

INTRODUCTION

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Continuing its mission to raise awareness on essential issues of our times through contemporary art, the new art project of ART for The World, is AQUA, an exhibition focusing on water and its importance to human beings, fauna and flora. The works of 30 artists deal with issues of the environment, biodiversity, ecosystems, climate change and water preservation as a vital resource. AQUA is a traveling exhibition originating in Geneva, then will be presented at SESC Belenzhino in Sao Paulo, and to other continents in 2018.

Conceived to raise public awareness on the notion of interdependence, essential to our environment and to the future of our planet, AQUA emphasizes our collective responsibility towards water in our contemporary society.

We know that human activity has a direct impact on natural resources, as well as on animals and plants, with which we share the Earth. Damaged ecosystems, climate change, endangered species, the survival of wildlife in developed areas, etc., push us to question the relationship between humans and other forms of life. Water is essential to life for all living organisms; however, by addressing a broad spectrum of compelling questions, water has become a major global challenge of our contemporary world.

Who does water belong to? Is water a private good or a public resource?

Recognised as a vital element since the beginning of time in all civilizations, the global economy is now changing the definition of water from a public resource to a marketable commodity. We should remember the citation in *Institutiones Justiniani*, the law codes ordered by Romano-Byzantine emperor Justinian I, "By the law of nature, these elements are common to all mankind: air, fresh water, the sea as well as the seaside."

Drinking water is another important issue. With the increase of environmental pollution of water since the industrial age, it has become necessary to support access to clean drinking water as a fundamental right. We, human beings, as well as fauna and flora, depend on water, a vital and essential element. When water is threatened, so too are all other forms of life on Earth.

In her reference book *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit*, Vandana Shiva cites the nine core principles of water democratization:

1. Water is nature's gift
2. Water is essential to life
3. Life is interconnected through water
4. Water must be free for sustenance needs
5. Water is limited and exhaustible
6. Water must be conserved
7. Water is a commons
8. No one holds a right to destroy
9. Water cannot be substituted

Water has played a fundamental role in the development of the first civilizations and their cities, which spread out alongside major rivers, strategic locations due to of fertility of the soil, the facilitation of transport, and thus became essential for agriculture, fishing and harvesting. This configuration generated a more complex social structure, aimed at managing trade and cultural exchange, as well as potential conflicts linked to resources. Water also ensured the construction and management of systems to provide irrigation and prevent flooding.

The awareness that water is essential if life is to flourish is found in every civilization. Water's critical importance has been recognized since the earliest times identified as one of the principle constitutive elements constituting of the universe, and assigned important symbolic and spiritual value. For the Sumerians, for instance, the word "a" meant both "water" and "generation." In most religions, water became a symbol of rebirth and divine grace.

In the exhibition of AQUA, we find a broad spectrum of reflections on water, presented in this publication by the artists themselves; for instance, the question of water's sacredness in the film, *L'Eau- Ganga* by Velu Viswanadhan, or of drought in *One more Garden, One more Circle*, an ephemeral installation made of ashes by Maria Tsagkari, or the important issue of endangered animals in the artwork by Eduardo Srur, *Hora da Onça Beber Água/ It is time for Jaguar to drink water*.

Pollution is particularly highlighted in the video installation by Noritoshi Hirakawa, *Harukasakura*, where the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe and the radioactive contamination of its waters which worsen daily. In *Superposition* by Michel Favre, pollution, on the contrary, was a result of the canalization of the Aire River, in the complex context of the development of the property market and agriculture.

It is also relevant to draw attention to the film by Nigol Bezjian on water scarcity in zones of conflict as in Syrian refugees' camps in Lebanon, or the sculpture *Public Private* by Stefano Boccalini on the intense ongoing debate of great importance: water is it a public or private good?

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