

ALICE

in

DOOMED LAND



FONDATION
VALMONT

May 22nd 2021 >
February 27th 2022

SILVANO RUBINO

ISAO & STEPHANIE BLAKE

DIDIER GUILLON

&

SPECIAL GUEST

STUDENTS FROM PUBLICOLOR NYC

Curated by

LUCA BERTA & FRANCESCA GIUBILEI

ART EXHIBITION AT

PALAZZO BONVICINI

Calle Agnello, 2161/A, Venice

EVERYDAY 10AM - 6PM

In collaboration with

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ALICE in DOOMEDLAND



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“*Alice* is a happily overdetermined and polymorphous text. It thrives in an indefinite number of forms, which amalgamates differently in the experience of each viewer, hearer, and reader, old or young.”

Michael Hancher *in* Christopher Hollingsworth, *Alice Beyond Wonderland. Essays for the Twenty-First Century*, 2009

“Sometimes, dreams (or nightmares) step forward and take over reality. That is exactly what happened to Alice. A white rabbit disrupted a prosaic afternoon, and she followed in its footsteps into a mystery land, where social rules do not apply, where physics and logics are subverted.

The visitors of *Alice in Doomedland* encounter a somewhat similar experience, in which the Palazzo Bonvicini in Venice unfolds as a site for playful metaphors and meditations on man’s power fantasies, and on the dystopian reality these fantasies have created. Wonderland is a faded memory. The whole world, as we have come to terms with, has turned starkly to a threatening *routine*; one that is hard to grasp; one that is probably doomed. Following artists off the beaten paths and outside our usual thinking categories, we might come upon unsuspected dimensions of ourselves. Art has the power to act as a driving force, leading us to reflect upon the part each and every one of us has to play in transforming the world—not the dreamworld, but the actual world that we all share.”

Luca Berta et Francesca Giubilei
Alice in Doomedland exhibition curators



CONCEPT

***Fondation Valmont* is proud to present its third thematic exhibition set at the Palazzo Bonvicini. For this revamped version of *Alice in Wonderland*, the foundation asked four artists to stage their vision of the vertiginous story of Alice. The resulting installations prove how topical the Victorian tale, many times retold, remains to this day.**

Alice in Wonderland, penned by Lewis Carroll and first published in 1865, enjoys a canonical status. The fable addresses deep-running themes, such as one's quest for oneself, the crossing through one's subconscious and the potency of dreams. As an initiation quest, it speaks to adults as well as children. The universality of this prolific story that has made it into a cultural monument. Many famous works—be they illustrations, movies or (graphic) novels—have found inspiration in *Alice*, from the 19th century until today.

Such topicality has radiated on to the artists invited by *Fondation Valmont* to take part in the exhibition. In turn, they have acknowledged the universal dimension of the tale and reverberated it to burning issues. A new Alice, *Alice in Doomedland*, has thus taken shape. From Wonderland, she is transplanted into the contemporary world, the flaws of which the exhibit uncompromisingly points out. Is our land really doomed, however, asks the show? It is by taking a wonderful detour through art that this question will meet answers.

The exhibition presents itself as a journey. The visitors are guided through it by the steady hand of the curators, who have orchestrated the collective and successive visions that make up the show. Yet the journey is also utterly personal: just like Alice, each visitor has the possibility to open certain door, or not. We only invite visitors to take all the time necessary to immerge themselves in the works, to get carried away in the artists' personal interpretations of Alice's wanderings. Let us also note that Alice's outlook, her bold and curious views, further inspired the artists. All four of them updated it by turning it to our reality. As a result, an immersive and sensorial world is recreated; strolling around it means embracing experiences of (re)awakening.

Alice in Doomedland is the newest in a thematic cycle of exhibitions, after *Hansel & Gretel – White Traces in Search of Your Self* (2019) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). These well-known stories have been chosen as themes because they represent a way in to contemplate, and even appropriate contemporary art, while also representing a haven in a restless world. Art and beauty are made accessible in the heart of Venice, the Serenissima.



EXHIBITION

A unique endeavor grounded in collaboration

Alice in Doomedland is the fruit of a large-scale collaboration between artists Didier Guillon, duo Isao and Stephanie Blake, and Silvano Rubino; and curators Luca Berta and Francesca Giubilei. The formers have each produced a unique installation, tailor-made to the majestic space offered by the Palazzo Bonvicini. Another grand installation, collectively conceived by all artists, initiate the exhibition.

This stimulating team effort originated in an inaugural workshop, where all parties met for several days of exchanges over *Alice* and their respective visions. The curators framed the artists' readings; they led them through the rife universe of the novel. Regular discussions have further interspersed the creative processes behind each work.

This innovative approach has not hindered the artists' originality in creativity. All of them productively brought to the table their distinctive perceptions which converged towards a harmonious polyphonic whole but did not blend. Various practices including sound installations, filmic experimentations, imaginative uses of color and smell, the arts of ceramics and illustrations have all enriched one another, in the conception as well as in the final result.

Fondation Valmont precisely promotes this collaborative, inclusive and inviting practice of art. The foundation further commissions the creation of original, bespoke pieces for its many exhibits—it has been the case for *Alice in Doomedland*, each work being produced on commission. The exhibition thus materializes how spectacular, substantial, and poignant such a total vision of art can turn out to be.

Fondation Valmont has also turned to another trusted collaborator: students by the New-York-based not-for-profit organisation Publicolor have brought to life a famous scene from the original novel as their special contribution to the mix.



THE ARTISTS



Venetian artist, **Silvano Rubino**, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice. Throughout his artistic journey, he has used painting, scenic design, sculpture, photography, installations, and video; styles used either separately or together, favoring a conceptual setting. Numerous exhibitions all over the world have celebrated his works, from Venice to New York and Europe to South America. In 2018, he was awarded by the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti for his artistic contribution to glass work.



Isao is a Catalan artist inspired by Japanese calligraphy and Japan - his mother's native country. Paintings, sculptures, illustrations, animations... The lines, flat colors and balance in his composition allow him to express with a great economy of means his fascination with nature in a kaleidoscopic way. The well-travelled artist who constantly strives for regeneration has launched several projects that are stamped with his touch and personality.

Stephanie Blake is American. She lives in Paris and she is a children's book author and illustrator. In 2002 she created *Simon the Super Rabbit*, published by l'École des Loisirs and translated into numerous languages before being adapted into a cartoon in 2016. Since 2018, Stephanie Blake has been creating clay sculptures that she immortalizes in bronze, Indian ink sketches on Japanese paper, and large colored canvases. Despite of their rough, naïve, and spontaneous appearance, Stephanie Blake's works reveal their ironically delicate, poetic... self-explanatory side.





Art runs in **Didier Guillon**'s family: his forefathers include sculptor Alphonse Lamy and collector and art merchant Charles Sedelmeyer... Creating is, for Guillon, an irresistible impulse, spurred by his inextinguishable curiosity. He muses through many mediums, such as serigraphy, illustration, cardboard- or glass-sculpture, with a particular fondness for mixed-media installations.

His realizations offer pretexts to scrutinize important contemporary issues, most often through a playful lens. Each of his original, detail-oriented, and finely tuned global projects has been shown around the world (Venice, Munich, Berlin, New York, Chengdu), as he is especially prone to making his art accessible to a public as well as expert connoisseurs.



Francesca Giubilei and **Luca Berta** are independent curators.

Francesca Giubilei is a contemporary glassmaking expert, and serves as art director to SPARC * - Spazio Arte Contemporanea, a project space dedicated to hybrid and experimental arts in Venice. Luca Berta, PhD., has authored several articles in international journals, as well as several monographs on art, aesthetics, and spirit philosophy, amongst which *In Bed with Mona Lisa. Contemporary Art for Commuters and Curious Minds* (with Carlo Vanoni, London, 2014).

Together, they have curated several contemporary art shows, and have founded the *Venice Design Biennial*. Their joint project-development resource, Veniceartfactory, has collaborated with worldwide major cultural institutions, such as the UAL (University of Arts London); the Fondation Dubuffet; the *Fondation Valmont*; the Arts Council England; the Art Bahrain Foundation; the UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency); the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti; the Fondazione Querini Stampalia and the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia.



Walking through Alice in Doomedland

The Garden Dreamers, by Silvano Rubino, Isao & Stephanie Blake and Didier Guillon

“The Garden Dreamers” initiates the *Alice in Doomedland* exhibition. This entry point into the fairytale world is conceived as an homage to the garden where it all begins and where it ends in the novel—an altogether welcoming and contemplative space.

To recreate the reverie garden, the settings to Alice’s waking dream, the artists worked collectively to appeal to all the visitors’ senses. Isao designed a cozy carpet on which to lay; this phantasmagorical realization evokes green grass. It is a quirky take on the traditional French formal garden, shaped by the sinuous paths one can walk down. Curves predominate, indicating that sideroads are the best route to cross over to Alice’s world. Other elements, however, invite visitors to linger rather than to pass by. Generous pillows, filled with aromatic herbs, call for heads to rest upon them. The blend of scents they contain results from the demanding work of sourcing Didier Guillon exerted, which he initiated during his mountain walks. As smell and memories are intertwined, he embarks visitors down a powerful olfactive wandering. Another form of wandering takes place through the action of reading, as Silvano Rubino is well aware. He conceived a video showcasing Lewis Carroll’s key sentences, which imbues the room, as well as the following ones, with a poetic atmosphere. A point of entry, the garden is also an exit point; but it mostly offers a chance to pause, and to take the exhibit in.

As curators Luca Berta and Francesca Giubilei explain, the inaugural room presents visitors with a crucial step: “it is through the garden that visitors truly *enter* the exhibition; at the sensory, symbolic and visual levels. Embracing the garden means embracing Alice’s point of view, shifting one’s perception, and adopting a new point of view, to better interact with our surroundings. When leaving the exhibition, visitors walk through this room again. Yet upon this second visit, they have not come full circle but rather have been transformed; they will find themselves again in the garden with a different awareness.”

The garden also points out to one of the show’s major concern: sustainability. All artists hark back to Nature in their works; the exhibition demonstrates care for the environment, and adopts a scrupulous approach, favoring low-impact art pieces. It is only natural, then, that *Alice in Doomedland’s* first room calls attention to our nurturing habitat.



CROSSING. Ad occhi chiusi, by Silvano Rubino

Crossing the garden, we reach the area set up by Silvano Rubino, who in this case, is inviting us to go on a journey. This time, entirely towards the conscience. For the artist, “*Alice*, like in all fairy tales, presents us with an extraordinary event that changes the lives of the characters and leads them to a greater internal awareness.”

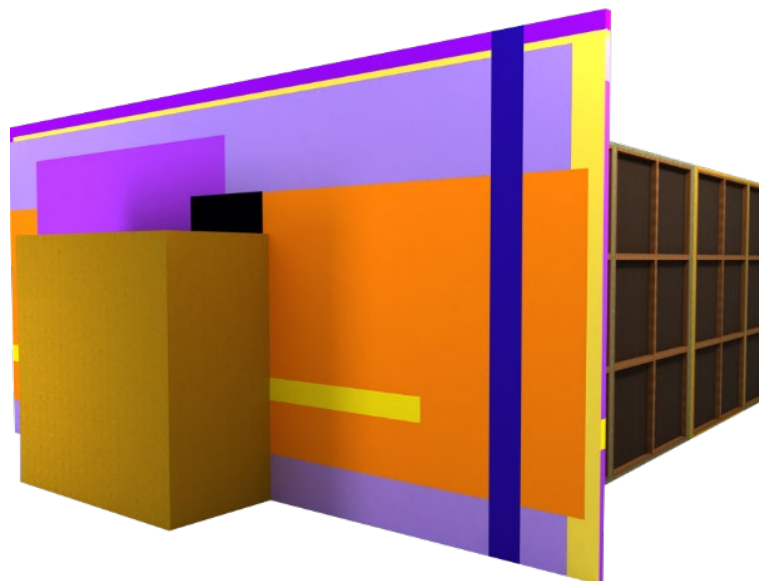
Astonishment. Unreality. Unusual landscapes. Unlikely identities. Everything is unexpected. It is like living in parallel worlds where reality no longer makes sense and familiar values are catapulted somewhere, only to get lost in the galaxies of an imagination where anything is possible. Alice is transformed into something unknown to her. She no longer recognizes herself. She loses her way, bewildered. However, her curiosity to understand her transformation, despite the chaos, leads her towards a light where she can begin to see things with a renewed awareness.

The modular, colored canvases of the *CROSSING – Ad occhi chiusi* installation define an architecture that develops across three observational levels and allows us to sensorially experience Alice’s journey.

The first level, that represents rationality, is composed of a façade painted with rich colors in a geometric abstraction theme that, via a staircase, accesses the second level: a purple-blue cube whose reduced size forces one to crouch in order to exit down a slide that leads to a room of the same color, enlivened with voices that ask unsettling questions about identity.

The third level is also accessed through a door of reduced size where an all-yellow room is revealed along with a seemingly chaotic backdrop, composed of two installations and a video.

The final element of the piece is a two-meter-tall writing desk on which a raven is perched, and under which visitors are forced to move on by passing through the outer doorway. This is also the final phase of the transformation experience of the dimensional connection both within oneself and by oneself, an illuminating discovery of one’s own becoming.



Silvano Rubino, CROSSING. Ad occhi chiusi



***Drink Me*, by Isao & Stephanie Blake**

Another cult phrase in the book, “Drink me!” powerfully addresses Alice, and the visitors with her. Isao and Stephanie Blake have toyed with this invitation to absorb the matter of the tale. Their monumental vision renders this injunction in the flesh, proposing yet another way to take part to Alice’s story.

Alice herself is central to their piece. An enormous figure occupies most of the space. Evidently too large for the room it is set in, this theatrical character conjures up the oppressing sensations provoked when reading the scene. This plastic interpretation of the novel vigorously attests to the artists’ intention, which is “to create surprise in the visitors, with a raw, almost brutal piece.”

The larger-than-life Alice doll summons strong emotions. Yet she remains anchored in reality, as some of its parts (her hand, her shoe) are made out of ceramics—one of Isao’s favored material. The stiff but fragile medium also commemorates the Victorian dolls that were so popular when the book was first published. Through the delicate work of ceramics, Alice navigates across time and space, up to today.

It is in a contemporary spirit that the artistic duo takes on *Alice in Wonderland*, reflecting on her eminently symbolic size changes. In doing so, they invite visitors to question their own relationship to space, to their environment. They will emerge from the room enriched with a new perspective, a new way of looking.



Isao & Stephanie Blake, Drink me, Le soulier vernis

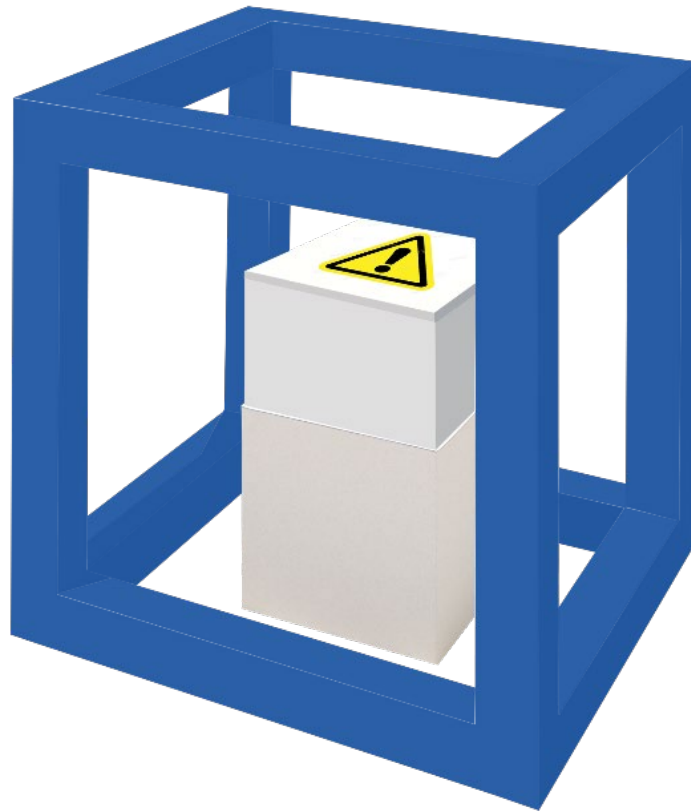


The Room of Tears, by Didier Guillon

The converging journeys of Alice and the visitors culminate in Didier Guillon's *The Room of Tears*. Guillon, an artist with current concerns over social, societal, and aesthetic issues at the heart of his practice, ensures that our contemporary reality and the fairytale collide in a spectacular way.

The artist's first endeavor consisted in identifying and naming the ten key challenges that our times face. On the one hand, personal challenges—pertaining to looks, mobility, communication—are to be addressed by each and every one of us. On the other hand, universal challenges—migratory crisis, global warming, and pandemics—call for a collective reflection and action. His second endeavor is all about materializing these challenges in a dramatic, arresting way. Guillon chose to generate interactions, and to work around the motive of the cage; neither opened, nor closed, the “Room of Tears” cages dare visitors to set them free... or to let them be. More symbolism is to be found in the color of these cages, an intense blue that recall Alice's tears as she faces tremendous challenges herself.

By viewing the world through Alice's eyes, both the artist and the visitors gain considerable insights on their surroundings. By viewing the world through Guillon's eyes, the visitors will furthermore find, in themselves, unexpected answers to tackle the complex issues we all must come to terms with.

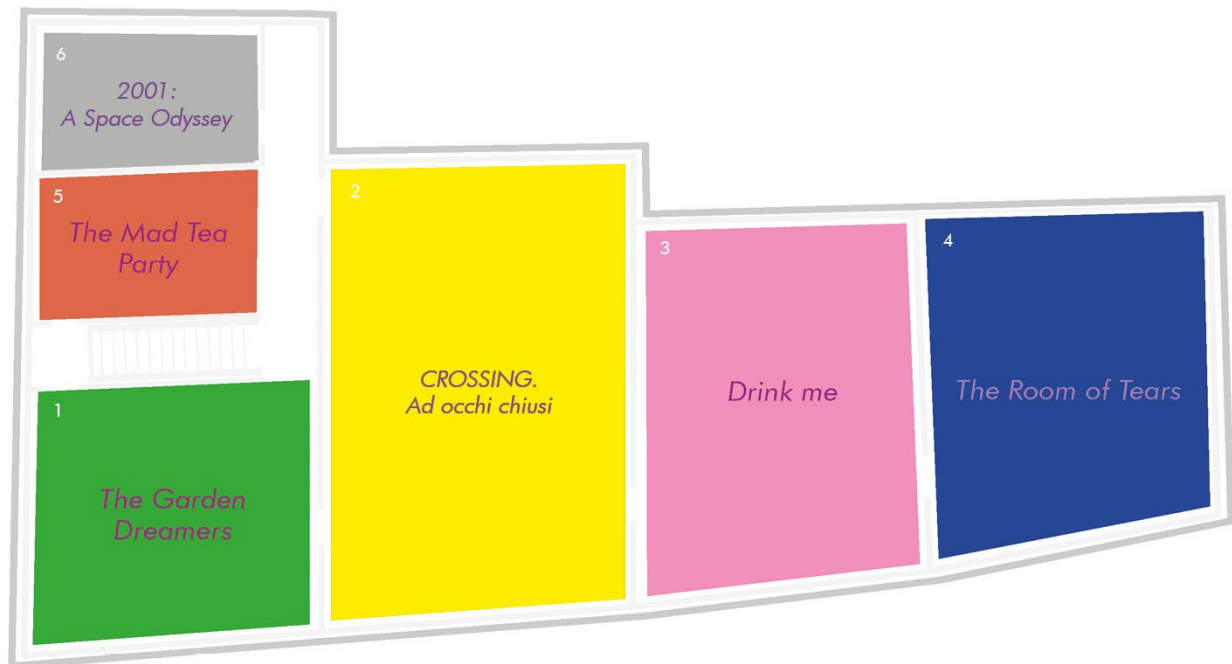


Didier Guillon, The Room of Tears



Circulating in Alice's world

Just like the white rabbit, we are offered arborescent peregrinations into Alice's universe. The artist's installations all come together as one under the aegis of the curators, who watched over the spatial and theoretical coherence of the ensemble. Their work crowned the collaboration deployed in the exhibition and represent a creative realization in itself. Each room thus becomes a chapter, as we are invited to roam in one after the other, in harmony.



A red thread runs through the exhibit: it is about plunging into art, that sheds new light on our reality rather than to deem it doomed. In engaging in a dialogue with the artists, as well as with other visitors, lays the possibility for participation.

Artists can, in that regard, be viewed as interpreters; they enlighten the various ways in which we can relate to the story of *Alice*, by displaying how they have related to it. The many resonances between the four installations—conceived as ephemeral, albeit sustainable and eco-conscious—make touring the exhibition an immersive experience. Visitors' personal interpretations of the works will be fostered by the deeply plural, multi-layered dispositive central to the show, overriding generational and individual differences to touch the hearts. *Alice in Doomedland* is a unique event within the walls of the Palazzo Bonvicini, to be enjoyed to the fullest. Two further initiatives, also set up in the Palazzo, complete the exhibition and extend its concept even beyond the traditional display.



The Mad Tea Party, by Publicolor students

An installation and a drawing replicate the “Mad Tea Party” scene—perhaps the most famous episode in the novel, where Alice takes part in a bizarre, eccentric tea party. Both realizations have been made possible by the joint support of *Fondation Valmont* and Publicolor.

Publicolor is a New York-based not-for-profit organization. Active for 25 years, it has devised several programs targeted at at-risk youth, to keep them in school towards obtaining degrees and qualifications. Its stay-in-school program comprises in activities such as workshops and mentoring clubs that sees 12 to 24 years-old through middle-, high-school and college and achieve success. All Publicolor’s programs are designed-based and involve creative activities. Educators, social workers, artists are mobilized, with the generous support of several educational and cultural institutions.

The outcome of a competition, the selected project managed to render, in 2D and in 3D, the burlesque atmosphere underlying the world of *Alice*. The works illustrates the themes running strongly under the surface of the original book. The scene finally produced, split between a hopeless world and a reclaimed cheerfulness, echoes the reflection unfolded in the exhibition.



Publicolor students, The Mad Tea Party model



2001: A Space Odyssey (movie projection)

Alongside the exhibition, Stanley Kubrick's 1968 masterpiece, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, will be screened in an adjacent room of the Palazzo Bonvicini. An extension of the visual narratives that the exhibition develops, in cinematographic mode.

The movie, as relevant as it ever was, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* are connected in more than one (unexpected) way. First, they both are mythical works. Both stories have innervated popular imagination, spanning several generations of avid readers and viewers. In fact, they have both become monuments by unfolding deep-running meditations fed by their genius creators' subconscious. *Alice* as well as *2001* are pretexts to an exploration, to a sensory trip down teeming universes, aesthetically appealing and sensually moving. These world-making *oeuvres* today engage in a stimulating dialogue.

The screening is also aligned with the experience offered by the exhibition: the movie can be watched in its entirety, or sequences can be caught bit by bit if one chooses to come and go, immersing oneself in the film each time all over again. *2001* thus broadens the range offered by the *Alice in Doomedland* exhibit, at the aesthetic and conceptual levels, in a demanding yet accessible medium.



FONDATION VALMONT

Fondation Valmont has become, since its 2015 debut, a champion of contemporary art to be reckoned with. Born out of the torch for art carried by the Guillons, it tirelessly works to promote art and creation in all forms. Indeed, art is both a passion and a family value that Didier and Sophie Guillon have passed on to their daughters, Capucine and Valentine, and to their son, Maxence, soon to be president of the foundation.



The Guillon family

It is then only natural that art is to be found in every venture that the Valmont group engages in. Art is a defining cornerstone for Valmont—a brand distinguished by its relentless quest for beauty. It bridges the gap between the luxury cosmetics by La Maison Valmont and the contemporary art circuit. *Fondation Valmont* strives to advance the arts by supporting emerging or recognized artists, and by making their works accessible to a large audience. Collaborations based on trust and loyalty make the foundation’s approach a truly committed one. It also stands by its artists’ side in the long run, through sponsorship actions and commissions which complete its almost 350-pieces strong collection.



Fondation Valmont also organizes several exhibitions a year in trendy, buoyant cities such as Venice, Hong Kong, New York, Tokyo, Munich, or Berlin. Enacting the highest standards in terms of creativity but also in terms of sustainability, the foundation takes pride in disseminating, on the occasion of these exhibitions, innovative concepts as well as traditional crafts and techniques. Its total approach, developed over the years, is centered on accessibility— an inclusive and democratic view of contemporary art that bears the Valmont seal.



*Venetian Love, works by Silvano Rubino,
Palazzo Bonvicini*



*The Elegant Symmetry of the Gorilla, Didier
Guillon, La Maison Valmont Munich*

Fondation Valmont's major exhibitions (selection)

- 2020-2021: *Venetian Love* – Palazzo Bonvicini, Venice
- 2020-2021: *Tintswalo African Colors* – La Maison Valmont, Berlin & Munich
- 2019-2020: *White Mirror* – travelling exhibition (Munich, Chengdu, Milan, New York, Ginza)
- 2019-2020: *Tell me the Truth* – La Maison Valmont, Munich
- 2019: *Hansel & Gretel - White Traces in Search of Your Self* – Palazzo Bonvicini, Venice
- 2018 – 2019: *The Elegant Symmetry of the Gorilla* – La Maison Valmont, Munich
- 2018: *The Elegant Symmetry of the Gorilla* – 393 Broadway Gallery, New York
- 2018: *Les Affinités Electives* – Château de Nyon, Nyon (Switzerland)
- 2017: *Beauty and the Beast* – Palazzo Tiepolo Passi, Venice
- 2016: *El Cuor No Se Vende* – Historical Archives Museum, Hydra (Greece)





Attentive to give back, *Fondation Valmont* supports several charities and associations, through fundraising initiatives and event sales of original artworks. All *Fondation Valmont*'s artists are keen on sharing and giving, their creativity shining through for charity.

Embracing this long-term commitment to generosity, *Fondation Valmont* starts in 2021 a new chapter by choosing the luxurious department store in Venice, Fondaco dei Tedeschi, as partner in this project. The artworks for sale are displayed within the Valmont counter for a noble cause: supporting **Make-A-Wish Italy**.

Make-A-Wish Italy is a non-profit organization that grants wishes of children living under life threatening medical conditions. For sick children it can be difficult to face life: strong medical treatments, constant hospitalizations do not allow them to live their own childhood, and sometimes also take away all their energy to keep fighting.

Make-A-Wish Italy, the Italian affiliate of Make-A-Wish International, was founded at the end of 2004 in memory of Carlotta, a sweet ten-year-old girl, affected by a grave disease.

During the past years Make-A-Wish Italy has granted more than 2000 wishes, thanks to the help of about 250 volunteers throughout the country. There is still very much to do due to the continued growing number of requests from hospitals and children, and to the fact that granting wishes requires an important economic effort and a lot of work. To be able to face all the requests and keep working on this project, Make-A-Wish Italy needs to grow, and to receive financial aid from generous partners who believe in this mission.



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Information

Exhibition to be held from May 22nd, 2021 until February 27th, 2022

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Social media: @fondationvalmont @didier.guillon

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Fondation Valmont current exhibition

The Room of Tears, by Didier Guillon, La Maison Valmont Berlin

From May 6th until September 4th, 2021

Upcoming exhibitions 2021

Janus, by Didier Guillon, Hydra (Greece)

Tintswalo African Colors, by Didier Guillon, Milan

Hadrien Dussoix et Didier Guillon s'amusement, La Maison Valmont Berlin

The Room of Tears, by Didier Guillon, La Maison Valmont Munich

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