



ROME
FILM FEST 2023
FREESTYLE

1964...THE COLD WAR WASN'T
ONLY AN ARMS RACE



A FILM BY
AMEI WALLACH

TAKING VENICE

GERI FILMS IN ASSOCIATION WITH DISPLAY NONE AND FOLKUM FILMS, THE ANNA-MARIA AND STEPHEN KELLEN FOUNDATION
AND THE DEANSE AND MICHAEL KELLEN FOUNDATION PRESENTS TAKING VENICE
VOICE BY ALAN SOLOMON | BY LOKE KIRBY COSTUME DESIGNER ADRIENNE STEIN EDITOR ROB TINWORTH ORIGINAL SCORE BY CHEE WEI TAY
MUSIC SUPERVISOR DOUG BERNHEIM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANDY DARSHS, SHANNON O'LEARY JOY STEVEN SCHAEFER
PRODUCED BY ANDREA MILLER, TAL MANDIL, VANESSA BERGONZOLI DIRECTED BY AMEI WALLACH
KINO LORBER Zeitgeist
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TAKING VENICE

A film by Amei Wallach

TAKING VENICE uncovers the true story behind rumors that the U.S. government and a team of high-placed insiders rigged the 1964 Venice Biennale – the Olympics of art – so their chosen artist, Robert Rauschenberg, could win the Grand Prize.

SYNOPSIS

At the height of the Cold War, the U.S. government is determined to fight Communism with culture. The Venice Biennale, the world's most influential art exhibition, becomes a proving ground in 1964. Alice Denney, Washington insider and friend of the Kennedys, recommends Alan Solomon, an ambitious curator making waves with trailblazing art, to organize the U.S. entry. Together with Leo Castelli, a powerful New York art dealer, they embark on a daring plan to make Robert Rauschenberg the winner of the Grand Prize. The artist is yet to be taken seriously with his combinations of junk off the street and images from pop culture, but he has the potential to dazzle. Deftly pulling off maneuvers that could have come from a Hollywood thriller, the American team leaves the international press crying foul and Rauschenberg questioning the politics of nationalism that sent him there.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up during the Cold War when the world seemed as dangerous as it does today. But it also seemed to be filled with possibility, with the actions of people who dreamed big and took big chances. This was especially true of artists, always looking to build something new. I became an art critic, then an author, and now a filmmaker. My goal is to make films about art that leap out of the art world and into a reckoning with what's relevant in our lives through the stories that they tell.

This film tells the story of the 1964 Venice Biennale, at a time when State Department officials and a team of unlikely conspirators were joined in their conviction that American democracy was worth the fight. They were determined to harness the audacity of American art to promote what was best about democracy. The artist they chose to represent the U.S. in their race to win the Biennale Grand Prize was Robert Rauschenberg, who was by no means a political artist, then. By the time I met him more than a decade later, he had come to believe that art had a more global responsibility.

The film builds on a tradition of telling the story of America *then* through the eyes of *now* because I want it to reflect how much the world and art have changed. I want there to be moments that sting with what we have lost, and moments that encapsulate what we have gained. The stakes are even higher than they were at that scandal-drenched Biennale, as artists everywhere try to create a way forward.

– *Amei Wallach*

THE VENICE BIENNALE

The Venice Biennale of Art is the oldest and one of the largest and most important of the world's international contemporary art exhibitions. It is a place where artistic reputations can be made and broken. Since the Biennale was inaugurated in 1895 by King Umberto I and Queen Margherita di Savoia, it has become known as the "Olympics of Art," where today 75 nations compete for top prizes for artists and exhibitions organized by the countries they represent.

More than 800,000 people visited the most recent of the every-two-year Biennale in 2022, the largest crowds in its history. The 2024 Biennale will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the historic year that Robert Rauschenberg became the first American to win the Biennale's Grand Prize, the International Prize in Painting.

The Biennale is centered on the Giardini della Biennale, a park that Napoleon Bonaparte created by draining marshland during his occupation of Venice. There, 29 nations – the most powerful at the beginning of the 20th century – have built individual pavilions to exhibit their art. Much of the controversy over Robert Rauschenberg's win centered on the fact that his work mostly resided in an exhibition outside the Giardini, a practice that is now common as nations from African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European nations make their own artistic contributions.

The Venice Biennale is renowned for anticipating new trends in art and, at the same time, presents works and artists of every period under renewed perspectives. Picasso's painting *Family of Saltimbanques* was famously removed from the Spanish Pavilion in 1910 in the fear that its novelty would shock the public. Renoir, Courbet, Matisse, Chagall, Klee, Magritte, Miro, and Giacometti were among the many heralded artists who showed there.

In the nearly 130 years since the inauguration of the Venice Biennale of Art, the Biennale has expanded to include the Venice Film Festival, the Biennale of Architecture, the Biennale of Music, the Biennale of Theater, and the Venice Dance Biennale.

ARTIST ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

The artist Jasper Johns once said that Robert Rauschenberg “invented the most since Picasso.” Rauschenberg has been called a forerunner to nearly every twentieth-century art movement after World War II. The year 2025 marks the 100th anniversary of his birth in Port Arthur, Texas, but his influence continues.

It was Rauschenberg’s conviction – shocking when he first emerged in the 1950s – that life was the prime material out which art could be made. And that meant the stuff of the life around him – car parts, neck ties, ironing boards, lightbulbs, mirrors, taxidermied animals, umbrellas, junk off the street, newspaper headlines, comic strips, magazine photographs, old master reproductions. He juxtaposed these objects from everyday life and popular culture with strategies out of the history of visual artmaking. The stuff and the strategies kept changing as the world around him changed but in his six decades as an artist, his insatiable appetite for experimentation never did. He made paintings that were sculptures, invented new methods of printmaking, gave new meaning to photography, collaborated with scientists, engineers, dancers and composers, and choreographed a dance on roller skates.

He had successive retrospectives in U.S. and European museums, the most recent of which, from 2016-2018, traveled from the Tate in London, to New York’s Museum of Modern Art and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

“I think the reason my work has been successful with the public is because it has changed their focus. I’ve changed the location of things that they see every day and didn’t know were worth looking at,” Rauschenberg said.

FILMMAKER BIOS

Director/Producer - AMEI WALLACH

Amei Wallach is an award-winning art critic, filmmaker, and television commentator. Her critically acclaimed films, *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, The Mistress and The Tangerine* and *Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: Enter Here*, remain in international demand. In her articles, books, media appearances – and more recently in her films – Wallach has chronicled, and known, artists from Willem de Kooning and Lee Krasner to Jasper Johns and Shirin Neshat. As an art writer, she watched Robert Rauschenberg make prints in New York and paintings in Captiva, Florida. She is uniquely able to tell this story. Wallach has written or contributed to more than a dozen books and was an on-air arts commentator for the PBS MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour. Her articles have appeared in such publications as The New York Times Magazine, The Nation, Smithsonian, Vanity Fair, Vogue, Art in America, and ARTnews.

Producer - ANDREA MILLER

Andrea Miller is a producer known for feature documentaries such as *Particle Fever* (2013), which screened at the Telluride and Sheffield film festivals and received the National Academy of Science Prize and a Columbia Dupont award; *Take My Nose . . . Please!* (2017); and *Joseph Pulitzer Voice of the People* (2018), which aired on the PBS series American Masters. Other documentary projects include *Thank You for Your Service*, *Letters from Baghdad*, *Four Winters*, *The New Public*, and *Colliding Dreams*. Andrea also produces fictional features. She was Executive Producer of the feature film *Savage Youth*, which premiered at Slamdance in 2018, and was the primary producer of *Dark Matter*, starring Meryl Streep, Aiden Quinn and Liu Yeh, which won the Sloan Prize at Sundance in 2007. She recently produced the film *Three Birthdays* with Josh Radnor, Annie Parisse and Nuala Cleary and directed by Jane Weinstock. Formerly, Andrea worked in television, producing such shows as *Pee Wee's Playhouse*, *Shining Time Station* and *Indecision '92* (hosted by Al Franken and Roger Ailes) after many years as a television executive and in the trenches on documentary and news features.

Producer - TAL MANDIL

Tal Mandil is an independent filmmaker/producer based in New York City who got her start in film while living in Chile. There she produced *Más Allá de las Olas/ Beyond the Waves*, a four-part documentary series about blue whales in Patagonia that aired on national Chilean television in 2022. While there, she co-wrote and produced a narrative short film, *Sumergido* (2019), starring Daniel Antivilo and Lux Pascal. She is currently working on an NEH-funded documentary, *Everything Seemed Possible*, about an era change in Puerto Rico in the 1950s and '60s, and on the feature documentary *Elie Wiesel: Soul On Fire*, directed by Oren Rudavsky and co-produced by PBS American Masters.

Producer - VANESSA BERGONZOLI

Vanessa Bergonzoli is an award-winning filmmaker who promotes cross-cultural awareness in her everyday practice. Her commitment to bringing stories of the underdog to the big screen guided her documentaries *Cinta Amarilla* (2019), about a controversial

monument to Colombia's Civil War, and *Our Own House* (2020), which addresses rising plastic pollution in Belize. Her producing work has garnered significant award recognition including the CLIO-winning commercial *Seflie* (2014) for Dove, the HBO, Academy Award nominated documentary *Mondays at Racine* (2013) and the Emmy Award-winning Sesame Street special *Growing Hope Against Hunger* (2012). Vanessa is currently producing *Bootstraps* directed by Deia Schlosberg, on Universal Basic Income.

Editor - ROB TINWORTH

Rob Tinworth is a filmmaker with broad experience in independent and broadcast documentaries. He is a five-time Emmy nominee, winning in 2014 for *NOVA: Manhunt Boston Bombers*. Other awards include two Best Documentary honors at the Asian Television Awards, and two Cine Golden Eagles. His last feature documentary, the award winning *Broadway Idiot*, followed punk band Green Day's foray into the world of musical theater and premiered at the SXSW Film Festival. He has edited documentaries for Discovery, National Geographic and PBS.

FEATURING

JANET BEGNEAUD - Sister, Robert Rauschenberg

ACHIM BORCHARDT-HUME - Curator Tate Modern London 2005-2021

MARK BRADFORD - Artist representing the U.S. at the Venice Biennale 2017

CHRISTO - Artist

ALICE DENNEY - U.S. Vice Commissioner 1964 Biennale

VALERIE HILLINGS - Museum Director, Global Projects Curator

HIROKO IKEGAMI - Global Art Historian, Kobe University, Japan

MICHAEL KRENN - Author *Fall-out Shelters for the Human Spirit*

SIMONE LEIGH - Artist representing the U.S. at the Venice Biennale 2022

CHRISTINE MACEL - Director Venice Biennale 2017

ED McBRIDE - Career Cultural Diplomat

LOUIS MENAND - Author *The Free World*

SHIRIN NESHAT - Artist

MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO - Artist

SARAH ROBERTS - Curator San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

PHILIP RYLANDS - Director Peggy Guggenheim Collection Venice 2000-2017

IRVING SANDLER - Art Critic

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN - Artist, Recipient 2017 Biennale Lifetime Achievement Award

ROBERT STORR - Director Venice Biennale 2007

CALVIN TOMKINS - Writer, *The New Yorker*

CREDITS

Directed by
AMEI WALLACH

Produced by
ANDREA MILLER
TAL MANDIL
VANESSA BERGONZOLI
AMEI WALLACH

Voice of Alan Solomon by
LUKE KIRBY

Casting by
ADRIENNE STERN

Edited by
ROB TINWORTH

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SHANNON O'LEARY JOY
STEVEN SCHAEFER

Original Score by
CHEE WEI TAY

Music Supervisor
DOUG BERNHEIM

Consulting Producers
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RUTH CHARNY

Co-Producer and Archival Producer
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