

Diary of a Young Boat

by AM Hoch



at *Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca* in Venice, Italy
curated by Professor Silvia Evangelisti

A crowdfunding and fundraising project

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introduction

The Diary of a Young Boat is a kind of interdimensional radio play—sometimes with and sometimes without any actual radios involved. The shape-shifting forms this ongoing series takes reflect the heart of its embedded narrative: the fictional aural diary of a pubescent girl who miraculously transforms into a boat. The installations in this series are remnants—like shucked-off cocoons—of the girl's abandoned selves, which cumulatively create a portrait of a self that isn't defined by a solid mass or bounded by a contour. Instead, what emerges is an authentic representation of the delicate messiness of being: a precariously balanced system of perception, memory and imagination.

The notion of “embedded narratives” has been key in the development of my interdimensional installations, in which suspended sculptures incorporate the space around them, while embedded videos and language (written or aural) are portals into another time and space.
—AM Hoch

Numerous site-specific installations and/or performances of the *Diary of a Young Boat* have premiered in Italy since 2011, but the permanent installation and performance of the “The Diary” planned for the **Women's Prison in Giudecca in Venice** (*Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca*) provides a particularly apt incarnation of the “*Young Boat*.” The merging of the upcoming site-specific installations with their surroundings in the Women's Prison in Venice will not only allow the work to take on deeper layers of meaning, but also allow viewers—the inmates firsthand, and the general public from afar—to engage with the artwork as a vital part of their lives.



AM HOCH; *Boat Souls*; DETAIL of sculpture/painting; approx 54 x 83 in., (137cm x 211 cm) 2008/2011

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Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca



The Women's Prison in Giudecca in Venice, Italy, is internationally renowned for its dedication to providing a safe place for the rehabilitation and recovery of its inmates. The effectiveness of its focus on regeneration and growth rather than on punishment has garnered worldwide attention. Its unique approach and innovative programs help inmates to develop a sense of autonomy, self-respect and interrelatedness with others, both within the prison and in the surrounding community. A choice of programs enables inmates to acquire skills and training that prepare them for work after their release, as well as involves them in a positive way with their immediate environment, such as:

- [Orto delle Meraviglie \(Garden of Marvels\)](#), a small organic farm within the prison grounds, where inmates cultivate vegetables for their own consumption and for sale in local Venetian markets;
- The produce from the garden also is used in the prison's production of health and beauty products which are sold in the Giudecca-Venice community and beyond
- An atelier for artisanal tailoring within the prison produces a line of hand-crafted women's clothing as well as costumes for the *Teatro La Fenice*, the renowned Venetian opera house

And perhaps most striking is the way the arts—theater, literary, and visual arts—are incorporated into the inmates' programs, encouraging their engagement in challenging projects, and expressing and exploring their candid responses.

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art and context

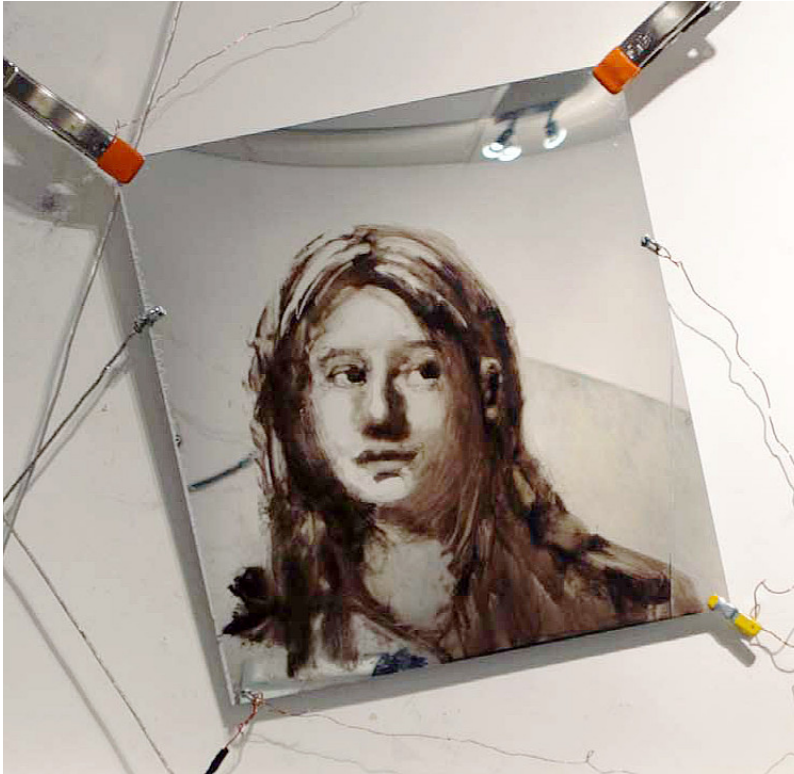
In recent years, writers and film directors have met with inmates of *Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca*, stimulating dialogue and mutual discovery; this reciprocity is an essential aspect of AM Hoch's installation and performance project in the Giudecca Prison. The important role art can play in prisons—providing opportunities for self-reflection, transformation and growth—is a subject of national and international interest. The authentic rapport AM Hoch has already begun to establish with the inmates and prison administrators at *Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca* confirms the mutual understanding and exchange that can exist between artists and those incarcerated.



AM HOCH, *Weird Triptych for a Young Boat with Text*, mixed media; 16.4 x 9.5 ft., 177 x 215 cm, 2013

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content and context



Using her *metis* (μῆτις)—the archetypal force within each of us that enables us to free ourselves from our most difficult dilemmas—the Young Boat transcends the ordinary limits of time and space. *The Diary* reveals in visual imagery and wry, coded storytelling what is normally hidden from view: the sexual violence against young girls.

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concept and context



AM Hoch, *Cocoon Boat*; second level of castle tower in Bagnara di Romagna: mixed media including painted mirror; 14.4ft (H) x 21.2 ft (Diam); 2011

In a scenario familiar to survivors of abuse, the incarcerated become invisible, both physically and in the collective consciousness of the world outside—even when the prison population expands to epidemic proportions, as in the United States.

In the installation and performance of *Diary of a Young Boat* in the Women's Prison of Giudecca-Venice, the usual positions of privilege, visibility, and connectedness are inverted: the firsthand experience of the artwork is primarily allowed only to the inmates; the "outside" general public will experience it only through secondary mediums, such as photographs, video documentaries, remote video installations (hidden in discreet sites in public locations in Venice and Giudecca), and accounts of the inmates.

This ironic twist—calling into question our notions of inside and outside, and our awareness of the realities that are embedded within our world yet hidden from our perceptions—adds an important conceptual level to the "*The Diary*." The general public will view the artwork only through "windows" of sorts—viscerally and conceptually experiencing a world usually outside their awareness. This experience of the "*The Diary*" is uncannily fitting to its content.

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the Young Boat in Venice



Venice, the most improbable of cities— where the line between the possible and the impossible blur—is for this reason one of the most probable places for the *Diary of a Young Boat* to materialize. For many, Venice represents living testimony that through the powers of imagination and intention, the miraculous can materialize.

This city, where ordinary logic is suspended, provides the perfect setting for "*The Diary*":

"The tenuous rigging of memory and language, perception and imagination that holds a life together has always been the source of fascination for me—perhaps because my own rigging has always seemed particularly precarious. ... In Diary of a Young Boat, imaginary boats become models of the impossibly delicate messiness of being ... For me, a self can't be described by a solid mass with a distinct beginning and end, but rather it is a mysteriously balanced system of weights and forces—a mesmerizing tangle of idiosyncrasies and yearnings and questions." —AM Hoch

In 2017, the Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art will coincide with AM Hoch's installation project, offering a symbolic bridge between Venetian citizens, Venice Biennale visitors and the Giudecca Prison for Women, while providing a potential source of stimulation, insight and dialog for the inmates and prison personnel.

EXCERPT FROM *THE DIARY*:

Last night, the Dog gave a lecture about aerodynamics. My sister asked him something like “How do airplanes stay up” and he started going into this whole long explanation, like he always does if you’re stupid enough to ask him something.

I personally haven’t asked a question since the end of fifth grade and I really wish my sister would stop too. I mean, even if I want the salt, I just wait for someone else to ask for it. It can take a while, but I don’t mind. That’s because it became clear to me that it was ESSENTIAL that [my father] never hear my voice again or see the inside of my mouth. In fact, the thought that he might ever catch even a glimpse of my teeth filled me with such nausea, that I could barely ever eat. My mother says that’s why I’m so small ... because I never eat ... she says I’ve “stunted my growth.” ...

—AM Hoch, excerpt from Entry 4,
Diary of a Young Boat

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collateral events

In addition to the main installation and performance of the *Diary of a Young Boat* at *Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca*, the following parallel events are intended:

- An exhibition, in a Venetian venue, in conjunction with the 2017 Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art, that will include another installation from the *Young Boat* series, along with photo documentation of the three pieces permanently installed at the prison
- The screening of a video documentary of the step-by-step development of the project at the prison;
- Three tiny video monitors showing three distinct video loops related to the "The Diary" will be imbedded in three discreet locations in Giudecca and/or on the main island of Venice, providing windows into the usually "invisible" world of the inmates. For previous examples of AM Hoch's use of hidden videos to reveal inner worlds in her installations, go to:
 - ["interstices" installation at the Alice Austen House Museum, New York City](#)
 - [Description and New York Times review](#)
 - [Documentary video of Mitosis: Formation of Daughter Cells at the Beall Center for Art and Technology, Irvine, California](#)



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further project developments



AM HOCH, *Young Boat (Future Reflection Sister Past)*, installation at SetUp Art Fair 2015 , Bologna, Italy; approx 130 x 240 cm, (51 x 94.5 in.), 2015

- Publication of *The Diary of a Young Boat*, as a literary text, first in Italian translation for the inmates at the Women's Prison in Giudecca-Venice, and ultimately in bilingual (English/Italian) edition;
- Radio play version of the "*The Diary*" broadcast in its entirety (in Italian and/or in English);
- Urban interventions of "*The Diary*" in Bologna, Italy, and cities in the USA (for example, Columbus, Ohio), accompanied by video and photographic documentation of the various phases of the projects;
- Additional installations and/or performances in other women's prisons in Europe and/or the US;
- Group exhibitions, including international photographers invited to document the *Diary of a Young Boat*

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project objectives



AM HOCH, *Gone*; mixed media, approx 98.5 inches (h) x 39.5 in. (w) x 36 in. (d), (250cm x 125cm x 100cm x 91 cm), 2010/11

The key objectives of this project are to:

- install three pieces from the *Diary of a Young Boat* in *Casa di Reclusione Femminile della Giudecca*, a context of international relevance—curated by the renowned Professor Silvia Evangelisti
- encourage the notions of *metamorphosis* and *transformation* through introspection and self-awareness in the inmates and personnel of the Giudecca Women's Prison;
- directly involve a number of interested inmates in the various phases of the project, such as preliminary discussions leading to the permanent installation and the dramatic performances of *The Diary* within the prison
- make permanently available to the inmates and personnel of the prison three site-specific art installations as potential sources of resilience, stimulation and catharsis in everyday life;
- publish and disseminate the text both in Italian and in English to the inmates (potentially spurring interest in language studies offered);
- develop and implement a project communication campaign designed to enhance, disseminate and share this experience at The Women's Prison of Giudecca-Venice as a possible model for further projects;
- focus attention on contexts of violence and exploitation, particularly against women and girls;
- disseminate the ideals and practices of the Giudecca Prison as a prototype for prison reform, sharing aspects of the inmates' everyday life with Venetians and the international audience of the Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art.

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artist's postscript



AM HOCH, *Young Girl on a Ladder*,
painted mirror on ladder, approx 75
in. x 15.75 in., (190cm x 40 cm), 2011

Artist's note:

There is a line from the 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi that I carry within me ever since I first read it decades ago:

*"From the moment you came into this world, a ladder
was placed in front of you that you might escape."*

My sister chose it as the epitaph for her early grave; for me, it could be an epigraph for the *Diary of a Young Boat*—in fact, ropes and ladders are recurring elements in the installations and text.

—AM Hoch

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bio



AM Hoch (a.k.a. Amy Hotch) has exhibited her paintings and interdisciplinary installations combining painting, sculpture, original text, and digital technologies in museums and galleries in the United States and Europe, including: *"Young Boat (Future Reflection Sister Past)"*, a Special Project installation for SetUp Art Fair 2015, Bologna, Italy; a live broadcast of excerpts (in Italian) of "The Diary" from Bologna's Radio Città del Capo from Casa dei Pensieri Libreria for the national Festa dell'Unità; *"Diary of a Young Boat in Three Movements"*, a site-specific installation with live narrator at Cartoleria 18 Società Cooperativa, Bologna, Italy; an installation at Laboratorio degli Angeli, Bologna; *"Metamorfosi di una barca"*, a site-specific installation in the Museo del Castello, Bagnara di Romagna, Italy; *"Mitosis: Formation of Daughter Cells"*, an interdisciplinary installation, commissioned and exhibited by the Beall Center for Art and Technology, in Irvine, California, and later adapted for the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Spoleto, Italy; *"interstices"*, a site-specific installation at the Alice Austen House Museum, New York; *"I keep forgetting ... it's not working"*, a site-specific installation at the Kunsthau Tacheles, Berlin, Germany. Solo painting exhibitions include one-person shows at Deutsches Haus, Columbia University, New York City; and LaMama La Galleria, NYC.

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Ms. Hoch has received numerous grants throughout her career, including: an artist-in-residency from Altos De Chavon, in the Dominican Republic; a project grant from the State Senate in Berlin, Germany; two Gottlieb emergency grants. She was a research artist at the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Snug Harbor Museum, New York. Ms. Hoch received a large-scale commission from the Beall Center for Art and Technology to launch their 2004 season. In 2014, AM Hoch was awarded a generous grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

Born in New York City, where she lived and worked for twenty-three years, AM Hoch currently splits her time between Bologna, Italy, and Columbus, Ohio.