Venice, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore

Longhena Library

6 September 2024, 11 am - 6 pm

*Chameleon*, a project by Universal Everything for the Fondazione Giorgio Cini

***The 'walking figure,' which has made the English collective of artists and designers famous, now crosses the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore: a digital film work to celebrate the union between contemporary digital technologies and the historical and artistic heritage.***  ***On 6 September 2024, it premieres at the Longhena Library; on 8 September 2024, it will be in Linz at the international festival Ars Electronica.***

On 6 September 2024,*Chameleon*, the **digital video work** created by the international collective of artists Universal Everything for the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, will premiere in the ancient Longhena Library.

**From 11 am to 6 pm**, this extraordinary filmic work will be **screened on a loop**, featuring 'the walking figure', the digital creature that has made **Universal Everything** famous through many works created for cultural institutions and international brands. On **8 September 2024,** it will be in **Linz** at the international festival Ars Electronica. From 9 September, it will be available on the **Foundation's YouTube channel.**

***Chameleon* derives from the digital and creative knowledge of this artistic collective and the wealth of material produced by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.** This includes **the comprehensive scanning of the entire Island of San Giorgio**, undertaken as a unique operation of conservation and documentation of architectural and historical heritage, thanks to the collaboration with the Factum Foundation based in Madrid.

The project moves in the direction of **reusing digitalisations and making large databases available to contemporary artists** who, through their research, can contribute to enhancing the cultural, historical, documentary and architectural heritage of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Artists can offer **new narratives of the island, unexpected keys to understanding reality and unusual archives of the contemporary.**

Ennio Bianco, an art critic, curator, and expert in digital arts who has closely followed the project, speaks of a work that takes shape from the ‘engagement elicited by such a complex context as the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, capable of resonating within the individual and, by extension, within society. *Chameleon* allows for the visual and sensory continuation of a dialogue from multiple perspectives, not only regarding art but especially concerning the contemporary world’.

**The man walking on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore**

***Chameleon* is a creature that transforms by changing matter, color, and texture.** ***Chameleon* roams the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore in a visionary and ultra-high-definition walk**, guiding viewers for twelve minutes through the environments that once served as a monastery and now host the Institutes, Study Centers, and libraries of the Foundation; it enters the Hall of Tapestries, contemplates the Wedding at Cana and crosses the woods with the Vatican Chapels.

Unlike other works featuring 'the walking figure', *Chameleon* transforms, while in motion, with the colors, gardens, cloisters, and tapestries it encounters. As **Ennio Bianco** points out, ‘***Chameleon* does not vanish in transition nor disguise itself** **with the landscape, but reflects it,** maintaining its recognizable restless shape, its identity as a curious and intelligent creature. **The walking man transforms not by imitation, but because he has been drawn by a magnetic force**—the force of the great cultural history that has characterized the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore for centuries’.

**Renata Codello**, Secretary General of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, explains: ‘‘We have accumulated a large amount of data from heritage digitisations. The question now is how to use them. This is why ARCHiVe works with researchers from different disciplines, academies, universities and innovative research centres. **ARCHiVe is our gateway into the search for new forms of cultural sharing'.**

***Chameleon* is the second chapter** of this project, following the 2022 experience of *The Mask of Time*created by Mattia Casalegno and Martux\_M.

**It represents an entirely new way for the Foundation to narrate the island** in its physicality, its colors and its textures through the digital heritage preserved by the **Cini digital center - ARCHiVe.**

**An entire island scanned**

The Cini digital center - ARCHiVe (Analysis and Recordings of Cultural Heritage in Venice) is the project department of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini dedicated to technological research for the digital conservation of cultural heritage and archives. It collaborates with a wide network of cultural and academic institutions worldwide, integrating the fields of humanities and technology.

Established in 2018 by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the Factum Foundation, and the Digital Humanities Laboratory of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL-DHLAB), it is supported by the Helen Hamlyn Trust, a London-based fund that supports innovative medium and long-term projects in the cultural, artistic, and non-profit sectors.

The scanning of the entire Island of San Giorgio is one of the projects carried out in recent years. The island is more than ten hectares in size and is almost entirely occupied by a monumental area that was once a Benedictine monastery, constituting an exceptional historical and architectural heritage managed by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini since 1951. The island also hosts one of the most fascinating and largest woods in the lagoon, with 700 trees of 32 different species.

The scanning of the island was carried out by acquiring 3D data with LiDAR, an operation conducted between 2020 and 2022. The island was captured from over 600 different recording points, generating a cloud of 60 billion points. This enabled the creation of a 3D model of the entire island. In 2021, another study was conducted in collaboration with the American company Divirod, using a radar sensor to monitor and record all possible data related to the water surrounding the island. This material served as the inspiration for the artists of Universal Everything to create *Chameleon*.

As Renata Codello emphasizes, ‘**The Cini digital center - ARCHiVe** once again confirms its role within the Fondazione Giorgio Cini as **a frontier of the contemporary**: here, the Online Academy focuses on digital themes and the pushing back of contemporary technological research boundaries. It's where fellows and experts work and conduct research in digitalization and communication laboratories, where Digital Libraries are created, Venice Long Data is processed, and tools like artificial intelligence and machine learning are utilized’.

**The art of Universal Everything**

**The creators of *Chameleon*, Universal Everything, are** **a collective of media artists, experience designers, and future makers, founded in 2004.** Their positive approach towards the future and focus on the audience bring their artworks, as well as their brand collaborations and prototype designs, to life. The studio creates digital experiences that subvert traditional cinematic practices, giving rise to new forms of moving images, interaction, and immersive spaces.

Over the years, Universal Everything has exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum, 180 Strand, and the Science Museum in London, La Gaîté Lyrique in Paris, and Borusan Contemporary in Istanbul. Their group exhibitions include those at the MoMA in New York, the Sundance Film Festival, and the Barbican in London. Universal Everything's works are part of many permanent collections, including ZKM, Thoma Foundation, Borusan Contemporary, and Sifang Art Museum.

In creating *Chameleon*, the creative process of Universal Everything was shaped by the uniqueness of the context, as **Matt Pyke, founder and creative director**, explains: ‘Our starting point was to investigate how it was possible to map such a visual, photographic, or filmic environment onto the surface of a human body. Secondly, we needed to understand how that surface could be sculpturally modeled so that it would not just be an image on a body, but a texture with reliefs and contours’.

From a technological standpoint, the English creative continues, ‘**to create *Chameleon*, we first used an extremely interesting new AI software** that tracks the movement of the actor walking in the space, extracts the data, and removes it from the environment, then replaces it with a CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) figure. The result is a realistic human movement that traverses space. Then we focused on mapping the textures in real-time: all these things would not have been possible until recently. The result seems truly unique to us’.

Partner of the *Chameleon* project is **Ars Electronica**, the festival of arts, technology, and society that has been held annually in Linz, Austria since 1979, becoming a reference point on the international scene. **Exactly ten years ago, Universal Everything was awarded at ARS Electronica, and to celebrate this, on September 8 at 11:00 AM, during the 2024 edition, the festival will screen *Chameleon* in its spectacular Deep Space.**

For this occasion, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini has also collaborated with **T6 Ecosystem**, a company specializing in innovative communication projects, and with the European platform **S+T+ARTS** (Science and Technologies in Arts), an initiative of the European Commission focused on supporting projects of great scientific and cultural significance.

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**Info**

Venice, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Longhena Library  
6 September 2024  
From 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM  
Admission is free with a reservation to attend the screening.

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