHOW 2023

These LIVE TRANSMISSION drawings were made in the studios and laboratories of Venetian artisans whose practices are crucial to Venetian arts and culture. They represent a small portion of approximately 130 drawings done over 3 years.

I began this series while I was in residence at the Emily Harvey Foundation. The Foundation extends month long residencies to artists over 40. Each year approximately 40 artists are invited to live and work in Venice. Applications are accepted online annually: www.emilyharveyfoundation.org

ART FOUNDRY VALDESE OWNED AND OPERATED BY CARLO SEMENZATO FONDERIA ARTISTICA VALDESE

Established over a century ago in 1913, the Valse Artistic Foundry stands as the sole remaining foundry within the confines of Venice. Even in the present era, it upholds the venerable tradition of employing the time-honored technique of sand casting.

The foundry is currently run by Carlo Semenzato and a group of skilled assistants. I was invited to draw as they worked and this drawing is the result of tracking 4 hours of movement in the main space.

On the left the dark shape is created by the movement of the hands of assistant Andrea Tenderini as he packs black carbon sand into a box to create a mold by imbedding objects to be reproduced into the sand. Once it is packed tight, the objects are removed and a strawlike tube is made from the surface to the molded space. Then liquid brass which has been melting in the firepit (on the right) is completely cooled, the brass objects are removed from the molds and taken to the next room to be cleaned and polished. Semenzato has a shop in the Foundry and several shops in different parts of Venice to sell the objects: lions, gondole, masks, et al, objects which present the visual iconography of Venice.

FRANCO VIANELLO CREA WHILE WORKING IN HIS BOATWORKS FRANCO VIANELLO CREA LAVORANDO NEL SUO SQUERO

Franco Vianello Crea is a master boat builder (maestro d'ascia) who has the respect of other boat builders, gondolieri and other boatsmen. He is especially known for inventing a boat called the Barena which is handmade with wood and is very light and versatile for fishing, shopping, taking the kids to school across the laguna, a multipurpose and super elegant boat. Crea works in his enormous squero - boatyard - on Giudecca Island. I have spent hours and hours drawing in this inspirational place. Franco works on 9 different boats at the same time in the huge space moving from one project to another. He flows through the large space, building, carving, fixing details as well as building the basic structures of the various boats: gondola,

sandolo, mascareta, barena... I usually station myself in a corner of the room in order to best track the movements of everything which is going on in the large space. When he stops in one location and it looks like he will be working in that one place for a good length of time, I move toward him to observe more detail. We often speak as he works and he teaches me, explaining what he is doing, relating clearly the inventions he has made, his personal and masterful adaptations to a centuries old boatbuilding process. He works with hand tools as well as power tools and large drilling, grinding, boring, sawing and sanding machines.

PAOLO BRANDOLISIO ADJUSTING A FORCOLA AND PLANING AN OAR AGGIUSTAMENTI DE UNA FORCOLA E LA LEVIGAZIONE DI UN REMO

Paolo Brandolisio is a master craftsman who makes oars and forcole/oarlocks, for the gondolas. Each forcola is made to measure. The height and weight of the gondoliere are important and once the forcola is made, the gondoliere tries it out for a week to see if it is right for him. It is not infrequent for the forcola to be brought back to the shop to be carved a bit more here, shortened there etc. until it is perfect for that particular gondoliere. Each and every gondola is handmade (6 months of manual labor) and each gondoliere decorates and furnishes his own boat, hiring woodcarvers, gold leaf appliers, tapesstry weavers, etc. Sometimes an owner will lease his gondola to a younger gondoliere who hasn't yet earned enough to buy his own boat.

So far, in 2023, there are only 6 gondoliera, women who own and work the gondolas. When I first lived in Venice in 2015 there was only one. Progress, but very slow progress.

FRANCO CREA MENTRE AGGIUSTANDO I FIUBONI DELLA PRUA DI UNA GONDOLA FRANCO CREA ADJUSTING THE RIBS OF THE PROW OF THE GONDOLA

Crea ...a different operation in the long process of making a gondola.

MARINO MENEGAZZO BATTILORO / GOLDBEATER

Marino Menegazzo is the last goldbeater in Europe who does this intense work by hand. He melts a piece of gold and when liquid, it is poured into a shallow square mold where it cools down. It is then run through a series of presses which successively flatten it out into a sort of ribbon of gold. It is then cut into small squares which are placed one by one between pieces of parchment and packaged into two strong leather sleeves to keep them from shifting under the blows of the hammer. He then hammers the packet for up to an hour to flatten it to the maximum thinness for gold leaf. His hammer weighs 8 kilos (17 pounds ten ounces) and he lifts and drops it steadily with his right hand for an hour. With his left hand he turns the packet in between each blow of the hammer so that the weight of the pounding is evenly distributed. Periodically he checks to see if it is thin enough. When it is done he brings the packet to the workroom where his wife and daughter separate the gold

leaves, control to be sure each one is perfect, and package them to sell. Defective leaves are remelted and the process begins again.

AMID SEDDIGGHI MASSCHERA DI LIONE

AMID SEDIGGHI, master maskmaker in Venice works with paper maché and wheat paste glue to apply strips of thick paper made from dried pulp to the interior of a plaster mold of a lion. All masks in Venice are made from such molds, some of which are truly ancient. He first coats the mold with vaseline to allow release of the mask after it dries. His fingertips massage the glue-soaked paper pieces into the various crevasses and lines in the mold. When the paper maché work is finished the mold is set aside for several weeks to dry. As it dries it shrinks a little bit and this shrinkage plus the vaseline help to remove the mask from the mold. ONce dried, the mask is coated with gesso, a white plasterlike paint which covers and protects the paper mask. It may be left white or then painted with water based paints. Amid's shop is filled with both white and painted and gold-leafed masks. Ca' del Sole in Castello.

MARZIO DE MIN INTAGLATORE SUI FIUBONI DI POPPA MARZIO DE MIN CARVING THE PROW OF THE GONDOLA

Marzio works with chisels and hammers to carve traditional forms into hardwood to be used as decoration for gondolas. He often works in Franco Crea's boatyard where different operations are simultaneously carried out on the gondolas. Dragons, mermaids, fish, decorative scrolls, lions (symbol of Venice), elaborate scrolls, flowers enhance and personalize the basic elegant form of each gondola. Sometimes the carving is done directly on the body of the gondola and sometimes it is carved on separate pieces of wood which are glued to the body of the boat after the carving is finished. It takes 6 months of handwork to create each gondola. When all the woodwork is finished, the gondola receives 12 coats of thick black paint to protect its hull against the salt water.