

The Moscow International Biennale for Young Art

At its sixth edition, Moscow International Biennale for Young Art (MIBYA) features more than 100 international artists in 5 different venues: Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA), the Rassvet District, the AZ Museum, the National Centre for Contemporary Art (NCCA) and the department store TSUM. Sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, MMOMA, NCCA and a number of private companies, MIBYA was first held in 2008 as a continuation of the hugely successful: “Qui vive.” This festival of young art ran annually at NCCA from 2002 to 2006. Taking over from “Qui vive”, MIBYA’s goal has been to promote, support and give visibility to artists and curators under the age of 35. Lucrezia Visconti Calabrò has curated this year’s main section at Rassvet, an old factory that used to produce engines for military planes. Her main theme is the magic formula: ABRACADABRA.

A framework envisaged to allow a certain amount of freedom to the artists was put forward more as an approach rather than a theme. It might have worked if only it had not been associated with and hindered by a theoretical structure: the economy of presence. The relationship between the two being the performative culture of our times. “In a society that requires our constant presence”, explains the curator at the press view, “We end up performing 24 hours a day, 7 days a week unable to discern whether we perform for ourselves or for some power above”. How do we break the circle? How do we claim back our own time? ABRACADABRA.

Known universally, regardless of its uncertain etymology, ‘Abracadabra’ is a performative word, “It is language that has a direct effect on our surroundings,” it relates to the transformative power of art.

Svetlana Vorontsova, a freshly graduated artist, who created *All work and no play*, for MIBYA, “Re-appropriates the magical procedure used in ancient times to activate the word ‘Abracadabra’ that had to be written several times in columns, in which the last letter of each line would gradually disappear”. A tapestry of pink neon words that navigate between the original sentence that titles the work and its final transformation: *Magic words let’s rave*, this pink neon piece uses the strategies of repetition and persuasion of magic to invite the audience to abandon a lifestyle based on work and embrace the rave culture.

Voyager Return Trip by Tomoyuki Ueno was created in 2016. Consisting of two large intersecting movable walls made of steel and mesh, plus a table, empty metal tubes, a golden record and two plaques, *Voyager Return Trip* refers to the NASA Voyager Programme. Between 1972 and 1973, NASA sent the probe Pioneer to space with a golden plaque featuring a man and a woman waving at the potential extra-terrestrial life. Ueno reproduced the plaque and created a paper replica of it.



Voyager Return Trip (detail), Tomoyuki Ueno

In 1977, NASA sent Voyager to space with a golden record containing information about our civilisation and a statement from Jimmy Carter - the then President of the United States. "This is a present from a small distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts, and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time, so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilisations. This record represents our hope and our determination, and our good will in a vast and awesome universe", reads Carter's statement. Ueno has duplicated both the letter and the record. "My idea is that we should have this letter back", says the artist, "Because we are still separated and as we know the United States is not working on Carter's direction". Abracadabra then, let us look at the world we were living in back in the late 1970s as the aliens would and get the letter back as a reminder of how we were...

Comet buried underground by Martino Genchi is made of three fluorescent hanging neon lights that meet giving shape to a triangle with no base. It points to a pool of water on the floor to indicate the underground presence of a comet. Combining light and water (some water is constantly dripping from the ceiling), this work generates feelings of fear and suspense: what if water and electricity get into contact? What if the comet underground is awoken? A sense of energy hovers in its vicinity; the artist is almost expected to wave his wand and let the underground comet break the ground to reunite with the neon lights.

"I was in the metro, in Milan, one night. There had been a storm, there was water in the tunnels underground, it was pouring heavily directly from the lamps...and I was struck by the intensity of that, by the roar of the water and the light as if they were one thing" - Martino Genchi



Comet buried underground, Martino Genchi

The darkest hour is just before dawn (thoughts on solo drinking) by Vasilis Papageorgiou is a 2018 work. The installation comprises of three hanging early 20th Century lamps, 3 solo bar tables and as many footrests arranged to reproduce the ambience of public spaces. *Lieux* where the intimate solitary condition of the 21st Century individual is intensified by the multitude of people, the distant noises and the hallucinatory effects of alcohol. But there is no dawn without darkness...you cannot avoid the ups and downs, light and darkness, positive and negative. You can make art though and play with them.

Bram de Jonghe's *The wind blows where it wants to*, conveys a sense of communication with the inner self. Inspired by Aleksandr Sokurov's *Eulogy of a dream* (a scene in the film where an actor enters a museum at night and looks at the artworks in the darkness) and Nicolas Philibert's *La Ville Louvre* (also a film on the life of a museum when there is no public) his installation is made of a cabling system and a candle attached to it through a wheel. The candle slides on the cable, lightening up the ceiling, creating shadows on the walls, dropping some of its wax, responding to the movements of the people and the air below almost like a silent witness of all the life around. Its life is limited though: every two hours it needs to be changed. Can magic work against time?



The wind blows where it wants to, Bram de Jonghe

There is a feeling at Rassvet that anything is possible while wandering in the dark old factory among the works, with music playing in the distance, the flow of visitors coming in and out and the noise of the mechanisms of the various installations. After all, one could say, there is an element of magic in all art. Here, the artworks have, in a sense, reclaimed their natural connection with the audacity of the spell, above language, and against rigid structuring systems.

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