

Sustaining Assembly

Parco Arte Vivente (PAV)

Piero Gilardi and Marco Scotini
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On Friday, May 7, 2021, the PAV Parco Arte Vivente will open *Sustaining Assembly: Artistic Practices for a Grassroots Ecological Transition*, a collective exhibition curated by Piero Gilardi and Marco Scotini, with works by Maria Thereza Alves, Mao Chenyu, Fernando García-Dory/INLAND, Piero Gilardi, Michele Guido, Alessandra Pomarico/Free Home University Collective, Yasmin Smith, Karrabing Film Collective, Bouba Touré and Raphaël Grisey, and Zheng Bo. From the very title, the word “assembly” makes reference to a multiplicity of actors and practices—in a choral sense. The objective of eco-sustainability on a planetary scale requires complex processes of transition towards models of life that are radically different to current capitalist and predatory ones. This project’s thesis is based on integration and interoperability between various, existing sustainability practices, from the research into and development of non-fossil fuel sources—necessarily now considered as an obligatory direction—to projects for re-greening the environment, from circular economies to the spread of bio-agriculture, the regeneration of urban areas and much, much more. These alternatives only too often appear to be incomplete and non-convergent and there is a need to integrate them under a single rationale. This, of course, requires a new form of awareness on the part of social groups who are frequently working in very diverse fields. Ecological art aims to contribute to this integration and interoperability and, anticipating them, this exhibition focuses on the possibilities of transition towards a fully sustainable future society.

This intersection, collaboration, and union of different perspectives on sustainability is fundamental to rethinking our understanding of ecology and ecological practices: not a de-politicized ecology or, in other words, the solutions of green, liberal economies that blindly concentrate only on the West—running the enormous risk of undermining the path towards an ecological transition based on political assumptions that differ from those which have led to this very crisis. Political ecology, resistance to the dogma of growth at all costs, and the fight for the decolonization of knowledge and collective memories, animate the research of the artists in the exhibition whose environmentalist stance is anything but a cosmetic gesture.

Sustaining Assembly proposes a sort of “Environmentalist”—internationalist and not globalist, an assembly of collective group initiatives that allow people to come together—rather than practices concentrating on individual gestures. In line with this perspective, the exhibition includes groups of artists or individual artists who have initiated collective projects, all over the planet: Fernando Garcia-Dory with the collective project *INLAND* and Free Home University Collective by Alessandra Pomarico; Zheng Bo; Mao Chenyu will tell us about the communities in Asia; ecological issues in Australia and indigenous rights will be covered by the Karrabing Film Collective. Yasmin Smith, also Australian, presents a project dedicated to the Terra dei Fuochi. Reflections on sustainability practices continue with the Italian Michele Guido, the artist Maria Thereza Alves and conclude with the duo Bouba Touré and Raphaël Grisey with their research into the African experience of Somankidi Coura. Piero Gilardi will present an original performative action.

The collaborative methodologies developed by the exhibition artists, often through a relationship of alliance with various indigenous communities or with the rural world, distance themselves from the conventional strategies of individual empowerment, proposing to the spectator, in contrast, the collective production of works and narratives as forms of resistance, opposing exploitation and any new development of economic, environmental and cultural colonialisms. These are all wonderful examples of that process that the Indian art critic, Nancy Adajania, calls “devolution.” Adajania explains that devolution involves the artist-citizen fully in the act of giving, triggering pedagogical relationships based on reciprocity, polyphonic collaborations that produce new descriptive vocabularies, new values, and new idioms of self-representation.

The exhibition has been staged with the support of Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione CRT, Regione Piemonte, and City of Turin.