

CRISTIN TIERNEY

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Art & Exhibitions

There Are a Ton of Shows to See Around the Venice Biennale—Here’s Our Take on What’s Worth Seeing (and What’s Not)

We placed bets about what we thought would be exciting to see, but those expectations did not always match up with reality.

April 19, 2024, By Margaret Carrigan

There is an overwhelming amount of shows across Venice to see this week—some 30 official collateral events are on view, dozens of galleries have brought their own exhibitions, and there are a bunch of private museum foundation shows to see.

Our team placed bets about what we thought would be exciting to see in the lagoon, but sometimes those expectations did not match up with reality. Here are our honest reviews.

Dread Scott’s “The All African People’s Consulate” at Castello Gallery



Dread Scott, *All African People's Consulate* (detail of participant with passport), 2024. Participatory installation. Courtesy of the artist and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York.

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Expectation: Conceptual artist Dread Scott is interested in how one of the defining experiences of immigration can be reimagined to be more inclusive. In this new exhibition, he aims to invert the pinnacle of rigid, exclusionary nation-state bureaucracy—otherwise known as passport control—by making it a welcoming and collaborative process. Visitors to the consulate will interview with staff about their relationship to Africa. For those of African descent, the staff will offer them a personalized passport that facilitates their citizenship in a futurist, globalist community; others receive a visitor’s visa.

The project echoes the Afrofuturist call for a union that draws together all Black people of Africa and its diaspora. But Scott takes this one step further and ultimately makes it a reality. In issuing his own passports at *The All African People’s Consulate*, he draws into existence a new state, one not dependent on land, exploitation, or violence, as most others have been. It might not be recognized by certain governments, but neither is Palestine and it and its people are no less real.

Like in his *Slave Rebellion Reenactment*, an ongoing project started in 2014 that was filmed in 2019 by John Akomfrah, who represents the U.K. at this year’s biennial, Scott’s consulate concept re-envisioning a world where Black and other marginalized people have the freedom of movement and right to exist that is automatically afforded to so many others (many of whom have white skin). Nevertheless, it’s hard to imagine that a consulate, even a revolutionary one like Scott’s, could be exciting and few details about the performance work and its environs were given in advance.

Reality: On the opening day of the exhibition, a speaker set up outside of the “office” was blasting Afrobeats and the vibe inside the space was buoyed by some snacks and fizz. I doubt that this energy will be consistent throughout the run of the exhibition, so be prepared to show up to what is essentially just a waiting room. Visitors will need to participate in the bureaucracy to understand the work, which ultimately is a strength of the artist’s concept.

After checking in for an interview for a visa at the front desk, I loitered for about 30 minutes until my name was called and I was shown into a side room with a desk, a chair, and an inkjet printer. I was subject to a brief interview about my relationship to Africa, which, as a white citizen of the United States, is fraught: I have obviously structurally benefitted from the historical exploitation of the continent’s resources and people that undergirds everyday life in America. But the interview was conversational, not intimidating, and after a quick passport photograph, I had a freshly minted visa in my hands. Having also just renewed my U.K. visa, I can tell you that the consulate’s congeniality and expediency is a wonder.

Rating: ★★★★★☆