

# Proposal for the Venice Biennial Inter-Galactic Pavilion. New Nonel&Vovel Commission: “Heroism: An Epic Out of the Frame.”

Curator: Nat Muller

To: The Inter-Galactic Council of the Arts  
Odyssey Building, 113<sup>th</sup> floor  
Stellar Avenue #4  
District X-Y3  
6<sup>th</sup> Planet

Reference: Concept Proposal for 2212 Inter-Galactic Pavilion.

Dear Committee,

On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Inter-Galactic Pavilion at the Venice Biennial, I lie before you the proposal “**Heroism: An Epic Out of the Frame**”. It is with great pleasure to announce that the well-known artist duo **Nonel and Vovel**, after embarking respectively on successful solo careers post the liberation of Palestine, have agreed to take up once more a collaborative project. I hope you are as excited as I am at the prospect of newly commissioned work by these two remarkable artists, and will agree to support this project in your fullest capacity to see it come to its fruition.

I remain at your disposal for any further questions or queries.

Sincerely,

N.M.  
(Curator of the 10<sup>th</sup> Inter-Galactic Pavilion)

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## Introduction

The Inter-galactic Pavilion has since its inception in 2192 focused on cross-planetary exchange and inter-species dialogue. Whilst this agenda has yielded numerous collaborations, has been fruitful for short-lived moments of individual curatorial glory, and has fostered soft inter-stellar diplomacy, the actual artistic outcomes have been mediocre. The latter is not a novel complaint, as age-old critiques on the instrumentalisation of art have cluttered many a degree program. Nevertheless, it seems

our learning curve is slow: an emphasis on the didactic, celebration of the alien, and overt consideration for trans-galactic sensitivities have produced an artistic practice that is meek, unchallenging and monolithic.

While the choice for two earthling-artists might seem unorthodox in some quarters within the framework of the Inter-Galactic Pavilion, we are *de facto* sending a strong signal that it is not territorial or extraterrestrial origins equipping artists with the ability to transcend and comment on confining ideological dichotomies, but rather that it is the freedom to consciously ignore those, and by corollary make us see things anew, that signifies the creative act. In our conception the notion of true inter-galactic citizenship lies within the capacity to embrace that freedom; Nonel and Vovel's work has been exemplary in this respect.

In many ways our proposal is a manifesto for the arts post-liberation. After the destruction of the 5<sup>th</sup> Planet, the subsequent liberation of Palestine and all other earth-bound civilisations, we have witnessed 300 years of global peace and stability. This defining moment has also marked the death of context-responsive art and the redundancy of socio-politically engaged artists as formerly known. Referred to as "the rupture", this breaking point caused a severe crisis in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century art world, and we still sense its ramifications to this present day, our contemporary artists have plainly ceased to generate meaning able to transcend the manifest present. Therefore, by placing the artistic process firmly at the centre of the collaboration, and eradicating compromising positions caused by 3 centuries of the neo-mimetic, we propose a truly radical stance in an era of harmonious dissociation: subjectivity through epic self-referentiality. Rather than responding to any given context, this project creates its own. It re-inserts the transformative role of art and the artist, and the creation of alternative subjectivities and positionings, surprisingly by ways of historical repetition.

Historic art movements such as the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century *Terra-nostalgics*, who functioned as *agents provocateurs* attempting to sow strife and mayhem, in order to create that long lost "rub" or "tension" with an imaginary hegemony, or the *atavist conceptualists* of the late 21<sup>st</sup> Century who had a stint at melting the already melted icecaps, have eventually failed in their mission. In this respect we can conclude that not only have we lost our utopias, but have in a similar vein also forsaken our dystopias. If the previous centuries have struggled to position art as resistance, art as conflict prevention tool, art as onanism for an uninspired intelligentsia and failing governance, or art as liberation, then we firmly reject the position of the artist as (symbolic) messenger. We embrace the artist as hero, as super-hero more precisely, just because beyond liberation it is the sole gesture left. We offer a commodity weighed down to its nett and naked essence: the artist, stripped of all societal noise and political excess luggage, a taste of pure aura. By corollary we re-install that what has been discarded and neglected for centuries: true iconographic (super)power.

### **Concept Motivation and Summary**

Our main source of inspiration is the seminal text "Heroism as Masquerade", which uncovers the performative strategies behind the heroic. The author posits that it is the

heroic performance act which defines and marks someone as a hero. Yet heroic subjectivity is always produced through a repetitive symbolic re-enactment of that very first transformative act. In other words, the act functions as an identitarian cloak – or in the case of Nonel and Vovel a cape – tagging the subject. If indeed masquerade is the means by which heroism is produced, then heroism is in and by itself a masquerade, and only exists by grace of the latter. Under the mask, we find nothing. In addition, the heroic act is always dated, but the heroic epithet is eternal. These convoluted dynamics beg for an epic meta-structure to support its unstable ontology.

“Heroism: An Epic out of the Frame” is a call to go back to basics. The artistic practice of Nonel and Vovel is one that has consistently risen “out of the frame”, whether considering tactics, collaborative methodology, media, or subject matter. Their work has been read as post-nostalgic, since the spectacle has been fully evacuated post-liberation. Given the significant role they have both played in the liberation of Palestine, and the destruction of the evil plot of the 5<sup>th</sup> Planet consortium, it is remarkable that after so many years and various multi-faceted projects, they have remained true to their original mode of collaboration, which is characterised by a fluctuation in and out of the frame and by what some theorists have called a “processual hesitance”. In their solo projects they have explored and tackled issues such as space travel and trans-galactic mobility, redirective artistic roles, cosmo-hedonism, orbital identity, and the shifting boundaries of superhero aesthetics.

For the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Inter-Galactic Pavilion, these fine artists have been commissioned to create a new piece of epic magnitude, befitting the artistic challenges at the turn of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Century. While subtly critiquing the institutional framework of the Biennial and its respective pavilions, which after the abolition of nation states in 2117 have for tradition’s sake still attained their folkloric and representative function, and referencing the quashed Biennial Coup of 2099 by the AAA (Alien Art Astronauts), as well as the Biennial Treaty of Eternal Sustainability (Venice, 2168), this work first and foremost seeks to be an inspiring and thought-provoking cause for a paradigmatic shift. “Heroism: An Epic out of the Frame” returns to the idea of exhibition as narrative space. It aims to offer a scenario across the time-space axis, with clear protagonists and multiple story lines. The artists do not seek the heroic of everyday life, or in the mundane, but rather in this new work materialise the self-referential supra-text, which is devoid of cause or functionality. In other words, the ethics of the epic, and the purpose of artistic labour post-liberation are excavated.

Here the role of the audience becomes fundamental, as they simultaneously perform the role of consumer archaeologists. Post-liberation the sensibility an audience craves most is the elated feeling of saviour. In the contemporary art world, and in an era of high-social responsibility, this is a desire oft frowned upon. Nevertheless, carefully controlled and designed momentary lapses of total surrender, and irrational trust in a force larger than oneself (the super-heroic) is a necessary and healthy psychological stress valve for any post-liberated society. The temporary migration of responsibility to the super hero/artist offers the audience the comfort(ing) zone they seek. In addition, it is the fine balance between the tangibility of performing the heroic and constituting

(physically embodying) the heroic that opens up a perceptually responsive space of intimacy. Nonel and Vovel simultaneously inhabit the iconic and archaic qualities of the Fedayeen (freedom fighter) and the Messiah (saviour), but in their work still afford a close proximity to their audiences. For the audience this results in a close identification with the superheroes, and cathartic wish-fulfillment in an era where there is nothing left to save, nothing left to truly fight for.

Therefore, this Pavilion can only be a celebration and glorification of the super hero/artist as herself. Monumentalised across multiple inter-galactic locations, the epic of the Liberation of Palestine and the destruction of the 5<sup>th</sup> Planet, will be dramatically re-enacted again and again, across every medium possible, looped ad infinitum until our semantic memory collapses, and the only thing we can discern is form.

### **Format and Components**

This ambitious project first and foremost makes use of the unique sub-aquatic properties of sunken Venice. The artists intend to use the water surface as a holographic device for the looped image sequence. Strategically mounted trans-orbital spatial sound systems provide for the audio elements. In the Pavilion space itself and across the Giardini, the performative act of heroic masquerading is choreographed into a live installation by an assembly of Nonel and Vovel clones. It is important to have their serial numbers and date of production clearly indicated, so that the audience's experience of authenticity is genuine in its various degrees, and mediated with integrity. As aforementioned, the system is programmed to run until the narrative is reduced to pure form. Once this phase has been attained the audience is teleported to a new venue where the same scenario recommences. The actual artists Nonel and Vovel make a heroic intervention entrée on location at the beginning of each new sequence. The impetus of the superheroes materialisation is to counter the representational, and offer masquerading illusion for what it is, namely the real. This stage of the project is still in full development.

During the duration of the Biennial a comprehensive program of side events – from presentations to workshops - will take place. Though still in their conceptual draft, we have already secured a workshop about trans-terrestrial mobility for the cosmologically impaired; a seminar on superhero design issues” for students at the Confederational College of the Arts; as well as a panel on the aesthetics of Post-Liberation Epics with experts in the field.

At the time of writing, we have struck up collaborations with fellow-institutions and organisations across our universe and the wider galaxy. Notable partners are the X-line Gallery on Luna #3, The Newest Museum in New York, Luna#7 Art Initiative, the 6<sup>th</sup> Planet Arts and Heritage Association, and the Cosmo-Consortium at Saadiyat Island. We are still negotiating with the group “Artists without Universes” for infra-structural assistance, but are confident once we can secure the base part of the funding they will join us in this venture.

[A detailed list of technical specifications and required resources is available upon request.]

## **Objectives**

- Tackling pressing issues of a Post-Liberation Universe through a non-threatening mechanism, which will not by any means destabilise universal peace
- Fostering true inter-galactic citizenship by capitalising on the obvious
- Creating a platform to critically review the role of the artist vis-à-vis the heroic
- Offering a new artistic vision and direction for the Inter-Galactic Pavilion
- Shaping an opportunity for 2 outstanding artists – currently popular as solo artists – to create exciting new work together, whilst at the same time performing an homage to their previous work.
- Engage a wide audience to immerse themselves in the epic and reality-transforming tale of Nonel and Vovel
- Carving out a definite place in the Annals of Inter-Galactic Art History for Nonel and Vovel

## **Foreseeable Obstacles**

### **Production/Technical:**

We are slightly concerned by the unstable meteorological conditions across the Mediterranean. Torrential rains, sub-marine tempests and quakes have caused disruptions of the aquatic surface, which is of utmost importance for the image part of this project. Our team of scientists and engineers are currently researching our technical options and possible solutions. In addition, consumer reports have not always been very favourable in relation to experimental teleportation technology. Our juridical experts are investigating conditions of usage and terms of liability for artists, the Biennial, and the audience.

[Full reports and studies are due shortly and available upon request]

### **Security:**

It has come to our attention that a small cell of neo-beta-settlers who categorically deny the Liberation of Palestine and the destruction of the 5<sup>th</sup> Planet, inspired by colonial and expansionist ideologies of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, have increasingly been attracting followers. Though the authorities have assured us that there is no threat whatsoever, and that the ludicrous conspiracy theories of the neo-beta-settlers are perfectly innocent, amounting to nothing more than infantile and de-historicised fact fabrication, we think vigilance is recommended. We have notified the Inter-Stellar Security Board, and have asked them to monitor the situation closely.

## **Target Audience**

With this project we hope to appeal to a large and heterogeneous audience across the stars. The attractive format and content make this an low-threshold and accessible project to those who might not necessarily be interested in the arts. In this sense we do hope to target new audiences with this piece. The Venice Biennial has always attracted a constant

flow of art lovers from the general public, as well as art professionals. We are lucky to be piggybacking on that context for our visibility. Delving deeper into the projected ramifications of the project, we hope the latter might be a catalyst to regroup the efforts and needs of superhero artists into a more organised fashion, by ways of a cross-orbital syndicate.

## **PR & Communication**

While the Biennial has centuries of experience in advertising their events with state of the art technology, we will undertake an accompanying PR and communication trajectory in a media campaign targeting strategic media partners and audiences. As usual there will be live pan-Galactic coverage for the whole duration of the event, updated to the nanosecond in all known galactic languages. Press reviews, reports, clippings, updates will be distributed immediately to those registered in our expansive database.

We will organise special VIP previews for Friends of the Biennial, and important critics, curators, artists and journalists across the galaxy. We are pleased to have secured a keynote speech at the Pavilion's opening by Professor Gibora Bint Batalah, the renowned post-liberation theorist, and expert on the aesthetics of the heroic.

We are collaborating with an outstanding PR company specialised in the genetic and societal manipulation of artistic appreciation. They are preparing a program comprising hi-art enhancing nano-bots for cardio-vascular use, pheromonic ads, synaptic mailing lists, and more traditional communication techniques such as web 8000.5 applications, and sensory delusion. The latter will trigger and ensure interest from even the most parts of our universe. Space shuttles linking the outer end of the universe with Venice will be accommodated.

[A detailed list of media partners and juridical disclosures regarding terms and usages of consumption enhancement, under article 4.3. of 23rdC Inter-Stellar Confederational Jurisprudence is available upon request]

## **Appendix – Nonel and Vovel - Artist Biographies**

Please see last page of this volume.