

**Yamada Hanako & Alex Hai
La Gondoliera**



The exhibition presents an intriguing collaborative venture between an emerging artist and a celebrated but controversial female gondolier, who is also a photographer and film-maker. Both have a passion for Venice and see their roles there as part of a greater adventure and continuing artistic exploration. Expect an original vision of Venice in the guise of an adventuress. In this thought-provoking mixture of fact and fiction, the boundaries are blurred. Is it a true story or a movie in the making?

Introducing **Yamada Hanako**, currently Artist in Residence at Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice, and **Alex Hai**, the "Prima Gondoliera", who broke with ancient tradition by becoming Venice's first female gondolier. With a preface by renowned art critic **Marco Tagliaferro**, this exhibition charts the cinematic journey of "La Prima Gondoliera" through photography. On display are a series of photographs shot by the two artists and a catalogue which gathers an array of articles and artefacts depicting the story of this embattled heroine.

Opening Reception: from February 4th to March 29th, Tuesday – Saturday 2–8pm

Jarach Gallery

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Artist Yamada Hanako

This emerging artist is currently Artist in Residence at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice. Despite her youth, Yamada has already held exhibitions in Venice, Basel and Washington DC. In the last few years, her artistic journey has focused on two main subjects: the photographic representation of Venice and the images behind female sexuality. This exhibition touches on her two current concerns.

Born in Ponte dell'Olio in 1986, Yamada currently lives in Venice, where she studied Visual Arts from 2005 to 2011, graduating from IUAV and the Academy of Fine Arts. Since 2008, Yamada's artworks have been exhibited through international festivals and institutions, including: Santorini Biennale of Arts; the House of Electronic Arts, Basel; Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice; the Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean, Thessaloniki; MSGU Tophane-i Amire Culture Center, Istanbul; the Italian Embassy in Washington DC, USA; the GCAC Galleria Comunale in Monfalcone; the CRAF Center of Research and Photographic Archives, Lestans; the Fondazione March, Padua; and at Venice Film Meeting, Venice.

Gondoliera Alex Hai

Countless articles have been written about controversial gondolier Alex Hai, with the theme taken up in books, movies and documentaries. This exhibition charts the cinematic journey of "La Prima Gondoliera".

Born in Hamburg in 1967, Venice's first female gondolier only now realises the synchronicity of leaving one seafaring city for another. The move to 'La Serenissima' proved less serene than anticipated, a life-changing adventure she's still living.

As a child prodigy, Alex penned several plays at the tender age of ten. At 22, her short film, dealing with domestic sexual abuse, caused a stir in her native Germany. The movie won her admission to the Communication Arts course at the Hamburg University - despite Alex not having finished high school. In 1992, Alex moved to San Francisco and worked for prominent film directors such as Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Kaufmann and Monica Treut. In 1996 Alex arrived in Venice with a potential movie in mind, only to be seduced by the captivating world of the gondolier. In nailing her colours to the mast, Alex daringly embarked on a career that has been a male preserve for centuries. In seeking to gain admittance to this close-knit 'boys' club,' Alex inadvertently challenged the Venetian status quo - and stirred the murky waters in the world's loveliest lagoon city.

Against the odds, Alex has succeeded in her dream of plying the Venetian waterways on her own terms. As an embattled female gondolier, Alex was forced to take a circuitous route, reflecting the shifting contours of Venice herself. How can a lagoon city offer straight paths through such sinuous channels? Ostraced by the gondoliers' union, Alex stumbled in her attempts to obtain the official gondolier's licence, representing the keys to the waterways. Undaunted, the 'Prima Gondoliera' set her precious gondola on a more challenging course.

Alex Hai dragged the profession of gondolier into the 21st century.

Documents and doubts

Articles, posters and book excerpts corroborate Alex Hai's vision of Venice and her adventures in the city. But prepare to be provoked. The array of materials and the piquancy of the anecdotes, often reported in a distorted or contradictory way, are designed to create doubt. If, at some point, fact become fiction, it serves only to suggest the legendary sense of the character. It's her story, in all senses of the word.

Photographs as fact or fiction

Photographs are in cinematic 16:9 aspect, full bleed. Shots and subjects evoke an emblematic representation of contemporary Venice, a cinematic portrayal of the city as seen through Yamada and Alex' eyes. Expect a conversation with counterpoints, inviting reflections on the authenticity of images and our desire to give labels.

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