

Venice Art Biennale 2013



Breath

Torre di Porta Nuova

"I set out to capture my own breath, to find the essence of my own experience transcending name, nationality, cultures" Shirazeh Houshiary

For her presentation as a Collateral Event of the 55th International Art Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia, **Shirazeh Houshiary** presents **Breath**, a four channel video that was first conceived in 2003, in a remastered version and as part of a unique, site-specific installation.

In **Breath** (2012-13), the evocative chants of Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Islamic prayers emanate from four video screens. The sound is choreographed with images that capture the expanding and contracting breath of the vocalists. The installation takes the form of a rectangular enclosure clad in black felt, which is entered through a narrow passage that leads to a dimly lit white interior. There are four screens hung at eye level from which the chants of the different traditions rise and fall, swell and

dissipate in a haunting chorus that fills the room and permeates beyond each of its walls. Where inside there is unity, outside is multiplicity.

Inspired by the history, location and scale of La Torre, Houshiary envisioned a structure – an enclosure swathed in heavy cloth, its presence constituted by an act of veiling – in which to house the animation. The structure appears as a haunting presence within the Tower's vaulted interior, acting to both capture and coalesce the disparate invocations of the vocalists, and also to isolate and extract them: projecting the sounds into the wider space. Houshiary has reconceived the work so that it inhabits and transforms the Tower, and at the same time, asks that the work be shaped by the specificity of the space: a Tower that is the gateway to the Arsenale, a boundary and a threshold.

The exhibition also comprises a suite of new paintings shown alongside the awe-inspiring diptych *Between* (2010-2011): the largest work on canvas that Houshiary has produced to date.

The version of *Breath* presented at La Torre has been kindly lent by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.