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## ANYONE FOR VENICE?

*Skinky-dipping, farting, peeing – artists caused a racket at this year's Biennale, says Camilla Long*

The Venice Biennale started off with Charles Saatchi losing his luggage at the airport. While the éminence grise of Britart stood by the carousel, red-faced at the halting Italian Tannoy announcement – 'Could Charles Saaaatchi please come to lost property?' (Nigella Lawson whisked him off in the right direction) – a scene of medieval madness was unfolding on the Grand Canal.

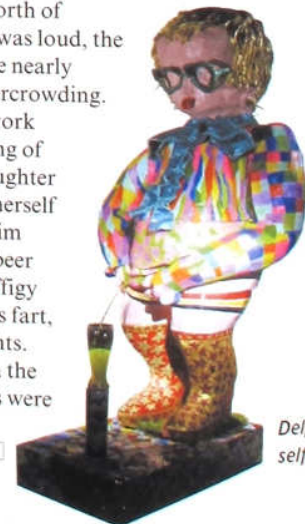
In the shimmering heat, 10,000 art dealers and gallerinas swooped down on the Giardini. By late afternoon, by far the cleverest place to be was on the steps of the British Pavilion, sipping chilled Prosecco. Chris Ofili's work (a collection of rich red and green depictions of luscious-lipped Africans kissing) was the British entry for the festival and an essential talking-point – along with where to purchase the chicest fans. In just an hour, Yoko Ono, Mario Testino, Charles and Nigella, and Timothy Taylor wafted casually through the doors, while Cindy Sherman had a Marilyn Monroe moment in the German pavilion when she stood on a ventilator.

Next stop was Angela Missoni's yacht, moored far out to sea, before going on to art dealer Roger Evans's boat, which had the most enviable mooring in Venice in front of the Cipriani. Here he entertained Britart rapsCALLIONS Tim Noble and Sue Webster, Detmar Blow – who remained pin-neat despite the heat – and Marc Quinn, who strayed on for a drink after his show.

I guess I made it to five parties a night, missed 20 more, and ended up chatting to Tracey Emin – who, surprisingly, was enjoying her first Biennale – in Haig's Bar at closing time. 'Even though I love the heat, this is a complete endurance test,' she said.

The rooftop terrace of the Guggenheim was in the shadow of Quinn's 40-foot steel orchid, as Sandro Rumney held forth about his grandmother, the formidable Peggy, who used to worry he would get kidnapped during the Biennale, but only because she wasn't prepared to pay the ransom. Things didn't stay this civilised for long. Skinky-dipping earned the unlucky Peter Doig a 50-euro fine.

Finally, to the Absolut party at the Palazzo Zenobio in the north of the city, where the music was loud, the people rude and the venue nearly shut down because of overcrowding. Perhaps the draw was a work by Delphine Boël, the King of Belgium's illegitimate daughter – a massive sculpture of herself dressed as her mentor, Wim Dubois, urinating into a beer glass. Occasionally, the effigy would let off an enormous fart, putting out its display lights. By Sunday morning, even the most seasoned partygoers were hankering for Heathrow, drizzle and leaden skies. □



Delphine Boël's self-portrait

*The music was loud, the people rude and the overcrowded venue nearly shut down*