

AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME

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Art, Video, and Live Performance Converge in Rome

Written by Claudia Trezza
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David Brooks's installation *7 Perspectives of La Esmeralda (and Its Lost Worlds)* in the AAR Library (photograph by Giorgio Benni)

By Claudia Trezza

Roman columns next to cartoonish clouds embossed on velvet cloth, a Greek tragedy reinterpreted with ancient and modern language, fragmented conversations projected on speakers.

Hundreds of people last week filled the American Academy in Rome's courtyard, cryptoporticus, library, and art spaces to view artists and performers

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OK

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In the Academy's cryptoporticus, the composer [Pamela Z](#) quieted the audience to listen to snippets of recorded sentences lifted from everyday conversations and reassembled here. "I had a dream last night," "I hit the snooze button about ten times," and "I drink coffee" were some of the phrases emanating from numerous alternating speakers which hung from the white stone ceilings of the corridor. Woven into the composition were live sounds by Pamela Z and her colleagues, [Alana Mailes](#) and [Joel Pattison](#), orchestrated by the composer.

Later in the evening, crowds draped the staircases and balustrades of the Academy's atrium to experience the Roman artist [Rä di Martino](#)'s performance: the actress [Iaia Forte](#)'s impersonation of an actress delivering an Oscar acceptance speech. Her initial euphoria and excitement—she thanked her dog sitter and make-up artist among others—quickly escalated into an emotional and physical breakdown ("I'd like to thank ... my mother ... my psychiatrist ... Johnnie Walker," she cried hysterically in Italian.) Covered in gold paint, the performer [Alessandro Pezzali](#) impersonated the Oscar statue, mimicking Forte's performance with his body movements.

In line with this year's Academy theme of "Encounters," *Cinque Mostre 2020* was a testament to the interdisciplinary exchanges that take place between artists and architects, writers, and performers during their stay at the Academy.

The city of Rome plays a central role in their lives here, as was apparent in the artworks on display no matter what medium or material used, whether digital, leather, polyester, or photo.

A video installation by the conservationist [Matthew Brennan](#) and the designer [Eugenia Morpurgo](#) featured a condensed version of these two Fellows' vision of a landscape after 2,100 years of climate change. During a six-minute video, a shot of a fresco of the Academy's grounds and surrounding area, initially lush and idyllic, becomes increasingly arid and desolate as time goes by and temperatures rise. The original fresco adorns the wall of the building's passage to the rear gardens.

On the main floor upstairs, the Syrian artist [Azza Abo Rebieh](#)'s carved drawing of the Colosseum and Rome's iconic She Wolf on a leather sheet was on display. Its printed version hung on paper directly above it. A testament to the reportedly intense relationship the artist has developed with the city, after having witnessed her own city of Damascus and its iconic symbols being destroyed by bombings.

In the adjacent room, the artist [Giovanna Silva](#) offered four different perspectives of Rome. Led by her four guides or "Saints," as she calls them, she traveled across Rome's different neighborhoods and produced a composition of snapshots evoking the city's old and new, gritty and ornate facets.

Juxtapositions of old and new were also present in the artist [Garrett Bradley](#)'s photos of obelisks and modern buildings and on [Dina Danish](#) and [Jean-Baptiste Maitre](#)'s linoleum panel carved with scenes of Greek deities and sketches reminiscent of Italian paintings and of popular American cartoons.

The library is rarely used as an exhibition space, but on this occasion it opened its doors to the artist [David Brooks](#)'s portrayal of the mysterious layers of literary, geologic, indigenous history imbued in the legendary landmark of the Casiquiare River in the Amazon, where he has traveled to. Amidst old catalogues, volumes, and rare book collections, an atlas in the form of a sculptural installation unraveled across reading tables and bookshelves.

All these works and more made for a dynamic and thought-provoking event, fruit of the diverse backgrounds, tendencies, and dialogues that converge at the Academy and that foster a rich and collaborative environment. The Academy's President Mark Robbins, in Rome for the exhibition's opening, lauded the works, the curators, and the staff that made this event possible and that demonstrate the important role the Academy plays in Rome's artistic and cultural scene.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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