

Project Proposal for VIR Viafarini-in-residence an artists and curators residency programme in Milan

The organisation, its mission and its activities

Viafarini was founded by Patrizia Brusarosco in 1991 as a non-profit organisation for the promotion of contemporary art, running an exhibition space and a documentation centre.

The **exhibition programme** focuses both on the presentation of site-specific projects by internationally known artists, and on initiatives to promote young artists in Italy selected from its Artists Archive, with no commercial purpose.

The schedule includes curatorial projects, site-specific installations, performances and events, as well as workshops, educational activities, and debates on specific issues.

Since 1995 Viafarini collaborates with the association C/O careof to organise specific documentation and information services in the field of contemporary visual arts, such as an Artists Archive, a specialised Library in contemporary art and an information service about opportunities for Italian artists and art professionals. These services, forming the **Careof & Viafarini Documentation Centre**, are offered to the public also on behalf of the Municipality of Milan. All services are accessible online through specific databases: www.bibliobit.it - www.italianarea.it - www.portfolionline.it - www.bancadatiartbox.it.

After over fifteen years of activity, Viafarini is well-known and acknowledged internationally, and in 2006 was awarded the American Center Foundation Grant.

During the last decade Viafarini concentrated its efforts on developing the following aspects implied in its mission:

Site-specific installations and projects by international artists:

The aim is to bring to Milan the main actors of the international art scene, thus taking on the role of *Kunsthalle* for the city, since the Municipality still does not offer such a public space devoted to contemporary art. Viafarini showcased, among others, Martin Creed, Mona Hatoum, Asta Gröting, Jimmie Durham, Vito Acconci, Rosemarie Trockel, Tobias Rehberger, Maja Bajevic, Marina Abramovic, Mathilde ter Heijne, Katharina Grosse, Nic Hess, Federico Herrero, Claudia & Julia Müller, Hans Op de Beeck, Bjorn Melhus, Runa Islam and Hyunjin Baik.

The Artists Archive:

The Archive collects **documentation material about Italian artists**, such as slides, photos, catalogues, videos, projects, biographies, texts etc., all viewed and selected by the responsible curators who have succeeded each other in the Archive's life.

Thanks to its independent character, the Archive allowed to build up a **network of direct relationships** with most of the Italian artists, from the beginning to the success of their careers. It is recognised as one of the main organisations for contemporary art in Italy, as testified by a research project commissioned by the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation and by the awarding in 2006 of the American Center Foundation Grant. The Viafarini Archive is also collaborating in a publication

about Italian artists, issued by the Galleria Civica di Trento on occasion of Manifesta 7, which will be held in Trento (Italy) in 2008.

Viafarini acted as a pioneer in Italy also in the implementation of **information technologies**: all artists and their materials are recorded in a database accessible online (www.portfolioonline.it), containing images and detailed captions of over 11.500 works of around 550 talented up-coming artists. Italian Area, a second database documenting around one hundred selected artists representative of the Italian art scene with extensive curricula and bibliographies, as well as complete documentation of the works, is also published online at www.italianarea.it. Due to the large amount of information and the possibility to carry out researches according to different criteria, these databases constitute innovatory and easily accessible **tools for research** about Italian contemporary art.

Artists' mobility

Since 1996 Viafarini has been running the **Milan Studio for the Australia Council for the Arts**, which allowed several Australian visual artists and designers to spend three-months-residencies in the studio located in the Viafarini premises.

In order to foster also the mobility of Italian artists, Viafarini started the data bank **ArtBox**, online since 1997, containing information regarding art organisations and schools in Italy and abroad, as well as residency programmes, competitions, grants, internships, financial support for specific projects (www.bancadatiartbox.it). Recently ArtBox issues a periodical newsletter, which informs artists and art professionals by e-mail about upcoming deadlines for selected opportunities.

With **Milano on the move** in 2006 Viafarini started a programme to stimulate Italian artists' mobility. Foreign art critics who represent international art organisations are invited to Milan to study the Italian art scene under the guidance of the curator in charge of the Artists Archive, offering them the opportunity to increase their knowledge of what is happening in Italy in the visual arts, by studying the Viafarini Archive and databases, as well as through visits to the artists' studios. As a result, Viafarini consolidated its relationships with some of the most important residency programmes in Europe, such as the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam and the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin.

Future developments

In March 2008 Viafarini will undertake an important step to develop its exhibition and documentation activities, establishing the **DoCVA Documentation Centre for Visual Arts** together with C/O careof in new premises at a site owned by the City of Milan called La Fabbrica del Vapore (The Steam Factory), which will constitute a multidisciplinary cultural centre devoted to youth's creativity. This larger and more public space, will give Viafarini the opportunity to focus on another aspect of its mission, which is to **widen the audience for contemporary art**.

In this sense, Viafarini and C/O careof worked out a three-year project, supported by Fondazione Cariplo, aiming at spreading to a wider public the issue of cultural diversity often at the centre of the debate in contemporary art. During the first three years at DoCVA, a series of exhibition projects, educational activities addressed to the general public including pupils and students, as well as workshops and internship programs addressed to the art public, will involve artists, curators and other scholars from different cultural backgrounds with the goal to foster an intercultural education towards a new citizenship by showing, disseminating and interpreting the universal message of art.

In view of this big step, Viafarini is also redesigning its website, which will function as a sort of **portal**, giving access to the websites of Viafarini, DoCVA, C/O careof, as well as to the Documentation Centre's databases.

In the meantime, Viafarini plans to start a new activity in its "historic" premises in Via Farini (this is the name of the street), i.e. the **VIR Viafarini-in-residence** programme.

Developing side by side a Residency centre—by definition a place for exchange for artists and curators from different backgrounds—and to focus the activities of a nearby public centre for contemporary art on the issue of cultural diversity, gives a unique opportunity for mutual exchange and advantage for both: Artists and curators in-residence will have a public art centre offering a rich programme of exhibitions, video screenings, lectures, artists' talks and workshops at walking distance, while DoCVA will have the opportunity to involve artist and curators hosted by VIR Viafarini-in-Residence in its programme by inviting them to realise exhibition projects or give lectures and talks as well as hold workshops.

The residency programme

VIR, first residency programme for artists and curators in Milan, is addressed to artists and curators upcoming on the international panorama, who will be invited to Milan for research purposes, staying for three months on average, in one of the apartments made available by the association. Artists will further have the opportunity to use one of the studios gained from the current exhibition space in via Farini 35. In these workshops they will be put in the position to develop their works within an adequate space attended by art professionals—invited by terms of a series of organised studio visits—and thus to establish opportunities of exchange and debate.

During an open day at the end of the residency, also the public will be invited to visit the artists' studios. Taking major international studio programmes as a model (such as the "Open Atelier" at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam) the traditional concept of exhibition—which opens with an event and then occupies the space for a longer period—is reversed.

The artists and curators in-residence at Viafarini will have at their use all the services offered by the DoCVA Documentation Centre for Visual Arts at La Fabbrica del Vapore, as well as assistance and advice by the Viafarini staff, who will be helpful in obtaining the maximum achievements from the stay in Milan. A series of studio visits by critics and art professionals will be organised during the residency.

The premises

In 2008 Viafarini's exhibition and documentation activities will be moved to new premises at Fabbrica del Vapore; the current premises in Via Farini 35 will be turned into two artists' studios at ground floor level and four apartments for artists and curators on the first floor. Each unit is a 30-square-metre self-contained unit, consisting of two furnished rooms. The artists-in-residence will therefore be able to use a studio for the duration of their residency, on average lasting three months.

Budget

The budget for the start up of the programme amounts to 150.000 Euro for the first year.

Funding

The project started in autumn 2007 with the contribution and the collaboration of ACACIA Associazione Amici Arte Contemporanea Italiana, association of the most important Italian collectors, established with the aim to foster important projects for the city of Milan such as the necessary public museum for contemporary art and other valuable international programmes like VIR.

Other potential institutional partners are being sought; to the moment mainly public bodies have been contacted, such as the Province of Milan and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Further, the aim is to set up agreements with foreign national funding bodies to finance the stay of one or more artists/curators in Milan during the year. Currently there is an ongoing agreement with the Australia Council for the Arts, which since 1996 reserves a studio to Australian artists in Milan.

Assumptions

Viafarini, since ever a Centre for experimentation, addresses its activities in the first place to artists and critics, whom it offers materials, places and initiatives stemming from the concept of art as creation of situations, projects, transactions and interactive exchange of ideas.

The aim is to create a **platform for contemporary art**, offering artists and curators, as well as the city of Milan new opportunities not only for exhibiting but also producing art and culture.

The result will be a structure where the artistic process can be turned inside out, where the artists work side-by-side with art professionals and the public, where concept and production become “public” phases of a project. Artists and critics, like the public, will benefit of a space-time dedicated to creativity, of a place for exchange of concept and research for contemporary culture.

More than ever, art does not only feel the need for visibility. Artists ask not only to exhibit. Processes and ways of conceiving and carrying out of artistic research are changing and gaining a more and more relevant role. The issues that art decided to approach or to make its own require commitment, time for debate, places for exchange of ideas, assuming that new critic and creative perspectives can open up through dialogue.

In this sense, the programme intends to support upcoming experiences and attitudes in the fields of art and art criticism, starting from the belief that, only by integrating research with direct contact with artists and their creative processes, it is possible to build up a new critical approach. It offers therefore not only a **training opportunity** and a **space for artistic experimentation**, but also a **place in which the public can participate in an artistic process** in all its phases, to share motivations, thoughts and results.

In Italy artists residencies are still rare and in many cases unstructured. As a matter of fact in the rest of Europe and in America residencies are not only long-lasting experiences, but are also considered to be fundamental steps in training for art professionals.

Viafarini, with the Australia Council Studio, has been the first to promote a programme to host artists in Milan. Now, thanks to its move to its new premises, Viafarini intends to develop this aspect of its activities and to start the **first structured residency programme in Italy**.

It will offer a residency linked to an art organisation running a regular schedule of exhibitions and a series of documentation and information services supporting the resident in contacting Italian art institutions and professionals, and to develop specific projects to carry out in Italy. Artists will thus find an ideal situation for conceiving, producing and divulging their works, together with the support of Viafarini, who detains a strategic role in the Milanese art world.

Viafarini-in-residence is also an answer to the current trend to cultural nomadism, to allow foreign artists and curators to get in touch with a set of a geographical, historic and social contexts, an artistic reality, a system of human and professional relationships which is new and will give a lasting imprinting in their experience. It will enable to develop a reciprocity between local and international context through the involvement and the dialogue with foreign public and private institutions. The residency is a worthy instrument for increasing knowledge and technique, through the encounter with professionals, it is therefore the **place for intercultural dialogue *par excellence***.

This is particularly important for a city like Milan, which on one hand offers an efficient network of commercial galleries offering a good overview, but on the other hand lacks in independent institutions for contemporary art. Artists find a fertile ground in terms of stimuli and contacts in the city, and an easily accessible launching pad in the residency programme.

Viafarini-in-residence constitutes a long-term project which focuses on the **local potentials to make it visible to an international public** and at the same time to draw suggestions and real reciprocal working impulses. The interaction with the territory is therefore a funding aspect of this project, as it is capable to make synergies with the city’s cultural life come true.

Starting from these assumptions the project constitutes an **added value on the territory** thanks to the opportunity for exchange with international art systems, as well as a **workshop** in which cutting-edge researches in art and art criticism converge and develop.