

For me Venice is a place of magical coincidences that seem more vivid and 'significant' than those experienced elsewhere, perhaps they result from the sensual overload and enhanced alertness that comes with being somewhere extraordinary.

Three large paintings on canvas made in 2022-23, celebrate co-incidence Venetian-style and inform the works on paper shown on this page



***Thinking about the C18th, (Venice Co-incidences 1)***, 2022, oil on cotton, 76 x 101 inches / 193 x 256.5 cm <http://www.virginiabodman.com/walkingonwater/51.html>





**Double Exposure, (Venice Coincidences 3), 2022**, oil on cotton, 75 x 100 inches / 191 x 256 cm <http://www.virginiabodman.com/walkingonwater/54.html>



**The Bravo, (Venice Coincidences 2), 2022**, oil on watercolour pen on acrylic on cotton, 76 x 101 inches / 193 x 256 cm <http://www.virginiabodman.com/walkingonwater/53.html>

They also investigate how my vivid sense of C18th Venice can be communicated, an important time in its history and still visible today. John Julius Norwich's writing on C18<sup>th</sup> Venice, (1977) and Ian Kelly's brilliant biography, *Casanova: Actor Lover Priest Spy*, (2008) were both influential. More recently E. Temple Thurston's novel *The City of Beautiful Nonsense*, whose title I borrowed for this page, explores Venice as the site of dreams unrealisable elsewhere. Dreams, fantasies, and fun are all good reasons for going to Venice and for making paintings.

In a 2023 BBC Radio 3 programme about Vivaldi Venice was described as the "Las Vegas of the eighteenth century", (where it has in part been 'copied', see Davis, C. & Marvin, G. (2004) pp. 284- 292, for a lively discussion about this and other 'Venices'). The 18<sup>th</sup> century was one of Venice's longest periods of peace and prosperity whilst also being the period of its greatest decline in terms of international importance and influence although this was masked by an almost frantic beautification of the city lest its former enemies consider it a spent force. But as John Julius Norwich (1977) says: "Throughout the century hundreds – perhaps thousands – of the most cultivated men and women of Europe poured into the city every year: they cannot all have been

wrong.” Much of what is still admired today, its architecture, sculpture, painting, theatre and music come from this period. Whilst the revived Carnival seeks to re-invent this period it is more than possible when visiting the now usually silent C18th Palazzi, to imagine and invoke that time from the rich remains, as St Augustine said “The dead are invisible but not absent”.

In Xu Lei’s work, shown in the Biennale di Venezia, 2022, I found a similar fascination with the elasticity of time. His work based on “time as a metaphor”, (a core element in ancient Chinese arts such as gardens, painting and poetry), “attempts to reorganize art historical images” to present “moveable time” which becomes in his work ‘the return of time’, “the reincarnation of time” and “the interplay of time”.

The disconcerting, uncannily life-like presence of C18th puppets from the Casa Goldoni, drawn in 2022, (thought to be from the puppet theatre at Palazzo Grimani), populate the first 3 of the *Venice Co-incidence* paintings and the more recent 2024 works on paper on this page.





Watercolours and pencil drawing made at the Casa Goldoni in 2022