

**THE HAPPENSTANCE.04**  
My Experience as a Fellow at  
The Happenstance

Scotland  
+ Venice



# STRETCH

ESTENDERE  
SUL MARCHIO-PAGINA



Le llaves de la Casa de Vecchio entrance to The Happenstance  
Image: B. and Hayley

# THE HAPPEN STANCE

**The Happenstance was Scotland's contribution to the 16th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice, 2018**

In this dispatch, architecture student, Theo Shack, as part of the research he carried out as a Fellow of the project, looks at what immersive education meant as part of The Happenstance and Venice, and how the mantra, “expecting to get lucky,” opened up “seeing things and possibilities that might not otherwise happen if you were busy carrying out the plan already made.” The five students who took part as Fellows played a key part in the project. The programme offered self-led research, professional development opportunities and a time of exceptional experiences.



Scotland + Venice



**This publication is one in a series of twelve reflections on The Happenstance. Click here or go to [ads.org.uk/the-happenstance-archive-dispatches](https://ads.org.uk/the-happenstance-archive-dispatches) to access the other publications.**



year of young people  
bliadhna na h-òigridh  
2018



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# Introduction

## Scotland + Venice Fellowship Programme 2018

In partnership with the Association of Scottish Schools of Architecture, the Scotland and Venice Partners organised the first Scotland + Venice Fellowship Programme to provide research and personal development opportunities during Scotland's Year of Young People.

The programme offers five students of architecture the opportunity to contribute to The Happenstance programme in a steward-research role whilst conducting their own self-led research during one of the most prestigious international architecture events.

Following a high number of applications and interviews with shortlisted candidates, the inaugural Fellows were:

Theo Shack – Year 4  
Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture,  
University of Edinburgh

Iga Świercz – Year 2  
Department of Architecture,  
University of Strathclyde

Eilish Camplisson – Year 4  
Architecture and Urban Planning,  
University of Dundee

Robert Colvin –  
Masters by Conversion  
Mackintosh School of Architecture,  
Glasgow School of Art

Lucia Medina-Uriarte – Year 3  
Scott Sutherland School of  
Architecture and Built Environment,  
Robert Gordon University.

Each fellow developed their own critical thoughts about the 16th International Architecture Exhibition theme of Freespace, responding through a range of exhibited mediums.

### Theo Shack

*The Art of the Unintended Encounter*

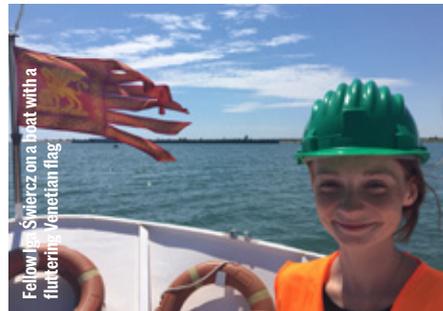
The Art of the Unintended Encounter is an investigation into the rules of the encounters at The Happenstance in Venice. The research is divided into eleven subheadings that explore and critique the processes employed, with a view to how this type of intervention can be replicated in other places away from the Biennale context.

### Iga Świercz

*All that is Transparent*

The research is a collection of stories from people the author met in Venice simply by chance. It is a catalogue of their memories. An attempt to describe a person through the transparency of the spaces associated with the conversations they had. Through this set of interviews, meetings and conversations, the most important moments of their lives are discovered.

Simultaneously abstract and analytical, the drawings and models detail the essence of subjective mental and physical experience of place.



### Eilish Camplisson

*Running Threads though Venice*

Running threads through Venice, is a record and exploration of the routes taken by people through Venice before finding/arriving at The Happenstance in Palazzo Zenobio. It seeks to examine how the space created by The Happenstance team relates or improves on that of the current free spaces within Venice.



### Robert Colvin

*Drawing the Intangible*

The research aims to construct new tools for observing, recording and experiencing the relationship between architecture and place. Developing beyond a simplified representation of locale, this research seeks to examine the role of architecture and environment in the choreography of daily life.

### Lucia Medina Uriarte

*45.4088 N 2.3155 E: And vice versa*

The two pieces of research look at the question of the city essence and the spirit of place: what is it that makes of a location what it is? Constructed purely as documentation, they aim not to draw a definite conclusion, but rather to evoke an impression upon the reader of what the city of Venice might mean.

“An urban phenomenology”, distils a series of conversations into stories and memories narrated by the city’s long and short term visitors, becoming a catalogue of experiences.

“The meeting place”, was put together as a reflection of our own position in Venice: a corner, or a point, where opposites met. Is the city, perhaps, not so much its components, but in the way they come together?

**'under the light of the gaze of others we grow tall'**



The five fellows sitting on the armature  
Image: Morag Bain

**'often, much of what you learn is not what you set out to learn'**



Sketch of the pole in the garden  
Image: Iga Swiercz

**'a place bristling with the art of the unintended encounter'**





The Happenstance was accessible to all who visited  
Image: Brian Hartley

# My Experience as a Fellow at The Happenstance

Theo Shack

When I think of education at The Happenstance, the word that comes to mind is immersion. Joining The Happenstance project was certainly an experience of education, but education in the greatest definition of the word. A real education is to be plunged into something, a full-body immersion. Joining the Scotland + Venice project as a fellow was a case of being doubly immersed, immersed firstly in Venice and then again immersed in the ways of The Happenstance, in Peter McCaughey's (lead artist and anti-curator) process, and the ways of all the very various architects and artists who together made it happen.

Being in Venice was an education in itself, a place rich with other

people's lives and loves. We learnt from the people who are Venice, who call it home. Being in Dorsoduro, The Happenstance came truly to the hearty and unique population who are the real Venetians, those who live here still, we joined in their sagras (annual feasts and celebrations) and they joined ours. Their children were the most prominent inhabitants of our garden. As a result, The Happenstance felt like a real exchange, a cross-over, a sharing of hearts and souls and ways, from Scotland to Venice and back again, and all in the most spontaneous manner.

Often, much of what you learn is not what you set out to learn, you commit to setting out upon

the journey, but beyond that, the winding road will take you through, and past, all sorts of things you might not expect. The Happenstance was a project, that from the outset, was committed to this way of being. It was not pretending to know what would happen beforehand, but rather, to coin Peter's phrase was, 'expecting to get lucky', with one eye out and one ear to the ground, listening and so ready to leap into, and onto, whatever odd or exciting things might come our way. And in this way, because you need to pay attention, you often see things that you might not otherwise see, if you were busy carrying out the plan already made.

On one day, I met a small man browsing through our free library at The Happenstance, we started talking. Giovanni was a nautical engineer who lived and breathed Venice, he loved and knew every marshy spot on the lagoon, and was so excited by our ideas.

A few days later, on a bright June morning that happened to be my birthday, I was woken especially early by Rob and Lucia, the other Fellows who I shared a room with. We were going on a journey to the secret island of Poveglia, an elusive and mysterious place. Giovanni was taking us there. Bleary-eyed, we sat a while at the water's edge before he turned up in his little boat. "I'm sorry I'm late, I had to finish an application for EU funding." We sped out across the Guidecca Canal, heading due south out into the lagoon, in the low

misty light of the morning. Behind us, Venice was becoming visible as another place, with the mountains that embrace it rising blue behind the horizon that you can never see from within.

By lines of wooden stakes, the fishermen were, on this early morning, emptying their nets and sorting through their catch. Our boat sidled up to theirs for a long good morning, to discover all the names and quantities of the fish, their numbers this year, and observations on the state of the lagoon, before saying cheerful farewells and carrying on towards Poveglia. Driving up the inside of the island, through a dense overgrown canal, and mooring by an old bridge, we set out to explore the wilderness, dense with undergrowth. You could just walk around the water's edge, then by old paths into the centre, where a ruined hospital stands like an Inca temple, with trees growing out of its walls. We returned to The Happenstance with armfuls of greengages from the fruit trees, a living evidence of our journey, and all before breakfast. You could blink and it would have passed you by, but in those magical few hours out on the lagoon, in the calm and the wild, there was an encompassing intuitive education, an opening up, an appearing outwards, a setting within time, a joining of present with the past, a fullness hard to fathom.

It could be said that the biggest thing I learnt from this trip, was just how possible things are if you



Fellow Theo Shack building a cone structure with a young Venetian  
Image: Bashirat Khan

Fellow Lucia Medina Uriarte (second right) with young Venezuelians



Rob Colvin takes a selfie in the busy garden of Palazzo Zenobio



are simply awake and alive to the people you might meet by chance. Peter has something of the magical about him, and The Happenstance was a place bristling with the art of the unintended encounter. A trip to the coffee shop in the morning could turn into an afternoon concert, or a chat in the garden become a raucous evening of folk dancing, and like that we learnt. Or perhaps, learnt how to learn. Peter urged us every day to “treat the next person who walks into the garden as the most important person you will ever meet in your life”. Quite a tall ask, and one that, (not always, but often), created the most wonderful events and occasions and conversations. Sometimes, it is the mere act of paying that much attention to somebody that means they feel like they can rise to the occasion, to meet your interest and

excitement in them, with ideas of their own about your project. Under the light of the gaze of others, we grow tall.

Socrates’s school taught through rigorous questioning - the students were questioned until they discovered a curiosity for questions they never knew they had. It is this curiosity at the world, this questioning, that draws us first to want to learn; wonder is the starting point and education (at its best) grows this.

The Happenstance was an education as an immersion. Immersion in a place, in a culture, in a history, in a philosophy of spontaneity and interchange. As an immersive education, we practised this curiosity and questioning every day. And, as a marker of education, I leave with more questions than when I began.

## RESOURCES

- [The Art of the Unintended Encounter, Theo Shack](#)
- [All that is transparent, Iga Swiercz](#)
- [Running Threads Through Venice, Eilish Camplisson](#)
- [The Meeting Place, Lucia Medina Uriarte](#)
- [Lininal Topography, Drawing the Intangible, Robert Colvin](#)
- [Related Films](#)

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Venetian children building a cone structure  
Image: Rob Colvin

**The experience of immersive education, and the possibilities that might not otherwise happen if you were busy carrying out the plan already made.**



Palone Gonfiato by Hannah Brackston and Daniele Sando  
Image: Basharat Khan

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