



DRIFTING ICEBERGS, LUGANO

HELIDON XHIXHA

IMPRINT

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Firetti Contemporary is pleased to present a solo exhibition of monumental artworks by international sculptor Helidon Xhixha in occasion of its first opening show. Two stainless steel sculptures entitled *Iceberg* and *Earth* will be at the center of the exhibition standing as an astounding manifesto in support of the awareness of Global Warming and the melting of polar glaciers.

An artist whose sculptural practice has gone from strength to strength – Helidon Xhixha’s *Iceberg* installations convey the intense sense of wonder that characterize his outlook and attitude towards art.

With an approach that is the result of an artistic upbringing, a formal education and the artist’s own instinctive, creative drive, Xhixha presents us with a grand spectacle: Art which challenges its audience. Not simply through its sheer scale and mass but through its engagement with ideas of fundamental importance.

The floating installation *ICEBERG* by Helidon Xhixha was first exhibited in the middle of the Venetian lagoon in occasion of the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. A four meter high stainless steel sculpture, captivated audiences, garnering much attention from industry professionals and the media alike; as it floated through the Canal Grande and the Venetian lagoon.

This outstanding reflective sculpture made a statement for global warming and the potential impact it could have on a place such as Venice in the near future.

Iceberg in the Gulf - a massive, irregular block of stainless steel, measuring 400 x 200 cm, whose form has been perfectly welded and waterproofed, is structured to float on water in such a way that it follows the movement of the currents and wind - allowing for a continuous variation of luminous projections that the mirrored steel produces.

We can imagine this floating metal block as an actual small iceberg that has detached itself from an icecap and, floating astray, arrived in the Persian Gulf. The view is shocking and aesthetically fascinating, but also clearly represents an alarming ecological warning. The UAE is classified among the categories of countries with highest rate of vulnerability to the potential impacts of climate change in the world resulting in warmer weather, less precipitations and higher sea levels. The UAE recognizes the global responsibility it is committed to and has integrated climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning.

The installation stands in support of the engagement of the country in its fight against this disastrous phenomenon for the well-being of future generations.

An objection could be made that the sculpture's medium, having come from an industrial process that contributes to Global Warming means an obvious contradiction occurs, between the symbolic purpose and material nature of the artwork. Such a contradiction is unavoidable - the art world is part of our reality and so reflects the contradictions of every-day life. This is a point that creates a truly problematic and culturally significant tension.

These aspects are common in numerous artworks. More specifically, the fact that a monumental, steel sculpture has been made to float and move, in contrary to its heavy weight and usual static nature, is almost ironic and contradictory in itself and invites us to reflect on the most experimental practices of sculptural expression.

Earth - Parallel to the environmental message, *Earth* provokes thoughts on the impact of climate change, a global problem that will affect every individual on each of the seven continents of the world. The installation *Earth* works in conjunction with *Iceberg*, acting as its terrestrial counterpoint, and memorializes the continued damage we inflict upon the planet.

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It is without a doubt that the vision required to realize such great artworks is the hallmark of a great artist and with the completion of these works, Helidon Xhixha joins the long, prestigious tradition of public, environmental art.

Xhixha has done his part, creating art that uses its beauty to incite positive dialogues on issues that need to be addressed. It is now up to you, the audience, to make sure the message reaches as far as possible and inspires as many as possible. Art needs its audience to invigorate change.

Using innovative techniques developed over the course of his career, Helidon creates sculptures that captivate with their beauty.

It is not enough for art to be driven exclusively by strong concepts; central to contemporary art is the communication of ideas. The fascinating aesthetics of *Iceberg* and *Earth* all serve to communicate its meaning – without them it would not engage its viewers, its ecological message would be lost.



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HELIDON XHIXHA

Biography

Helidon Xhixha (b. 1970) has, in recent decades, affirmed his position as a leading figure in today's contemporary art scene, with his work going on to receive much critical success on an international platform. Upon discussing Xhixha's iconic stainless steel sculptures, the prominent Italian art critic Luca Beatrice is quoted as calling the artist "one of the most interesting sculptors on the contemporary scene". Currently based in Milan and Dubai, Xhixha holds a prestigious role in the international art scene sharing his innovative vision and technique through monumental examples of public art and redefining the relationship between a sculpture and its environment.

Having inherited a passion for the arts from his father, Helidon Xhixha took the decision to study in Italy, where he was able to develop his technique whilst at Milan's prestigious Brera Art Academy. In 1998 the artist was awarded a scholarship to attend London's Kingston University where he was given the opportunity to work with new materials, including stainless steel, that would go on to become the signature medium through which he would lay down his artistic legacy over a 15 year period. Throughout his artistic trajectory, Xhixha's three-dimensional stainless steel sculptures have shed light upon the inherent relationship between the artwork and its surrounding environment. As famously stated by Xhixha, "I don't sculpt materials; rather I use materials to sculpt light."

Ever since his academic years, Helidon Xhixha has been commissioned to design works in various countries across Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the United States.

In 2015 Helidon Xhixha's symbolism and artistry was famously included during the 56th Venice Biennale; representing the Syrian pavilion. Helidon Xhixha's floating installation "ICEBERG", a four-meter high stainless steel sculpture, captivated audiences, garnering much attention from industry professionals and the media alike; as it floated through the Canal Grande and the Venetian lagoon. This outstanding reflective sculpture made a statement for global warming and the potential impact it could have on a place such as Venice in the near future.

Soon after, Helidon Xhixha exhibited a contemporary response to Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" titled "Everlasting" at Milan-Malpensa Airport. Twelve pillars made of polished stainless steel stood before twelve panels depicting The Last Supper painting. Each stainless steel column designed to represent one of the twelve apostles standing firmly in place around the largest, central figure, Jesus Christ, in perfect symmetry. Contrasting these slick objects, Xhixha has created a column made of dull, browned Corten steel to depict Judas, the traitor. A juxtaposition of materials highlights the themes of good versus evil, eminent notions within da Vinci's masterpiece. Featured in such a prominent exhibition space the installation was viewed by some 20 million passing spectators.

In 2016 Xhixha's success from the previous year led him to present a major solo exhibition entitled "Shining rock" in the historical town of Pietrasanta on the coast of Northern Tuscany. The artworks were designed and placed across the town to accentuate Pietrasanta's beauty and rich history. The reflective nature of the work drew over 50,000 visitors during a period of 4 months, who travelled to admire the visually striking sculptures made using marbles - coming from the Cervaiolo quarry, Monte Altissimo - bronze and stainless steel. By paying homage to the famous history and tradition of marble sculpting in the area, Helidon Xhixha not only made works that were relevant to their setting, but he presented a shift in his practice where he moved beyond the use of stainless steel and into the realms of exploring materials taken directly from the Earth.

During the same year Helidon Xhixha was given the 'Public medal Award' for Best Installation at the first ever London Design Biennale. The event at Somerset House exhibited Xhixha's installation titled "Bliss" in the central forecourt, the most prominent location in Somerset House. Within this exhibition, that included works coming from 37 different countries inspired by the theme of Utopia, the public had the opportunity to interact, socialize and self-reflect with his sculpture. This installation was sought to blur the line between art and design in order to create a stimulating and progressive experience of Plato's concept of 'Utopia' as an individual and a community in an ideal city.

The summer of 2017 Helidon Xhixha, invited in person by the Director of the Uffizi Galleries, Eike Schmidt, unveils a major new exhibition set within the stunning scenery of the Boboli Garden's in Florence. For this exhibition the artist has sought to explore the deeply complex themes of Chaos and Order, by taking inspiration from nature and sacred geometry. The exhibition can be understood as being split into two separate sections, where a clearly discernable difference between the worlds of chaos and order are apparent. In the Limonaia of the Boboli Garden's the artist has looked to nature in order to discover Chaos. By taking inspiration from the crystal caves of Naica, Mexico, Xhixha has designed a complex response to the seemingly random selenite formations.

For the artist's response to Order, monumental structures have been placed in prominent outdoor locations around the Boboli Gardens, inspired by sacred geometric principles, whose roots are again found in nature. Perhaps most striking of all are the large-scale sculptures placed in front of the Palazzo Pitti; Conoscenza and Infinito. Situated at either side of the palace entrance, these works display intricate levels of geometric regularity that instantly capture the viewer's attention.

In 2019, two major open-air exhibitions, Riflessi di Luce, curated by Eike Schmidt, presenting twenty monumental sculptures throughout the city of Lugano and Steel and Stone, held in the city of Forte dei Marmi, featuring a series of monumental sculptures by Helidon Xhixha made in stainless steel and marble.

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On invitation by the National Institute of Contemporary Art, Helidon Xhixha installs nine monumental sculptures in the historic city center of Casale Monferrato in a solo Open Air exhibition entitled “Casale Risplende”. The exhibition held from October 2020 to February 2021 is curated by Anselmo Villata.

In December 2020, “Luce, La rinascita di Venezia” curated by Klodian Dedja, witnesses six monumental installations placed at the Arsenale of Venice in occasion of an exhibition evoking rebirth and reawakening after the global pandemic.

Xhixha embraces the role of the monument not only as a solid, physical object but also as a reflection and abstraction of our external environment. His artistic trajectory has redefined the boundaries of contemporary sculpting and will continue to reshape our vision in the coming years.