

**“There is no bigger challenge and few more satisfying projects for an artist than to take on a visual cliché and making it his or her own. ‘Real Venice’ is a fascinating project in which fourteen contemporary artists have been asked to tackle the biggest cliché of all – the most frequently painted and photographed city in the world, the one that modern artists avoid at all costs – at least if they don’t want to invite comparisons with Canaletto, Guardi, Turner, Whistler, Sargent and Monet.**

**When I saw the show at the Abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore during the Venice Biennale, what impressed me was the way the project seemed to engage the imaginations of the participating artists, who ended up by rediscovering a *strangeness* in Venice that is easy to miss when you know it too well.**

**For example, in the bustle of the biennale few of us stop to look at individual faces surging over through St Mark’s Square or crushed into a crowded vaporetto. But French artist Pierre Gonnard ‘s does just that in his series ‘The Venetians’, in which he photographs in almost sculptural relief male and female sitters of all ages, each chosen for their exotic looks and instinctive dignity. The formal poses they assume remind us that their beauty and grace is inherited from ancestors who are an unseen presence throughout the series -as they are, of course in the city itself.**

**So many artists have been fascinated by the light in Venice that you’d think there was no more to be said on the subject. Philip-Lorca di Corcia adds to that tradition by capturing moments of transition: a street lamp piercing the winter’s dusk, shop windows glowing in square at night, or- in homage to Turner and Monet - the disc of sun rising through mist across the glittering lagoon. And I was fascinated by the photos Dionisio Gonzalez creates in which he inserts buildings designed but never built by Louis Kahn and Frank Lloyd Wright into photos of the Zattere, Giudecca and Grand Canal as they actually are. Not Venice as she is, but Venice as she might have been.**

**I could go on, but you get the point: there are some wonderful artists in this show and they have been challenged to produce some startlingly original work. In Venice the exhibition proved to a big draw, and I’m sure the success will be repeated internationally.”**

**RICHARD DORMENT, CHIEF ART CRITIC, *THE DAILY TELEGRAPH***