

**ALAN SONFIST AND CARLO SCOCCIANTI
TWO ARTWORKS IN DIALOGUE**

PARCO DEI RENAI DI SIGNA
FLORENCE, ITALY



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PRESS OFFICE

Image MEDIA AGENCY
tel +39 055 4684 187

PRESS OFFICER

Susanne Lambert
susanne.lambert@image-web.org



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PRESS RELEASE

18 October 2017

Alan Sonfist e Carlo Scoccianti
TWO ARTWORKS IN DIALOGUE

Island of Paradise
by Alan Sonfist

Plinths for Living Statues
by Carlo Scoccianti

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The first meeting between Carlo Scoccianti and Alan Sonfist took place in 2010. Soon a mutual understanding was born, due to their will to give voice with artistic act to their common feeling for nature. Sonfist, one of the fathers of the environmental art movement, has reworked the theme of the fragility of nature during his long career through his artistic research - starting with his famous environmental sculpture "Time Landscape", created in New York in 1965. Scoccianti, a biologist and activist in the defence of environmental systems, he is an expert in the conservation of "wetlands" and in the reconstruction of natural environments that arise from a deep awareness of the evolution of living forms in order to tend, in the light of renewed sensibilities, towards the definition of real works of art. Hence this mutual understanding became true friendship, especially when Sonfist was invited to visit the territorial works created, year by year, by Scoccianti in the surrounding of Florence, with specific reference to the wetlands landscapes and their typical flora and fauna.

Today the two authors, although coming from very different experiences, have decided to confront each other through the realization of two artworks that are placed within the same area, in dialogue with each other. The two artworks express a common propensity to reflect on environmental issues. Their comparison is based



on the use of the same material, iron, and on the fact that the two works are both placed in the water, on which they will float. These structures, which are also located within these flooded areas, have a function of aid for aquatic birds. The identified area for “Island of Paradise” and “Plinths for Living Statues” has been chosen by Carlo Scoccianti a few kilometers to the west of Florence, in Signa, where the stream Bisenzio flows into the river Arno. While Sonfist’s artwork finds its place within a newly formed lake, located in the areas where the extraction activity is still in progress, that of Scoccianti is part of a wider intervention, on which the biologist himself had intervened, operating from 2000 to 2006 one of his first environmental works, one of the interventions that Scoccianti calls “Work-Sites”, entitled “Cingersi d’acqua” (Enclosing with Water). The intervention gave shape to the lake itself, which today begins to house its new “Work-Element” titled “Plinths for Living Statues”, in an artistic act that today transforms the whole place, a destination already for numerous visits inside the Parco dei Renai of Signa.

After the first flotation and final placement tests, the two artworks are becoming part of the environment in which they were placed. The final inauguration will take place in spring 2018, when their function will begin to take shape as time goes by.

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ISLAND OF PARADISE

by Alan Sonfist

Nature is the art of God
Dante

Art is the rhythm of the universe
Alan Sonfist

5 “The “Island of Paradise” is floating green landscape — it is the hybridization of green and industrial, natural and man-made, earthly and divine; embodying the nexus of nature, organisms, histories, art, culture, and industry. Constructed upon the repurposed vacant quarry of a past mining operation, the skeletal remains of this industrial process have been filled to create the lake which the Island calls its home, and forms the bedrock upon which the “Island of Paradise” strives to reimagine and reengage the demarcated and atrophying relationships imbued within these seemingly conflicting forces. The island itself, built exclusively from recyclable and repurposed material, is a relic of labor-intensive economic functionality imbued with the quivering energy of natural life — the Earth’s repossession of the man-made. Ancient and native flora and fauna prevalent from the region during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance will feed migratory and indigenous birds, bridging the Island of today to the history of its surrounding environment and the culture of the Renaissance. The “Island of Paradise” form a crucible linking past and present, an amalgamation of organisms, times, ironies, ideas and histories — it is the Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise conjoined in one; the meeting place of the divine, the universal, and the human.”

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PLINTHS FOR LIVING STATUES

by Carlo Scoccianti

Typical works of Scoccianti's action in the territory generally have large dimensions (many hectares). Inside, sometimes they can contain further specific works localized which the author himself defines "Work-Elements."

"Plinths for Living Statues" is a Work-Element. It is positioned within the Work-Site 'Enclosing with water' where wet forest habitats have been created to obtain islands of different dimensions in an old abandoned gravel pit flooded basin. The species for whom this new environmental work has been carried out are big aquatic birds, especially colonial Herons. These birds have always fascinated people because of their flight and their extremely slow movements and above all the hieratic look that they put on standing still.

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The whole Work-Site enables the life of the heronry. This intervention (Work-Element) becomes the fundamental support where birds can roost between two islands. The presence of these species in this site is the hinge object of the entire intervention: the artistic work, therefore, comes to an end with the herons figures that pervade the site and stop over.

So the Work-Element defines only the specific point and the suited support for these living being to offer themselves even easier to the observer: with these emblematic figures the artist wants to show the life itself, in its enchanted pause and then in its new sudden start.

With this act, emphasized by the title of the work, the artist limits himself creating the plinths for the statues, declaring therefore that these, since they are alive, can exist only in the reality. That is why they cannot be performed in any way in a pretence, but only invoked in their existential majesty. If on the one hand it seems the art has decided to renounce express itself to pay homage to peerless beauty of existence and of real wildlife, on the other hand it is clear that Scoccianti's artistic expression showed itself once again in the act of creating a new wild living landscape, that, in this case, is specific, and in the same time essential, for the existence of these important species.

(★) *Enclosing with water (Work-Site) by Carlo Scoccianti*

The ability to circumscribe one's residence with a depressed area and, where possible, to maintain a permanent volume of water within the latter, is a quite common characteristic of building of use in history of human communities. In the plains in particular, the creation of special places ("moats") with these characteristics has had, especially in certain regions, a great development of cultural and organizational type with reference to the protection of the territory. Still today, however, the image of the moat around the medieval castle is the symbol par excellence of the defense of a place.

Like humans, many wildlife species live or spend long periods of the year in large groups to ensure better protection against possible hazards and/or disturbances.

It is the case of many herons nesting in large multispecific colonies (in Italian, "garzaie"). Their habitat of choice is made up of humid forest environments, isolated from the presence of water all around. These environments were not quite common in recent times near larger watercourses and swampy areas.

As a result of the strong work of regulation and artificialization of watercourses that has affected the whole of our territory in the last decades, these environments have almost disappeared. Thus, today the lack of this type of habitat is considered the most important limiting factor for the presence of colonies of these species and therefore for the possibility that they may reproduce in a territory. Building new habitats of plananitial forest suitable for herons is therefore a priority from the point of view of conservation and, at the same time, from the point of view of the reappearance of these important landscapes.

With this work, an old excavation basin in a state of abandonment has been redesigned in order to present in the central part large isolated areas, completely surrounded by deep waters, on which to grow over the years the wet forest environment. Precisely the isolation factor has guaranteed the success of the intervention with the settlement a few years after a new colony where four species of herons reproduce.

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ALAN SONFIST

Beginning with his first major commissioned work, "Time Landscapes" in Greenwich Village, NYC, Alan Sonfist received critical acclaim for his innovative use of urban spaces to design havens of nature. His early work in the 1960s and 1970s helped pioneer the burgeoning movement of site-specific sculpture.

8 *After growing up in the South Bronx of NYC near the Hemlock Forest, which later became a major inspiration for his art, Sonfist attended Hunter College, where he received a Masters in Art. In addition to his studies at Hunter College, he also studied with Gestalt psychologist Hoyt Sherman at Ohio State University. His research there concerned the language of visual culture and its relationship with human psychology. Later, he went on to pursue a Research Fellowship in visual studies at MIT, Cambridge, MA. His first major publication was on his lecture series at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969. Sonfist edited "Art in the Land," an anthology on environmental art which was republished in Europe and Asia due to its reception by critics and artists alike. He has been included in multiple major international exhibition catalogs such as the Documenta, the Venice Biennale, and the Paris Biennale. Recently, Dr. Robert Rosenblum wrote an introduction to Sonfist's "Nature: The End of Art" which was distributed by Thames and Hudson,*

and published by Gil Ori.

Sonfist's works are included in many international public collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim, the Whitney, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Villa Celle, in Tuscany, Italy, the Today Art Museum in Beijing, and the Museum Ludwig in Koln, Germany.

A few of his commissions include, but are not limited to: "Lost Falcon of Westphalia," commissioned by Prince Richard of Germany, "Time Landscape of Indianapolis," commissioned by the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, and "Circles of Time," on the Gori Estate in Tuscany, Italy. Sonfist's current projects include "Ancient Olive Grove" in Florence and a xeroscape landscape for the city of Los Angeles. He has created a team of specialists to address all of the issues involved in creating a functional ecological landscape that will naturally adapt to their contemporary urban and suburban environments.

Today, he continues to promote his message of ecological sustainability and timeless respect for the fragility of nature in his work..



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CARLO SCOCCIANTI

In the research of Carlo Scoccianti, a biologist trained, singular skills emerge that reinterpret the theme of the use and modification of the territory in the light of a technical competence that rarely has the opportunity to compare itself, as it happens in his case, with the practices of art and design.

9 *Carlo Scoccianti wrote: “The systems that the project is designed are complex from both an ecological and aesthetic point of view. They are real spaces ecologically accomplished, they are living, dynamic and interactive scenarios. This is precisely their characteristic ecosystem makes them places deeply linked to the wider territory in which they are inscribed. At the same time, this characteristic, typically interrelational, determines infinite meanings depending on the subject taken into consideration. In my places, man is the first user, but like all other living beings. Each of them can freely arrive there, stay more or less for a long time and even live there”.*

In Carlo Scoccianti’s research, the constant confrontation with artistic research is strongly supported by a

scientific awareness and a sustained commitment to the protection of the environment and the species that inhabit it. The breadth of his twenty years, the numerous areas in which he has intervened to rebuild natural environments and which find an exceptional point of accumulation in the Florentine Plain, are flanked with occasions teaching at university level, but also at the battle against poaching, the rescue of amphibians and numerous actions that have always been carried out together with numerous collaborators and volunteers.

All this, in Carlo Scoccianti, tends towards the expression of new sensibilities towards the environment and opens up to renewed hypotheses of landscape that the world of art and architecture are observing with increasing interest.

www.artlands.net

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DATA AND CREDITS

of the project

Titles of the two artworks

“Island of Paradise” by Alan Sonfist

“Plinths for Living Statues” by Carlo Scoccianti

Schedule

first meeting between Alan Sonfist and Carlo Scoccianti: 2010

decision to set up a dialogue between two artworks: 2013

start of construction at the Renai di Signa, Florence, Italy: 2015

Acknowledgements

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For making the site available to us and for supporting the construction of the artwork “Island of Paradise” by Alan Sonfist, we thank the Presidents of the Isola dei Renai: Andrea Marzi.

For the technical support in the construction of the artwork “Plinths for Living Statues” by Carlo Scoccianti, we thank: Francesco Biagi, Andrea Sorbi, Chiara Sortino.

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IMAGES FOR THE PRESS

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Alan Sonfist, L'isola del Paradiso_01_foto Peppe Maisto.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist, Island of Paradise (photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 2,9 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



Alan Sonfist, L'isola del Paradiso_02_foto
Peppe Maisto.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist,
Island of Paradise
(photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 2,5 MB (format
JPG)

**Please note: This
image is available for
both paper and online
publications.**



Alan Sonfist, L'isola del Paradiso_03_foto
Peppe Maisto.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist,
Island of Paradise
(photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 2,8 MB (format
JPG)

**Please note: This
image is available for
both paper and online
publications.**



Alan Sonfist, L'isola del Paradiso_04_foto
Peppe Maisto.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist,
Island of Paradise
(photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 2,6 MB (format
JPG)

**Please note: This
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both paper and online
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Carlo Scoccianti, Basamenti per statue viventi_04_foto Peppe Maisto.jpg

Caption: Carlo Scoccianti, Plinths for Living Statues (photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 2,7 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



Carlo Scoccianti, Basamenti per statue viventi_03_foto Peppe Maisto.jpg

Caption: Carlo Scoccianti, Plinths for Living Statues (photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 1,8 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



**Carlo Scocciati,
Basamenti per statue
viventi_01_foto Peppe
Maisto.jpg**

Caption: Carlo Scocciati, Plinths for Living Statues (photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 2 MB (format JPG)
Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



**Carlo Scocciati,
Basamenti per statue
viventi_02_foto Peppe
Maisto.jpg**

Caption: Carlo Scocciati, Plinths for Living Statues (photo: Peppe Maisto).

Size: 1,8 MB (format JPG)
Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



Alan Sonfist, L'isola del Paradiso_ IMG_0897_foto Lisa Bencivenni.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist introduces his artwork "Island of Paradise" to journalists and critics who attended the preview on September 13, 2017 (photo: Lisa Bencivenni).

Size: 1,7 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



Alan Sonfist, L'isola del Paradiso_ IMG_1066_foto Lisa Bencivenni.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist (to the left) overlooks the positioning of his artwork "Island of Paradise" onto the water (photo: Lisa Bencivenni).

Size: 2,4 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



Alan Sonfist e Carlo Scocciati_IMG_1097_foto Lisa Bencivenni.jpg

Caption: Alan Sonfist and Carlo Scocciati (photo: Lisa Bencivenni).

Size: 1,7 MB (format JPG)

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Carlo Scocciati_IMG_1222_foto Lisa Bencivenni.jpg

Caption: Carlo Scocciati introduces his artwork "Plinths for Living Statues" to journalists and critics who attended the preview on September 13, 2017 (photo: Lisa Bencivenni).

Size: 1,6 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.



Carlo Scocciati, Basamenti per statue viventi_IMG_1219_foto Lisa Bencivenni.jpg

Caption: Carlo Scocciati introduces his artwork "Plinths for Living Statues" to journalists and critics who attended the preview on September 13, 2017 (photo: Lisa Bencivenni).

Size: 1,8 MB (format JPG)

Please note: This image is available for both paper and online publications.

PRESS OFFICE

For additional information, to receive high resolution images and to set up an interview with the artists you may contact:

Susanne Lambert

Image MEDIA AGENCY
via Venti Settembre 84
50129 Firenze, Italy
susanne.lambert@image-web.org

tel +39 055 4684 187

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