



The Portable Nation: The Republic of the Maldives at the 55th Venice Biennale

Shore

Participating in the Biennale for the first time, this small chain of islands has a rich cultural past and unfortunately an uncertain future with rising sea levels threatening to send it below the ocean by 2080. With the theme title of Portable Nation for this year's Maldives national pavilion, we look at some of the artists representing Maldives at the 55th Venice Biennale and their take on this impending ecological adversity.



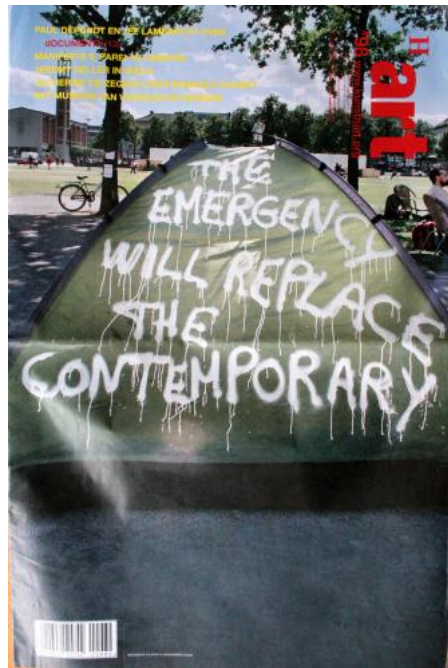
Organisers of the Maldives national pavilion initially explored the idea of a portable pavilion: a concept intended to be representative of the archipelago, with its need to be moved in the future that will force its residents to adapt to changing environments. Now to be held at the Gervasuti Foundation, the multiple exhibitions on display at the Venice Biennale

will explore questions of environmental impact, climate change and migration, while highlighting the current acts of local people to archive and collect as much of their heritage as possible as 350,000 people prepare to move. The artists taking part in this environmental campaign aim to engage the viewer, encouraging them to think about their existence on the planet and the environmental effects of modern life. The pavilion will include a number of international multi-media artists, as well as contributors and group collaborations. We highlight some of the standout artists involved.

Thierry Geoffroy (AKA Colonel)

This French-Danish conceptual artist is primarily known for using cogent and experimental methods to engage with the audience directly, encouraging a debate between artist and spectator. Geoffroy is known for establishing the concept of 'Format Art': a framework for the widespread dissemination of the art. The art may be repeated with permission from the artist, so long as the format is respected. His ongoing format, Biennialist, explores the thematics of current Biennales and cultural events, and questions their themes. Coinciding with the themes of the Maldives national pavilion, Geoffroy's works often look at movement, immigration and national identity. At this year's Biennale, he will continue to address global emergencies and ask 'is climate change an emergency?'

[Interview with the artist.](#)



Stefano Cagol

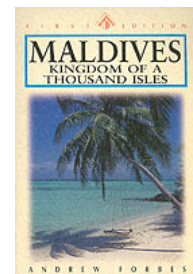
Italian video, photography and installation artist Stefano Cagol took part in the 54th Venice Biennale with his solo project CONCILIO. This video installation saw him dealing with the concepts of 'oppositions' and 'borders' as he showed footage of the Barents region, an area full of natural hostility and where three borders meet. These violent dialogues contrasted

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portrayals of wind blowing over the snowy horizon with images such as light from a torch gleaming through heavy rain. This year's Biennale will see his installation *The Ice Monolith*: a tall monolith of ice sourced from the Alps, which will gradually melt under the sun - a commentary on the effects of global warming.

Sama Alshaibi

Sama Alshaibi is an **Iraqi-Palestinian** multi-media artist who explores complex social discourses through the mediums of video installations, light boxes and prints. Her works are often confronting as they deal with death, war, exile, injustice and helplessness amongst other themes. She sees the importance of the impending death of man in relation to our misuse of nature's resources, which she describes as 'perpetually raped'. In viewing her works, we are made to become more aware of our own mortality and through this hopefully gain an understanding of the extremity of the climate change situation. At this year's Biennale, she will display a site-specific video installation that focuses on her three year project journeying through the water-barren deserts of the **Middle East** to the lush paradise of the Maldives.



Achilleas Kentonis and Maria Papacharalambous



The first Maldives national pavilion will see visual artists Achilleas Kentonis and Maria Papacharalambous joining forces in order to display the conjectural work *Mental Paradise*. This work will hone in on notions of our environment, the essence of life, the powers that make up our daily routines and the extent to which we are aware of them. They seek to open the viewer's eyes to the truth of their reality, emphasising the power of nature and its purity. For the pavilion they have created a 'Garden of Eden' in which the

visitor can imagine their own paradise. Previously, Maria Papacharalambous and Achilleas Kentonis have worked over a range of mediums including field painting, engraving, architecture, photography, installation, short films, and costume design among others. Their eclectic styles and meaningful concepts make them a valued addition to the Maldives team.

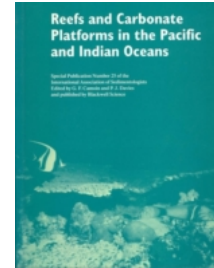
Heidrun Holzfeind and Christoph Draeger

Artists Christoph Draeger and Heidrun Holzfeind took a three-month trip to the five countries most affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in order to investigate one of the worst natural catastrophes in history. Travelling to **Thailand, Aceh/Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives and India**, they investigated the current state of architecture built or reconstructed in the aftermath of the tsunami using video and photography. Documenting the long-term effects of the disaster through the people affected, they asked questions about the abundance of aid money sent to these communities, how suitably the architecture was built for the needs of local people, how much of an input the communities had with the rebuilds and how they adapted the buildings over time. Based on their five-chapter film *Tsunami Architecture* (2012), the artists will display the Maldives chapter, developing it into a new installation which will focus on land issues and climate change.



[Interview with Christoph Draeger](#)

Klaus Schafler



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Based in Vienna, Schafner expresses his artworks primarily through installations, videos and performances. These works centre on the effects of transitions within communities, such as alienation, social detriment, questions of human rights and migration laws, as well as other political and ecological issues. His most recent work, [2050](#), saw him collaborating with other professionals not only within the artistic sphere, but also the scientific in order to



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convey a more unified society in the future. His involvement in the Venice Biennale will see him exploring these themes as well as ecological issues regarding climate change and our precarious future.

Maldives Team

Theme: Portable Nation

Artists: Paul Miller aka DJ Spooky, Thierry Geoffrey aka Colonel, Gregory Niemeyer, Stefano Cagol, Hanna Husberg, Laura McLean & Kalliopi Tsipni-Kolaza, Khaled Ramadan, Moomin Fouad, Mohamed Ali, Sama Alshaibi, Patrizio Travagli, Achilleas Kentonis & Maria Papacharalambous, Wooloo, Khaled Hafez, Ursula Biemann, Heidrun Holzfeind & Christoph Draeger, Klaus Schafner.

Commissioner: Ahmed Adeeb, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Republic of Maldives.

Curators: CPS - [Chamber of Public Secrets](#) (Alfredo Cramerotti, Aida Eltorie, Khaled Ramadan).

Deputy Curators: Maren Richter, Camilla Boemio.

Venue: to be confirmed.

About The Culture Trip's Venice Biennale Project

The 55th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale will take place from 1 June - 24 November. [The Culture Trip's Venice Biennale Series](#) is an article series leading up to the start of the exhibition. With 88 countries participating in this year's Biennale -- 10 of them for the first time -- and 150 artists from 37 countries, our coverage over the next couple of months will highlight a selection of the National Pavilions that will be participating in the 2013 edition of the Venice Biennale. Watch this space for our daily Venice Biennale updates or follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#)!

By Melissa Pearce

Images courtesy of: 1: [Maldives Pavilion](#), 2: [Thierry Geoffroy](#), 3: [Stefano Cagol](#), 4: [Sama Alshaibi and the Samawi Collection](#), 5: [Achilleas Kentonis and Maria Papacharalambous](#), 6: [Christoph Draeger and Heidrun Holzfeind](#), 7: [Klaus Schafner](#).



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