



VIU

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**Venue:** Venice International University, Isola di San Servolo, 30100 Venice, Italy

On the occasion of the 54th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, **Ambassador Umberto Vattani**, President of Venice International University, will preside the official inauguration of Pietro Consagra's sculpture *Doppia Bifrontale (Double Bi-frontal)*, situated at the entrance to the Island of San Servolo. "This imposing sculpture will establish a most fitting dialogue with the Lagoon's characteristic chiaroscuro," notes Ambassador Vattani. "I have always greatly admired Consagra, who was one of the very first to donate his work to the special collection of contemporary artists that I was creating for the Palazzo Farnesina in Rome. The sculpture that will now greet people entering the Venice International University on the Island of San Servolo prompted a *Double Bi-frontal* of even more imposing proportions, which I persuaded the Italian government to donate to the European Parliament in Strasbourg. I am certain that the placement of the present work at the entrance to the international university campus of the VIU – which groups together leading universities from all five continents of the globe – will foster a greater awareness of this outstanding Italian artist among the many professors, students, and visitors who come here from every corner of the world."

The curator of the inauguration ceremony on the Island of San Servolo, **Professor Achille Bonito Oliva**, has underlined the "considerable debt to Ambassador Vattani for having conceived and created the aforementioned collection of contemporary artworks in the Palazzo Farnesina in Rome, and for his coordination of another collection specifically for the VIU campus, which will be appreciated by teachers and students from all over the world." Bonito Oliva went on to observe that "the sculptural works of Pietro Consagra actually compete with reality in some way, furthering a grand aspiration, namely, that of the self-sufficiency of art. An aspiration that naturally the past avant-garde movements grasped, and strove to realise a utopia to overthrow outside reality through another reality that relies upon the complete autonomy of the language created by the artist. These are therefore sculptures that inhabit a non-space ("nowhere"), otherwise termed *atopia* [Gk. without place]. Consagra knew full well that art must strive toward self-reliance, and organise itself around forms of its own devising. A secular and stoical artist, Consagra was an aesthetic artificer and keenly ethical creator, one who rigorously went about constructing his personal creative dream. In most cases, utopia presupposes the clash between the frontal contrast and the alternative, the difference from the reality. However, his *atopia*, or non-space, eludes the idealism of this confrontation, imposing itself as the only possible presence."

In collaboration with the Archivio Pietro Consagra (Milan) directed by Gabriella Di Milia, the Venice International University has chosen once more to enhance the context of higher education and further endorse such themes as globalisation, sustainable growth, and the appreciation of cultural heritage, by providing a place of honour for this outstanding work of art, and magnificent example of creativity and innovation.

Pietro Consagra created his *Doppia Bifrontale* sculpture in 2000 from painted iron, measuring 335 x 490 x 35 cm. According Gabriella Di Milia: "The name of the work alludes to the merger

of two individual bifrontal sculptures, laterally joined to create a new "sensitive" object that looks at us and involves us.

The sculpture seems to emerge from the ground as though inventing a way to converse. If observed from the upper section, it looks as if it issues from the arched, rhythmic strip of the profile, before spreading out with the jutting forms of the central part and finishing in the base, without which it could not stand, but which serves to place the piece in a "nowhere" site, in an ideal rapport between two opposing horizons.

The completely uniform white colour does not appear as a coating, but as a body of the plasticity of the piece itself and determines its structure: by not having any gradations, variations of light and shade are avoided so that the immediacy is not lost, and the observer's attention is not led astray by detail.

Consagra's own choice of frontal viewing, giving value to the placement of the sculpture, offers an alternative direct human communication, a different attitude toward what already exists".

**Mr. Raffaele Speranzon, Cultural Assessor for the Province of Venice**, has declared: "We wholeheartedly welcome this work of art on the Island of San Servolo. For some time, the provincial authorities have been working toward enhancing the character of these particular public spaces in the Lagoon. And our arrangement with the Archivio Consagra, which was brought about by Ambassador Umberto Vattani, confirms the quality of our endeavours in this direction."

**Description of the sculpture:**

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### **Pietro Consagra**

Unlike many other artists of the last century, during his long career Pietro Consagra (born in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily in 1920; died in Milan in 2005) touched upon all the different aspects of artistic creativity. While he produced the sculptures for which he is internationally acclaimed, he also painted and drew (each sculpture starts from a drawing), exploring new media and techniques, wrote poetry and essays with an untiring polemical slant, designed buildings and large-scale urban installation, along with tiny pieces of jewellery. After attending the Fine Arts Academy in Palermo, in 1944 Consagra moved to Rome.

Two years later he travelled to Paris, and in 1947 he was among the founders of *Forma*, the first group of postwar abstract artists in Italy. In 1949, together with Arp, Brancusi, Giacometti, Pevsner, and others, Consagra took part in the "Mostra di Scultura Contemporanea" installed in the garden of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice (Peggy Guggenheim Foundation).

From 1948 onward he began to express in his sculptural works a "frontal vision" and unique viewing angle; this intention was endorsed by the *Colloqui (Colloquy)* series initiated in 1952, which secured his recognition at international level. His presence at the Venice Biennales includes those of 1950, 1952, 1954, 1956 (personal room), 1964, 1972 (personal room), 1982 (personal room), 1993; and at the Biennials of São Paulo of 1955, 1957, 1959; and the Documenta exhibitions in Kassel of 1959 and 1964.

In 1960 he was awarded the Sculpture Prize at the Venice Biennale.

In August 1967 he travelled to the United States where he spent one year. In 1968 he proposed his concept of bi-frontality, having a minimum thickness of two tenths of a millimetre in the *Extremely-thin* series in steel, to a maximum of six metres for the buildings of the *Frontal City* (again in steel). On the basis of this maximum consistency for the double frontality, came a series of large-scale sculptures that dominate chosen urban settings, such as the *Stones of Versilia* (1973), *Back-to-back* (1976), *Walls* (1977), *Interferences* (1985), *Sibillines* (1990), *Gates* (1990), *Façades* (1996), and *Double Bifrontals* (2000).

Among his most important exhibitions are those held at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1958; Galerie de France (Paris) in 1959; Galleria La Tartaruga (Rome) in 1958 and 1959; Galleria Blu (Milan) in 1961; Staempfly Gallery (New York) in 1962; Pace Gallery (Boston) in

1963; Marlborough-Gerson Gallery (New York) in 1967; Galleria dell'Ariete (Milan) in 1965, 1967, 1969, and 1971; Boymans Museum (Rotterdam) in 1967; Galleria Marlborough (Rome) in 1966, 1969, 1972, 1974, and 1976; Palazzo dei Normanni (Palermo) 1973; Museo di Castelvecchio (Verona) in 1977; Lorenzelli Arte (Milan) in 1986; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (Rome) in 1989; Hermitage Museum (Saint Petersburg) in 1991; Palazzo di Brera (Milan) in 1996; Institut Mathildenhöhe (Darmstadt) in 1997; Galleria Fumagalli (Bergamo, Italy) in 1997 and 2002; Parco del Palazzo d'Orleans (Palermo) in 1998; Museion (Bolzano/Bozen) in 2000; Arts Palace (Cairo) 2001 as guest of honour; Galleria Fonte d'Abisso (Milan) in 1995, 2001, and 2004; Museo di Castelvecchio and Galleria dello Scudo (Verona) in 2007.

Awards he received for his work include Metalwork Prize, 1955 Biennial of São Paulo; Premio acquisto Einaudi, 38th Venice Biennale 1956; Honourable Mention International Exhibition, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1958; Prix de la Critique, Brussels, 1959; First Prize Morgan's Paint, Rimini, 1959; Special Mondello Prize, Palermo, 1980 (for his autobiography *Vita mia (My Life)* published by Feltrinelli, Milan, 1980); Antonio Feltrinelli Prize for Sculpture, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, 1984; 2001 Gold Medal from the President of the Italian Republic for his contribution to culture and art.

Consagra's works are in the permanent collections of many galleries and museums in Europe and the United States, including: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; Art Institute, Chicago; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Salomon Guggenheim Museum, New York; National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Tate Gallery, London; Ludwig Museum, Cologne; Galerie Der Stadt, Stuttgart; Sprengel Museum, Hannover; Musée d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg; Musée de la Sculpture en plein air, Antwerp; Peggy Guggenheim Foundation, Venice.

Many of Consagra's urban sculptures are situated in outdoor settings. The revolving iron *Colloquy with the wind* (1962), stands outside the Houston Museum designed by Mies van der Rohe; the bronze *Solid and Transparent* (1967) on General Mills, in Minnesota; the *Wall* (1977) in Giallo Mori e Verde Alpi marble in the Museo di Castelvecchio in Verona; the building *Meeting* (1983) and large gateway in steel measuring 28 metres, *La Stella* (1982) in Gibellina (Sicily); the back-to-back work in concrete *La materia poteva non esserci (The Material Might Not Have Been)*, 1986), measuring 18 metres, in Fiumara di Tusa (Messina, Sicily). In Milan, during the one-man exhibition of 1996 Consagra installed a *Porta* in iron in front of the Palazzo di Brera. For Roma, in Largo Santa Susanna, he built the Botticino marble sculpture *Giano nel cuore di Roma (Janus in the Heart of Rome)*, 1997) 5.5 metres high. In Via dei Mercanti (near the cathedral) in 2002 a definitive placement was given to the marble bifrontal sculptures *Nembro Rosato* (1977) and *Giallo Mori* (1977); and in July 2003 the *Double Bifrontal* measuring 4 by 6 metres was erected outside European Parliament building Strasbourg.

Consagra is the author of many published essays on art.

Venice International University was founded in 1995 as a joint venture between the two Venetian Universities (Ca' Foscari and Iuav), the Province of Venice, Ludwig Maximilians Universität from Munich (Germany), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), Duke University (Durham, USA) and the Fondazione di Venezia. Since its foundation VIU has grown to include in its network, along with the founding members, a total of eleven renowned international Universities and important Italian Institutions such as the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea and the Italian National Research Council.

**Venice International University members include:**

Boston College (USA), Duke University (USA), Ludwig Maximilians Universität (Germany), Tel Aviv University (Israel), Tilburg University (The Netherlands), Tongji University (People's Republic of China), Tsinghua University (People's Republic of China), Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (Italy), Università Iuav di Venezia (Italy), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), Waseda University (Japan), Consiglio Nazionale della Ricerche (Italy), Fondazione di Venezia (Italy), Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del territorio e del Mare (Italy) and the Provincia di Venezia (Italy).

The **mission of VIU** is to offer advanced training and research in an international context, by promoting the exchange of ideas and knowledge with a multicultural and interdisciplinary approach and in agreement with the different academic traditions of the Universities which are part of VIU. Each year VIU welcomes professors, researchers and students of different nationalities who live together, study and carry out research on its campus on key topics such as **globalization, innovation, environmental sustainability** and the promotion of **Cultural Heritage**.

VIU, as an international education center for advanced training and research, promotes new approaches to academic learning, by introducing extracurricular activities focusing on **creativity and innovation**. Creativity offers new opportunities for teaching methods and is a fundamental element in developing competitiveness for companies in the global economy. As well as teachers, researchers and students, VIU's experiments in this field have involved Italian and international artists, scientific and technological partners, and have lead to collateral events of the Venice Biennale.

The following are the collateral events promoted by VIU during recent editions of the Venice Biennale:

***Radar Connecting Europe***, 50th Biennale Art Exhibition, 2003

***L'Isola Interiore***, 51st Biennale Art Exhibition, 2005

Curated by Achille Bonito Oliva together with Michelangelo Pistoletto and Cittadellarte

***Mobile Journey***, 52nd Biennale Art Exhibition, 2007

Curated by Lorella Scacco, combining artistic creativity and technological research

***L'Isola Interiore: Isolamenti e Follia***, by **Vettor Pisani**, 52nd Biennale Art Exhibition, 2007

Curated by Achille Bonito Oliva

**A Gift to Marco Polo, Contemporary Art from China**, 53rd Biennale Art Exhibition, 2009  
Curated by Lu Peng and Achille Bonito Oliva.

***Mapping Contemporary Venice – from the City of Today to the Venice of the Future***,  
54<sup>th</sup> Biennale Art Exhibition, 2010

Venice International University, in cooperation with Moleskine, invited distinguished international architecture studios, an anthropologist, designers and students to present a visionary concept of the city, to outline the city of Venice seen in a new perspective, and reinterpreted in Moleskine notebooks, bringing together economic development and sustainable innovation.