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PRESS RELEASE

OPERA AS THE WORLD
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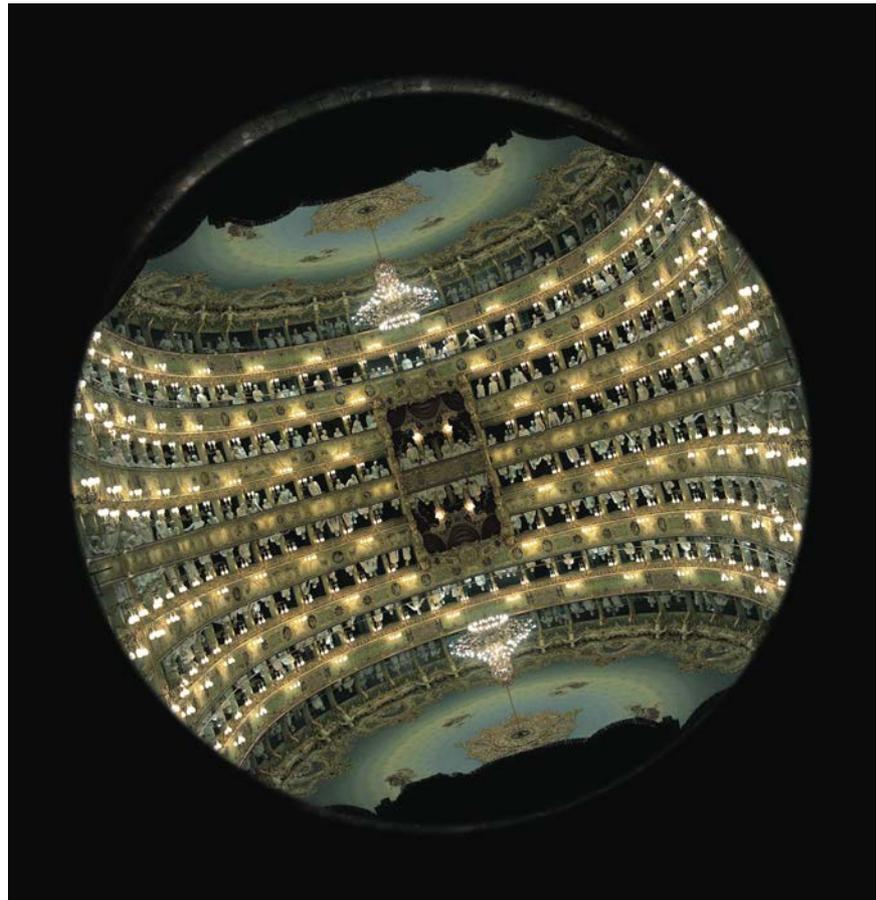
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Grazia Toneri, *Semper edam*,
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The exhibition Opera as the World is a testimony to the encounter between the visual arts and the operatic genre in the XX and XXI centuries. More than an exhibition devoted to opera sets produced by artists, it aims to explore, as an echo, or on the contrary, in tension with the heritage of the Wagnerian “Gesamtkunstwerk” (the concept of a total work of art), how the visual arts and the operatic genre fed off each other mutually and sometimes even radically influenced each other. In this to and fro movement, opera thus serves as a fertile field of experimentation and a catalyst for new sensitivities, aesthetics and politics.

Exposing opera today has more than one sense. The myth of the “final opera” no longer exists. If Pierre Boulez’s famous declaration in 1967 – “Opera houses should be blown up” – seemed to come down like some fatal and definitive verdict in the 1970’s, we can now observe that the genre, on the contrary, throughout the XX century and precisely these last decades, has continued to produce important and remarkable creations. The spectacularisation once criticised has largely touched other artistic domains. Opera as a place of high spectacle enables henceforth, to explore from another angle, this innervating theatricality more and more after years of more conceptual art, in the contemporary field.

Presenting models, costumes and elements of sets, as well as imposing installations and new creations, the presentation mixes images and sounds, showing how opera is both a factory of shared artistic desires as much as a symbol of liberty. Theatrical experiences of the first avant-gardes such as *La Main heureuse* (1910–1913) by Arnold Schönberg to the scores which are now lastingly inscribed in the programme of the great theatres such as *Saint-François d’Assise* (1983) by Olivier Messiaen, whilst not forgetting more experimental but so emblematic forms such as *Einstein on the Beach* (1974) by Philip Glass and Bob Wilson, Opera as the World will outline a different mapping of inter-disciplinarity. Opening out into different thematic sections, going from the theatre stage as a moving painting, to political projects and sometimes more radical utopian forms and new places for opera, by way of fairy tales or even the passion of myths, the project essentially focusses on a selection of creations which are particularly representative of these fruitful stage – artist relations. Certain great classics – such as *The Magic Flute*, or *Norma* will also be exposed, revealing how the repertoire when handled with audacity, has served both as a means of transgression and of transformation, whilst still guaranteeing a certain longevity for the genre. The exhibition will question the very capacity of an exhibition if not to reproduce, to at least mention the sensory power of opera and its bewitching character. An important work on the reactivation of certain creations from the past, as well as certain commissions given in the past to contemporary artists, will enable to show the passion which the genre still arouses today, and to plunge the visitor into the singular magic of the operatic spectacle.

Curator: Stéphane Ghislain Roussel

Research and coordination officer: Anne Horvath, Centre Pompidou–Metz

A rich programme of associated performing arts will be proposed in connection with the exhibition.

The exhibition Opera as the World is produced as an echo to celebration of the 350th anniversary of the Opéra national de Paris.

Throughout the 2018/2019 season and up until 31 December 2019, the Opéra national de Paris will celebrate its 350th anniversary: it was in 1669, the 28 June, that Louis XIV signed the letters patent authorising the Councilor Pierre Perrin to establish the Royal Academy of Opera, which would later assume the name of Royal Academy of Music.

This anniversary is a unique occasion in the life of the Opéra national de Paris to pay a tribute to its history. Parallel to its programme based on three and a half centuries of history it is incumbent on l'Opéra national de Paris to step out of its own buildings and it is legitimate that it is associating with the Musée d'Orsay, the Centre Pompidou Paris and Metz, the Bibliothèque nationale de France for large- scale exhibitions, but also to reply to the invitation from the Collège de France and numerous regional theatres.

These institutions and the Opéra have coordinated their projects with the aim of covering the majority of great epochs in the history of the Opéra de Paris and to provide a full historical panorama. Exhibitions, conferences, master classes and meetings will enable the comparison of the heritage of an institution with its future aspirations.

