

# The Real Venice show makes saving the city glamorous, writes *James Pallister*



Given its status as home to both the major architecture and art biennales, it's no surprise that Venice can muster fundraisers with more

glamour than your average cake sale or fun run.

Venice in Peril is a charity dedicated to conserving the many valuable buildings and works of art within the city. It lobbies for protection against damage from the inexorable rising lagoon waters and spiralling numbers of tourists, so that, as the charity says, Venice will be there 'to enchant our great-grandchildren as it has enchanted us'.

For *Real Venice*, which debuted at the Venice Biennale and has now moved to Somerset House, Venice in Peril asked 14 renowned photographers, including Nan Goldin and Hiroshi Watanabe, to document Venice and donate their works to be sold in aid of the charity. They hope to 'harness the creativity, the internationalism – and the financial power – of contemporary art to save Venice'. At the opening night, word was that they'd made nearly €360,000 thus far.

There are some great photos on display. Candida Hofer (*pictured*) has produced large studies of the interiors of concert halls. Other highlights include very different studies of tourism, from knick-knacks and tat by Robert Walker, to the lonely anomie of Jules Spinatsch's series of light switches, fire escapes and other details of anonymous hotel rooms.

Also in Somerset House is the exhibition of RIBA London Forgotten Spaces (AJ 20.10.11) which, following its equivalent in Sheffield, shows proposals for unloved, underused spaces across London. They range from the wacky to the workable and include Alex Scott-Whitby's winning scheme to transform vacant church spires into studio space. Appropriately, the show is displayed in an obscure wing of Somerset House. Having a chance to navigate the passageways and alcoves that loop round the south part of its courtyard is reason enough to visit.



VISIT Real Venice, until 11 December (£5) Forgotten Spaces, until 29 January (free) both at Somerset House, Strand, London WC2 [Somersethouse.org.uk](http://Somersethouse.org.uk)