TUSCANY IS (ALWAYS) CONTEMPORARY

IRENE SANESI

Tuscany brims with history, a history that is teetering on the brink of becoming overwhelming. I like to remember Vasari, who called art “in today’s manner” by which he intended the contemporary, our here and now. The challenge before us today is not to imitate the past, but to understand our own time. Tuscany has a penchant for provincialism, for competition as opposed to cooperation. But I believe in networks, in sharing and exchange as a means of building the future. In Tuscany there are numerous public institutions for contemporary art, like the Marino Marini in Florence, Palazzo Fabbroni in Pistoia and Casa Masaccio in the Valdarno, as well as the entire roster of private art galleries, and even wineries designed by the world’s top archistars. This is contemporary arts, in the plural, a stellar line-up in a myriad of disciplines.

Tuscany vaunts a contemporary “geography”, and Pecci stands firmly at its heart, a pivotal point for collaboration among public and private institutions. What Pecci offers is a diversity of media and a multiplicity of cultural options, striving to legitimize contemporary art and ways in which to entice and engage the public in the wide horizons of the history of the future.

Irene Sanesi is President of the Fondazione per le Arti Contemporanee in Toscana, which manages the Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci. She is also President of Opera di Santa Croce and an expert in the economics of culture.
A golden ring surrounds the old Pecci center for contemporary art, visible from the main road entering the city. A spaceship that has landed and made its home here, detached yet attached only where access is needed, connecting old and new. An antenna reaches to the sky, trying to sense the new forms of creativity pulsing from the territory.

Architect Maurice Nio calls his new building for Prato’s Pecci museum “Sensing the Waves”. This suggests its function as a receptor (and perhaps even transmitter) capable of capturing and disseminating current creative vibrations.

Its form can be strategically interpreted in many ways, according to the viewer’s imagination and fantasy: a disc, a ring, a long wave, a horseshoe, a spaceship, a sliver of the moon, a piercing as someone already described it. A scenic presence, an urban signal, an attention-grabbing element. An object that senses, stimulates reactions, elicits visions.

“As opposed to the rather rigid, mechanical character of the existing museum building, which was partly inspired by the industrial architecture of Prato, “the new project,” recounts Nio, “looks fluid and ecstatic. It embraces the existing building and touches it only there where needed for the circular plan.” In addition, Nio’s project aims at establishing an interaction with the city around it: the green area around the Pecci Center (formerly the site for an open-air art collection) was reorganized and made more practical and more visible both from the boulevards around the museum and from the “portholes” that pierce Nio’s ring-like extension. Contemporary art now escapes the envelope of the museum space and opens itself up to the city.

**PECCI IN NUMBERS**

Original building by Italo Gamberini 1988 / New design approved in 2006 / Costs (new building + reworking of old building) Euro 14.4m / Years of construction 6 / Amount of new exhibition space 7,815 sqm / Total area of Pecci Centre 12,125 sqm / Number of artworks in the permanent collection 1,000+ / Number of volumes in the library and archive 50,000 / Seats in movie theatre 140 / Seats in open air theatre 1,000 / Restaurant 1 / Bar/Café 1 / Grand opening October 16, 2016
PECCI THEN AND NOW

How this contemporary museum is beginning a new life

With the new, spaceship-shaped building extension by Maurice Nio complete, the Grand Opening of the new Luigi Pecci Centre for Contemporary Art will take place on October 16, 2016. Ten years in the making (since the design was presented in 2006), the renovation and construction cost 14.4 million euros.

Founded in 1988 and set up in an industrial-style building designed by the Florentine architect Italo Gamberini, “the Pecci” - as it is called by most - was the first institution in Italy to be built from scratch with the specific intent to exhibit, collect, preserve, document and distribute research on contemporary art.

The Centro Pecci started its own collection from scratch, with no former legacy. This allowed the earliest directors to shape the collection with the maximum freedom of choice and without any compromises. Consequently, a direct correspondence came to exist between the exhibitions and the purchases, based on the art of the 1980s onwards. The result is a unique collection in Italy with over 1,000 works by internationally recognised artists such as Anish Kapoor, Jan Fabre, Jannis Kounellis, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Andy Warhol and Sol LeWitt.

The Pecci Centre is about to become an international benchmark for the experimentation of multiple contemporary artistic languages. Its mission is to explore various disciplines of contemporary culture including film, music, performing arts, architecture, design, fashion and literature, whilst simultaneously seeking to make art as accessible as possible to society.

The new centre doubles the space of the old one and will also have an archive and specialized library which will include over 50,000 books, an outdoor theatre, a cinema/auditorium, a performance space in the galleries, a bookshop, a restaurant and a pub/bistro. Not just exhibitions but also experimentation and research will take place here, striving to create a dynamic relationship with spectators, and become a hyperactive place with extended opening hours for performances, concerts and screenings, as well as conferences, workshops and courses for adults.

Future programming will prioritize activities and projects which fulfill the institutional aims and the cultural mandate of the centre: multi-disciplinarity and bringing art and its themes closer to the public. This will always be characterised by themes and artists of broad interest, starting with a collaboration with Maurizio Cattelan, the world’s best-known Italian artist, who will be re-entering the exhibition arena after having announced his retirement at the large solo show at the Guggenheim in New York back in 2011. He will be followed by the solo show of Christian Marclay, winner of the Leone d’Oro (Golden Lion) at the 2011 Venice Biennale, and by Yayoi Kusama, the famous Japanese artist known for her atmospheric immersive, polka-dot environments.

Part of bringing contemporary art closer to the public lies in opening hours, so whenever possible the centre intends to extend programming into the evening with packed series of events, performances, concerts and the like, supported by the presence of a restaurant and bistro.

The October 2016 inauguration and the centre’s first exhibition will be supported by numerous fringe events involving the whole city of Prato and extending into Tuscany. An urban itinerary will extend the Pecci’s sculpture garden further towards Prato city centre, and even into partner museums like the ground floor of Palazzo Pretorio, while other works from the collection are already located in spaces around Tuscany. The region’s contemporary art galleries have been involved and the best of their proposals will be displayed. The same goes for art by young artists in Tuscany who replied to an earlier call for works that generated shows through 2015 at Officina Giovani; the best of these will create a show that summarizes the TU35 project – Geographies of emerging art in Tuscany. Finally, additional opportunities for discussion will be sparked through round tables that will debate themes such as artistic education and economic relations regarding sponsorship of art and the specifics of contemporary art production.
Step back and consider the following. The distances in the universe are enormous, so great that they are difficult for the human mind to comprehend. If we were to travel the distance between the Earth and the Moon in our car, respecting the motorway speed limit of 130 kilometres per hour, it would take 2,923 hours, that is 122 days, to reach our satellite.

To visit our closest planet, Venus, Earth’s twin, you’d have to go 40 million kilometres, so at the same motorway speed the travel time would be 307,692 hours, around 35 years. Still doable for a person, although it would require the commitment of a lifetime. The trip back would be more of a challenge. Mars, which is 55 million kilometres away, would require 48 years of navigation, and we’d need a massive dose of optimism to imagine we could get back within our lifetime. The trip to the Sun, which is 150 million kilometres away, is impossible for a single human being: 131 years. The time required to travel in space is long if compared with a single human life, but very short in relation to the history of the universe and even that of our Earth.

Four billion, 500 million years have gone by since this mass of fire started to coagulate and become a solid sphere. Since then, many things have happened on this planet we call Earth, and scholars today only know about a tiny fraction of them. It has been a history of developments and catastrophes, evolutions and tragic ends, collisions with planets and asteroids, eruptions and glaciations. A history largely unknown, starting with the creation of life, which appeared around 3.5 billion years ago, and there is still doubt over whether it occurred autonomously, was triggered by an external element or desired by a god who had already envisaged a higher purpose.

In relation to the immensity of cosmic movement, mankind is really just a speck of dust. When Homo sapiens appeared in Africa around 200,000 years ago it had left behind a long chain of precursors: primates, hominids, Pithecanthropus, Australopithecus, whose genetic story started around 6 million years earlier. During this period these beings had learned to walk on two legs and to create tools out of stone, discovered love, learned compassion and mastered fire. Homo sapiens slowly spread to all the continents at a speed of just over one kilometre per year. The conquest of the Americas is even more recent: only 12,000 years ago, during the last Würm glaciation, when humans travelled across the Bering Straits on foot and expanded into the continent, which was discovered by Columbus around 11,500 years later. Agriculture emerged only 10,000 years ago, and just over 5,000 years ago humans abandoned stone and started to use bronze and metals.

In the meantime, 150,000 years ago, humans started to use language, which was to be their great privilege: the capacity of symbolic abstraction. The remains of the first artistic signs in the Lascaux and Chauvet caves are only 30,000 years old. The history of the practice we are concerned with, namely art, is incredibly short!

If we compare the history of the Earth to a 24-hour day, life appeared towards 4:30 in the morning. Then, for the whole day, not much happened: only single cells made identical reproductions of themselves, until around 8:30pm, when the first marine plant life appeared. Trilobites, three-lobed creatures that have only survived as fossils, only appeared after 9pm, immediately followed by the great Cambrian explosion. Dinosaurs showed up at around 11pm and disappeared at 21 minutes to midnight. The human story, from the first hominid who came down from the trees, started just before one minute to midnight. Our history, our entire history, from Sumerian writing to the present day, can be contained in three or four seconds. So it is curious to see this microscopic being, this ever-busy ant that we are, look up at the sky and attempt to drive itself into space, build satellites and missiles, travel to the Moon, Mars, Pluto and comets, and send messages to the boundaries of the universe in an attempt to understand the secrets hidden in its depths. From a certain...
point of view, we are nothing more than the terminal expression of the innate expanding energy that is inherent in life. From this perspective we can observe the human story with a certain detachment. What we perceive today as a sense of the end is an infinitesimal moment in the enormous curve of time and space. It is not an upsetting catastrophe, nor a cosmic drama, but a simple change, a small wrinkle in the boundless dimension of the universe. An inevitable consequence of the laws of physics and chemistry. It is not the end of the world; it is only the end of “our” world.

A version of this text has been previously published in the Centro Pecci Journal.

Fabio Cavallucci is the director of Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato and curator of the inaugural exhibit “The End of the World”.

THE END OF THE WORLD

OCTOBER 17, 2016
TO MARCH 19, 2017

On the occasion of its reopening, the Luigi Pecci Centre for Contemporary Art presents the exhibition “The End of the World”, including the works of over 50 international artists. The exhibit reflects not on an impending catastrophe but is rather an exercise of distance which pushes us to take a look at our present from far away, to think about the immeasurable cosmic distances and the interminable ages of the Earth and the Universe. The exhibition will include works by already internationally established artists, such as Native American Jimmie Durham, Cuban Carlos Garaicoa and Chinese Qiu Zhijie and Cai Guo-Qiang, as well as pieces by younger artists such as Brazilian Henrique Oliveira or Swiss Julian Charriere, who has a work created with German Julius Von Bismarck. There will also be pieces which by now are a part of art history, like those of Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso or Umberto Boccioni in dialogue with numerous younger artists who are still relatively unknown, many of whom come from regions of strong contrast and conflict such as Eastern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and South America. The audience will pass through various environments experiencing different sensations: the detachment from this world of ours, so small and insignificant, the nostalgia for something which we once loved and have lost, until we come to recognise a glimmer of the future which is already present today, even if we haven’t realised it yet.

CENTRO PER L’ARTE CONTEMPORANEA LUIGI PECCI
viale della Repubblica 277, Prato
Open daily 11-23. Closed Monday
www.centropecci.it
PRATOMUSEI

Prato’s card to art

Pratomusei is a network set up in February 2013 which connects the four main museums of the town: Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Museo del Tessuto, Museo di Palazzo Pretorio and Musei Diocesani.

The aim of the network is to create cultural cooperation among museums within an institutional context. It also aims to develop territorial and organisational synergies with other city institutions, thus strengthening Prato’s role as an art town promoting tourism and culture in Italy.

In its first intervention, Pratomusei has concentrated its efforts on the sector of educational activities, creating a single, shared programme targeted at both schools and families.

The collaboration among the four museums covers numerous aspects: the conservation and care of the collections and the relative promotional activities; the planning and integrated management of cultural events and communication and marketing services; last but not least, professional training.

The synergy among the four museums has led to the creation of the Pratomusei card, the new 3-day-card which allows holders to visit all four museums and enjoy various benefits.

### PRATOMUSEI CARD

**PRATOMUSEI CARD** è la nuova tessera nata dalla sinergia tra i quattro principali musei della città di Prato: Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Museo del Tessuto, Museo di Palazzo Pretorio, Musei Diocesani Prato

### MUSEO DEL TESSUTO

Prato’s Textile Museum breathes new life into the Campolmi factory, an important exemplar of industrial architecture, symbolized by the ciminiera (smokestack) in its courtyard, the tallest in Prato. Just inside, a 19th-century team-powered boiler is given pride of place in the first room, recalling the function of this factory as a cimatoria, where a specific part of wool processing was carried out (the shearing). A display on the first floor shows the permanent collection in thematic rotation. The second floor is dedicated to the Prato’s unsurpassed textile history, while a large space is used for temporary exhibits on themes (like vintage clothing) or designers (like Ferré). There is an educational area about how textiles are made, as well as a workshop area that is frequently used for schools.

Open Tuesday to Thursday 10am-3pm, Friday and Saturday 10am-7pm, Sunday 3-7pm. Closed Monday

[www.museodeltessuto.com](http://www.museodeltessuto.com)
MUSEO DI PALAZZO PRETORIO

This important medieval building in the centre of Prato came back to life in 2014 after a long restoration. The permanent collection on three floors vaunts a modern layout and explanatory texts. It tells the history of Prato through the paintings and sculptures that defined its most important spaces throughout history, from the 14th century, through the Renaissance in Prato, to the 1900s. On the top floor, an airy gallery with a view over the whole city focuses on the sculptures and drawings of the Lithuanian artist Jacques Lipchitz, donated to the city by the artist’s foundation in 2013. Check out the temporary exhibitions on the ground floor.

Open daily 10:30am-6:30pm. Closed Tuesday.
www.palazzopretorio.prato.it

MUSEI DIOCESANI PRATO

The Diocesan Museums in Prato include the Opera del Duomo museum and access to the frescoes by Filippo Lippi inside the Cathedral. The museum is laid out in the spaces adjacent to the Cathedral, including an impressive 14th-century courtyard. The museum preserves relics, sculptures, illustrated choral books and sculptures that are part of the church’s heritage. Perhaps most importantly though, it is home to the original bas-relief sculptures from the external pulpit by Donatello.

Open daily 10am-1pm, 3-5pm. Sundays 2-5pm. Closed Tuesday.
www.diocesiprato.it/museo-dellopera-del-duomo
SEPTEMBER 16
6pm - La fine del mondo – Prologue
Works from the Pecci collection around Tuscany: Anish Kapoor at the Museo di Scienze Planetarie, Prato

SEPTEMBER 23 – OCTOBER 2
Contemporanea Festival 16 organized by Teatro Metastasio: 27 shows, 3 laboratories, 4 special events, 11 troupes and international artists (with a focus on France and Switzerland), 15 Italian artists. Shows and performances in various locations around Prato including Metastasio, Fabbricone, Fabbrichino, Magnolfi, spazioK, Scuola di Musica Verdi, Istituto culturale Lazzerini & 4 squares in town.

SEPTEMBER 24
11am - La fine del mondo – Prologue
Works from the Pecci collection around Tuscany: Remo Salvadori at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence

SEPTEMBER 29
5:30pm - La fine del mondo – Prologue
Works from the Pecci collection around Tuscany: Michelangelo Pistoletto at Museo di Storia Naturale / Zoologia La Specola, Florence

OCTOBER 7
5pm - Teatro Fabbricone
Exhibit presenting the 10 finalists of the international contest for the new Parco Centrale di Prato (visible until October 23)
6pm - La fine del mondo – Prologue

OCTOBER 8
11am - La fine del mondo – Prologue
Works from the Pecci collection around Tuscany: Daniel Spoerri at Museo e Istituto Fiorentino di Preistoria “P. Graziosi”
6pm - Opening: Icastic for Pecci at Camera di Commercio di Prato - organized by ARRezzo ARSnova

OCTOBER 12
Opening of the exhibit TU 35 – 2016 at Officina Giovanni, piazza dei Macelli, Prato
+ Opening of La Torre di Babele at ex Fabbrica Lucchesi, piazza dei Macelli, Prato

GRAND OPENING
OCTOBER 14
5pm - Centro Pecci
Public meeting with former directors of the Centre

OCTOBER 15
Centro Pecci
10am - Press preview (TV)
12 noon - Press conference
1pm - Press preview
3-5pm - Forum dell’arte contemporanea italiana: sessions open to the public
6pm - Members-only preview
9pm - DJ set

OCTOBER 16
Centro Pecci – Grand Opening
11am - Official opening of the Centro Pecci
3pm - Presentation of the book and exhibit by Maurice Nio: SupraSensitivity in Architecture
6pm - Conference on The End of the World by Marc Augé
Until midnight - Centre and exhibit open to the public

OCTOBER 17
Centro Pecci
Open all day to the public

OCTOBER 18
3pm - La fine del mondo – Prologue
Works from the Pecci collection around Tuscany: Giulio Paolini at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa on occasion of the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, with the support of the Associazione Amici della Scuola Normale Superiore

OCTOBER 21
Conference/workshop - Reversibility – The new project for the Parco fluviale Urbano del Bisenzio

NOVEMBER 3
Centro Pecci
6pm - Conference on
The end of the world by Zygmunt Bauman

#theendoftheworld
@centropecci
#finedelmondo
#theendoftheworld