

STAI

Emanuel Dimas de Melo Pimenta

concert-installation

2025

curated by Roberta Semeraro with Giovanna Cicutto

Palazzo Bollani

Venice 2025

dedicated to Helena Bacardí and Roberta Semeraro

in memory of my dear friend René Berger (1915-2009), on his 110th anniversary!

*What happens when communication, as is the case today, rivals the speed of light?**

René Berger (1970)

in Esthétique et mass media – Sélection de cours et des actes du colloque « Art, technologie et communication », 1970-1972

**translated by Emanuel Pimenta*

The essence of sculpture is for me the perception of space, the continuum of our existence.

Isamu Noguchi

The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing.

John Cage

STAI is the prehistoric term from the Indo-European (a linguistic set extinct around 20,000 years ago) which is one of the most remote roots of our word *stone*.

Stone is the very first sign of Helena Bacardí's work, to whom the concert-installation is dedicated.

The piece lasts 60 minutes, working on a loop, and therefore without end. And, particularly in this case - Helena Bacardí's exhibition at the Palazzo Bollani in Venice - it should be an installation, creating a soundscape.

One must pay attention not only to the quality of the sound, but also to its intensity: low enough to function as background music without monopolizing the moment.

The most important is Helena Bacardí's sculpture. Music should not prevent or disturb thoughts, conversations, or moments of silence. It should act as a kind of delicate backdrop that, in its delicacy, interacts with works and people.

An important conceptual issue in the exhibition is the difference between stone and the dematerialized digital world in which we live. We have the sculptor and robots, stone and human beings, sound and silence, being and non-being - dualities that make up each one of us.

On the other hand, whether directly or not, over many years Helena Bacardí's work has been developed around the curve. Not the baroque curve, with a single vanishing point, but the open curve, whose order is non-linear and infinite by nature. The same principle led the ancient Egyptians to determine the circle - through the expression π - as the image par excellence of cosmic energy and, therefore, sacred.

Helena Bacardí thus belongs to a lineage of thinkers of the nonverbal universe that puts together, in a panorama which is beyond space-time, creators such as Isamu Noguchi and Auguste Rodin or Henry Moore, Oscar Niemeyer, Eero Saarinen, and John Cage - all operating the infinite curve without a single precise vanishing point, and thus opening themselves to permanent discovery and chance.

Stone is a temporal interconnector par excellence, while the virtual is the absence of time, the ephemeral, the real-time.

Beyond the infinite curve, Helena Bacardí also operates the paradox of the material and the virtual, the natural and the artificial, the human and, we might risk to say, the supernatural - setting up a new paradox in a world where magical thinking seems to be rapidly disappearing.

Thus, the exhibition, curated by Roberta Semeraro, is a profound

reflection on these dimensions of reality. In this way, we have the artist of today, Helena Bacardí, who works with stone and robots, being and non-being, and at the same time we also have Michelangelo Buonarroti, transported from about five hundred years in the past, as a kind of enlightened phantom, virtually and materially present with his traces, his hand, his drawing.

It is a universe whose complexity reminds us of the structure of a labyrinth of mirrors.

The composition emerged from the image of such a complexity.

The musical score - as I have done since the 1970s - is made inside Virtual Reality, changing the logical structure of the musical discourse. So, we have the material and the immaterial - like what happens with stone and robots, with the present time and Michelangelo's time, or with the natural and the artificial.

Graphic virtual - in this case four-dimensional - scores can be even more precise than conventional traditional music scores, as I explain in my book *Music - A Brief History of the Western Musical Thought*, published in 2014.

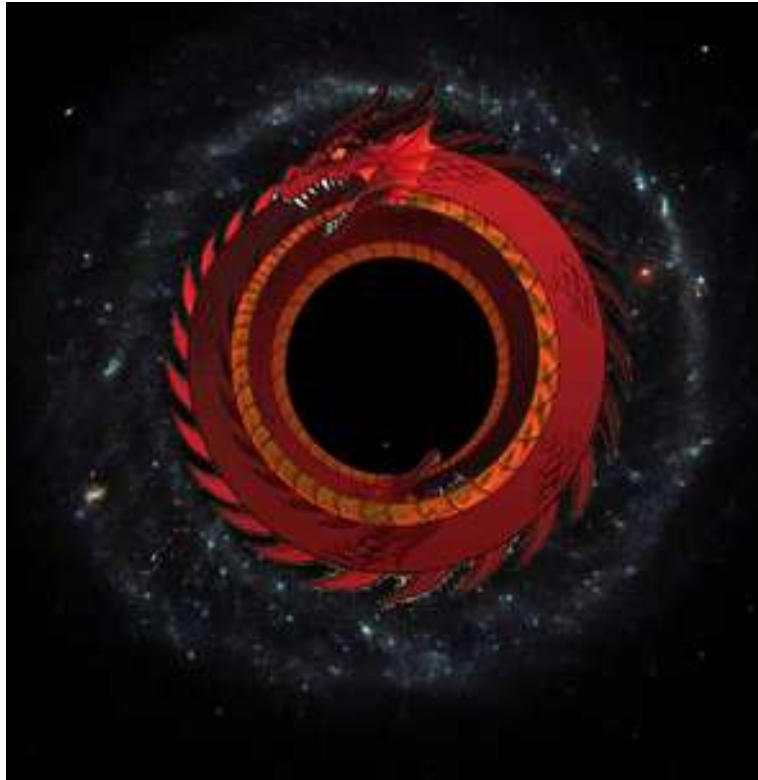
STAI is basically structured in three big simultaneous and paradoxical movements.

Since the early 1980s, many of my compositions have been structured around the number three, because they are based on Zen aesthetics - *ten, chi, jin*. This is also the case in STAI.

The virtual score, which in this case gives form and unity to the musical discourse, is the four-dimensional image of sounds of stones rotating around two continua, one larger and one smaller, one with more intensity, the other with less, one forte, the other piano—as if making a clear reference to a double figure of the ouroboros, the mythical serpent of Egyptian origin that swallows itself. It is therefore a double of a double.

In his beautiful poem *Ébauche d'un Serpent*, started in 1916, therefore some 110 years ago, French Poet Paul Valéry, who lived between 1871 and 1945, deals with the serpent as an image of the thought - as was so brilliantly showed by the great Brazilian concrete poet, another dear friend, Augusto de Campos, in his book *Paul Valéry: A Serpente e o Pensar*, published in 1984. The thought is always autophagic, whatever it may be.

The serpent as thought, here duplicated, gives the essential form of the composition from the conflict between the numbers four and three - which in Classical Antiquity indicated, respectively, the dynamics of life and of the thought, the reason, the ratio.



virtual musical score

On one hand, we have the sound of stone, or of stones spinning around everything - which constitutes a first major movement. This sound, or sounds, arise from a question: when an irregularly shaped stone falls, how does it fall? What sounds does it produce? Being irregular and hard, the stone will fall and generate different sounds at different times. Such irregularity is of a non-linear, unpredictable, and open nature, like the curves designed by Helena Bacardí.

Here, in this composition, we deal with very small stones falling together in a specific environment. The sounds of the “falls,” or impacts, of these small stones were recorded and transformed into digital, virtual data. Therefore, the stone was dematerialized through its own sounds.

As I had made many years ago in another composition, *Stones*, from 1987, also here I used an interesting indigenous musical instrument from the Brazilian Amazon, for this purpose. It is called “pau de chuva” (rain stick). It is a tube made by the Indians, with intertwined plant fibers or made inside a wooden trunk where thousands of small stones “roll” when we turn it, and unpredictably fall from one side to the other, obeying the infinite enigma of π .

I installed microphones inside this tube, which captured the sounds of the small stones “falling” when we moved the tube.

These sounds were then dematerialized and transformed into digital data. The density of the mass of sounds produced by the small stones was transformed in temporal terms, but always maintaining the same relations between the data. These dematerialized sounds were then transformed into other sounds, from other objects, but artificial ones, and controlled by a kind of robot: a computer.



rain stick

In this way, an original structure constituted by chance and designed by the small stones acquired a new dimension.

These sounds run throughout the concert, “spinning” around the room, without a linear time, uninterruptedly.

Interestingly, during the transition of the sounds to the digital system, some elements became regular repetitions—which I decided to keep, feeding the paradoxes.

This is the first movement.

The second major movement is based on a work by the brilliant Renaissance composer Josquin des Près, who lived between around 1450 and 1521. Josquin des Près was also a singer - he was considered by many of his contemporaries to be the most important singer of his time.

In 1477, at the age of twenty-seven, Josquin joined the choir of René of Anjou, who had been king of Naples between 1435 and 1442. In 1480, already rich and famous, he traveled through Italy with Cardinal Ascanio Sforza. He served Pope Innocent VIII, who held the papacy between 1484 and 1492. He also served Pope Alexander VI, who was the leader of the Church between 1492 and 1503. He also served Louis XII of France and Ercole I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara.

Michelangelo Buonarroti lived between 1475 and 1564. When he was born, Josquin des Près was twenty-five years old. Michelangelo's connection with the Papacy began in 1505, two years after Josquin had served Alexander VI, when Michelangelo was thirty years old.

Josquin des Près' presence in the Vatican was intense, as would be Michelangelo's.

Josquin des Près would become known as the “Michelangelo of Music”! His contemporaries called him the “Prince of Music.” In 1567, the Italian diplomat, mathematician, and philologist Cosimo Bartoli wrote: “About Josquin, one can say that he was, in music, a monster of Nature, just as our Michelangelo Buonarroti was in architecture, painting, and sculpture.”

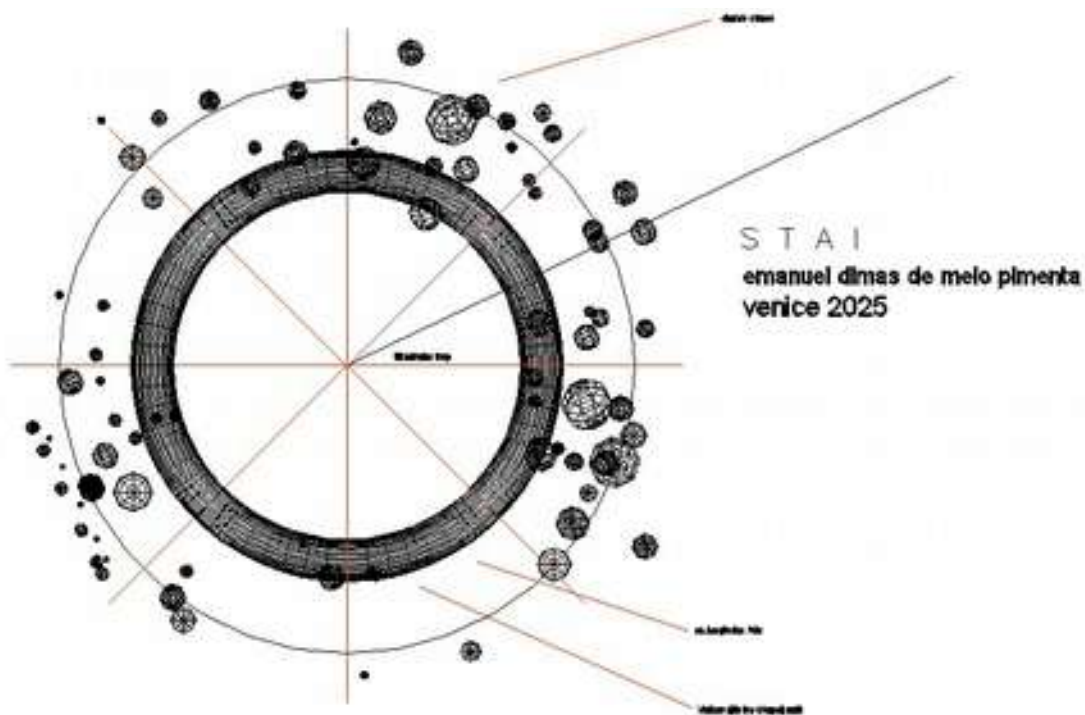
We know of no evidence of any personal connection between Josquin and Michelangelo, but it is absolutely certain that they were familiar with each other's work and most likely knew each other personally.

In 1515, when Josquin was sixty-five years old, six years before his death, he composed a piece that I find unusual and mysterious: *Praeter rerum seriem*.

This composition was written for six voices: soprano, two altos, a tenor, and two basses. It is a distribution of voices very much geared towards the lower frequencies, which was unusual. When the frequencies were low, it was said to be something mysterious. The mystery came from those frequencies. Thus, it is as if a mysterious labyrinth of sounds were being designed.

It is, therefore, a piece of vocal music, for singing, and its last words are:

*The providence of God
which disposes everything
in such a sweet way
raises your birth
to a mystery.
Our Mother, hail!*



virtual musical score, map

This second movement of STAI is a complete deconstruction and reconstruction of Josquin des Près' piece. In addition to changing the order of the sounds, what was human singing was transformed into electronic, artificial sounds.

The new order of sounds came to be defined by paratactic principles, that is, by a logic of coordination - like an open and infinite curve. In this way, the original structure of the music - such as melody, harmony, or rhythm - disappears, but mysteriously, a strange connection with the original work from 1515 remains.



inside Virtual Reality

The third major movement, much more subtle - a kind of shadow of the first, being a kind of shadow of the ouroboros - is directly related to the Vatican, a space so important to both Josquin and Michelangelo.

The physical space of the Vatican building was intensely shared by both Josquin des Près and Michelangelo Buonarroti.

The Sistine Chapel, originally known as the Capella Magna, was built by Pope Sixtus IV between 1473 and 1481. Josquin was about twenty-five years old. Between 1508 and 1512, Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Chapel. Josquin was then fifty-eight years old.

The third movement was composed from anonymous recordings of the sounds of people walking through the Vatican building in the 20th century, about five hundred years after Josquin and Michelangelo had "lived" that space.

However, this third movement is almost imperceptible, extremely subtle, with almost inaudible sounds.



Thus, we have three major movements: a first “circular” movement with the sounds of stones, a second movement based on the mysterious composition by Josquin des Prés, and a third movement with the footsteps of people walking in the Vatican building.

The concert-installation will take place in the exhibition space, the Bollani Palace—a historic twelfth-century palace that was once the residence of the famous poet, writer, and playwright Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), who is said to have been Michelangelo's model for the figure of Saint Bartholomew in the Last Judgment scene at the Sistine Chapel. In 1944, the palace was

rented for a short time by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who would go on to found his futurist association in Venice. John Ruskin knew the palace well and wrote about it.

In 2017, again curated by Roberta Semeraro, near this palace, the great artist and dear friend Marco Agostinelli and I paid an important tribute to Baroness Lucrezia De Domizio Durini, who collaborated with Joseph Beuys for several years and with whom I developed numerous joint projects over thirty-two years.

It is in this fabulous space that Helena Bacardí's exhibition is now taking place, for which I was invited to compose a concert-installation.

I met Helena Bacardí through her husband, another dear friend, the former actor and writer Graves Kiely, back in the 1990s in New York City.

Helena is a timid, silent person with a deep inner world. Her silence and quietness seem me to be a defense against an increasingly futile and volatile world.

The silence of the infinite curves of her work - so strongly connected to Nature - brings to mind a thought by John Muir, the brilliant philosopher of the forests, who lived between 1838 and 1914: "The power of imagination makes us infinite."

