

# Venice for Visitors

## Looking back on the 1997 Biennale

by Durant Imboden

The Biennale di Venezia is one of the world's best-known exhibitions of modern art, with pavilions that showcase selected artists from dozens of nations. During the 47th Biennale, which ran from June 15 through November 9, 1997, Venice was awash in related events such as art shows, films, dance performances, and poetry readings.

I visited the 1997 Biennale in its final weeks. The permanent pavilions in the Giardini di Castello (a park near the tip of central Venice) were comfortably free of crowds, and I was able to take snapshots of artwork that caught my fancy. Three sculptures are shown here.

### **Egypt**

Al-Ghul Ali Ahmed had an impressive collection of massive sculptures. Some of the works, which were built from large stone blocks, made me think of Egyptian pyramids and temples.

### **Greece**

Dimitri Alithinos dug a pit beneath the Greek Pavilion, filled it with several giant vats of metallic goop, and titled it "Seventy-Second Concealment." At the end of the Biennale, the work was "concealed in public," where it "will remain in situ under the Greek Pavilion forever."

### **Montenegro**

Vojo Stanic's surrealist paintings were a delight (and probably my favorite works at the Biennale).

### **Romania**

Ion Bitzan's *The Library* (below) was one of several intriguing sculptures by this artist from Bucharest, who died on Sept. 16, 1997, during the Biennale. Another Bitzan sculpture, *Sanzienele* (St. Diane), added a touch of topless whimsy to the Romanian Pavilion.



### **Republic of Korea**

Ik-Joong Kang lined a room with small wooden tiles, each labeled with pictures or phrases such as "Time to make donuts," "I shit often, or "Today I repent." Loudspeakers were hidden at various locations behind the tiles, and excerpts from a recorded Italian language course were uttered at random from different points in the room.

### **Spain**

Joan Brassa had a collection of what might be called objects in juxtaposition: a glass with a nail through it, a handcuff attached to a rhinestone bracelet, a shoe laced with a ball of string, and a soccer ball with a flamenco dancer's comb atop it and labeled "Pais" ("Country"). Less amusing works included an iron garotte at a dinner table (the garotte, now retired, was used for Spain's last execution in 1974) and a piece called "Interval" that consisted of three chairs facing a music stand with submachine guns for instruments.