



TEKST EN BEELD MARCO KÄLLER

MUD, FISH AND ARMANI AROUND THE CORNER

In Treviso the plane routinely coughs up its passengers and luggage. Via Venice we travel to Chioggia that lies to the south of the lagoon and which is where our boat lays ready. The road to Chioggia runs past dreary industries, ploughed thick fields and the Canale Nuovissimo that continuously follows the road. The final part of the journey takes us over a dike and through shallow water with a wood of poles and nets. Chioggia presents itself with an industrial area and a rusty decaying ship on the roadstead. Via the boulevard, caged beach pleasure and a lot of concrete, the journey ends in the centre of Sottamarina.

After a short walk we find the rental base of 'Rendez-Vous-Fantasia'. On the dock is 'Herr Insturktor', already awaiting us and in fine German he gives us a tour around the boat. The map that he hands over is, to our dismay, in no way like a water map we are familiar with. This tourist map eventually appears to be sufficient. Contrary to the map that is for sale in the harbours, which is so detailed that the black ink makes the boats, ferries, depth lines, harbours and restaurants merge into a single black spot.

We take a Sunday afternoon stroll through the city and saunter with the Italians through the main streets, quench our thirst with a large glass of beer on a terrace and find a restaurant on the Canale Lombardo Interno. After the meal we buy a bottle of wine there and the price predicts an incredible headache. Below deck we toast to a prosperous voyage.

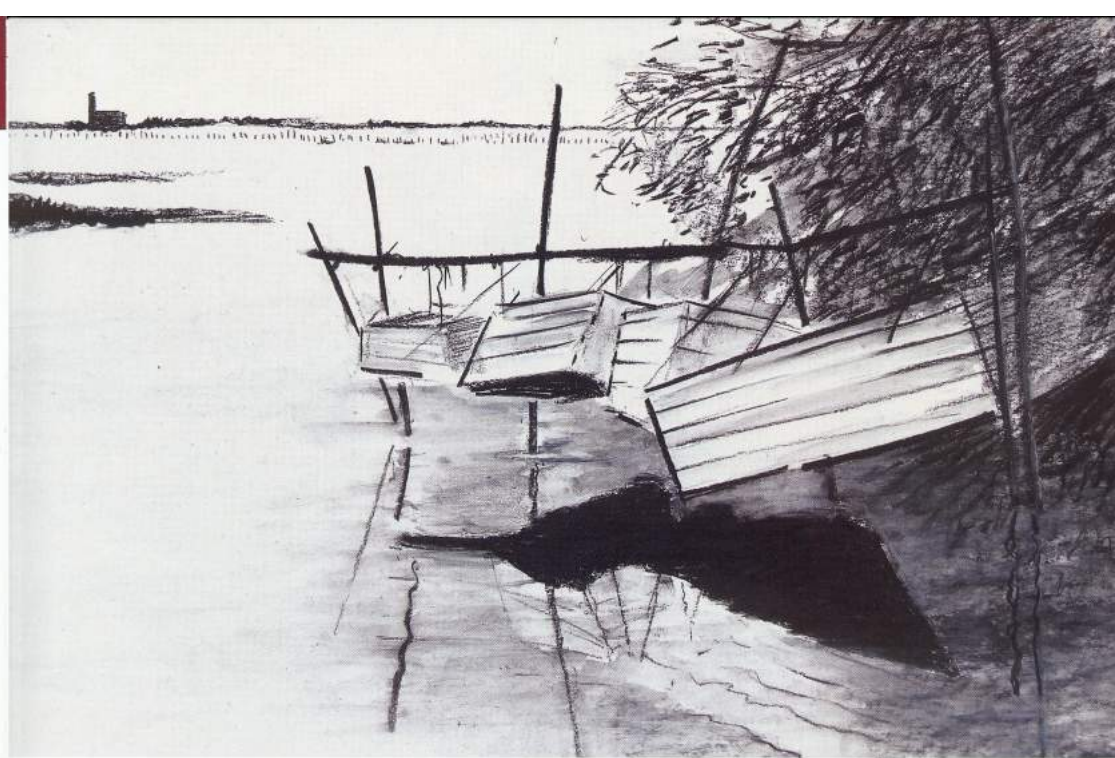
Early next morning we are roughly awoken. The boat slaps on the waves of the fishermen's fleet which is sailing out. The day starts with doing groceries, hauling all sort of things, drinking coffee and setting sail towards the northern part of the lagoon. The harbour of Chioggia lies behind us

and endless rows of mooring posts, the 'bricoli', point the way through the waterways, the 'Canale'. The water is covered with fishermen boats, mud scooping labour ships and speedy speedboats.

Improvised building creations on poles swarm in front of Pellestrina. It is an inspiring spectacle of lines, spheres and colours built by fishermen with the most diverse materials. The next town along the coast, Portosecco, is dominated by a wharf with red hoisting cranes and a red painted ocean ship on the red-tainted reflecting water.

After many exchanges of names, the Canale di Caroman ends as Canale di San Pietro. It is here that we cross the Bocca di Malamocco, the deep entrance for the tankers to the dreary petrochemical industry in the west of the lagoon. Through the Canale Rochella, past the Isola Poveglia and the crumbling walls of the monastery of San Spirito, gradually more of Venice becomes visible. From the Canale Orlanda we catch a glimpse of the San Marco through an exciting peephole. The Canale di San Nicolo is extremely busy with shipping traffic. Ferries draw white stripes, water taxi's glide gracious turns and rusty vaporetto plow through the silt blue water.

We dock in a canal belonging to the silent and country green island Le Vignole. A single inhabitant strolls with a grocery bag along the quay and sport rowers in sandolo's move their oars steadily through the water. Ecotourism appears the most important activity and there is an open-air restaurant that, in the season, welcomes guests from across the water. It must be wonderful to take a dip here in the water and to linger at the table under the trees with a view of the Arsenal of Venice. With the vaporetto we are quick to





arrive in the city where Armani and Benetton expose the total contrast between mud and luxury in this lagoon.

The next day we set out after breakfast and sail towards Punta Sabioni. On port lies the old establishment of San Andrea. In early times the lagoon was closed off with a chain, originating from this establishment, to protect the powerful city of Venice against intruders. Like many others, this building is now in a ravaged state. Nothing is resistant to the combination of salt, moisture and the movement of the water.

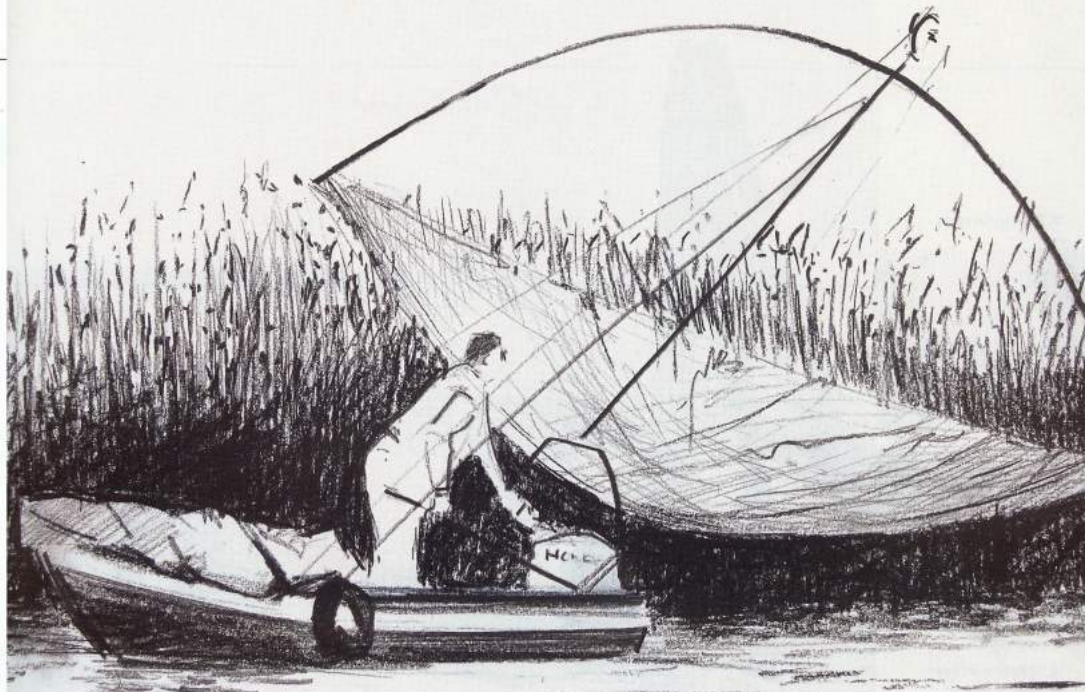
Above Le Vignole behind us, the steel masts of the light line which indicates the 300 degrees sailing route in the tidal in and outlet at night are visible. We sail towards a complicated situation. The passage, as indicated on the map appears to have been subject to drastic changes due to the construction of the Mose Sea wall. With a lot of effort and help of a rib with red flag and flashing light we manage to find the new made sailing channel. On Punta Sabioni the ferries and tour boats load hordes of passengers for a trip to Venice, Murano, and Burano.

At Treporti we turn inside. Unfortunately it appears that the bridge does not open anymore and we have to choose an alternative route.

After passing a couple of beautiful villas, the trip sets forth over a broad Canale San Felice. Fishermen lie with their anchored boats. They scoop shrimps with a net tied to a seven meter long stick.

Canale del Bari: air, water, salt marshes, and bricoli. A minimal landscape lies in front of us. The tide is the only action. At Lio Maggiore the opposite is true. With the current the boat sails ahead rapidly. Rows of bricoli stagger in contrast of each other. Exciting compositions are created with silhouettes and backlighting. The church tower of Torcello is visible everywhere and reminds us of the inhabited world. We decide to visit the island. Canale San Antonio brings us to the back of the island Torcello. Here in the Canale di Torcello the fishermen bend over the side of their boats. They grab crabs from box traps that hang in the water attached to lines. At the eleventh century Fosca Basilica, the brand new docks invite us for a walk and a glass of beer. It is a strange idea that Torcello had 10,000 inhabitants when currently the island only has a handful of houses. The building materials have been moved to Venice, but apparently nobody dared to interfere with the church.

We cross over to Burano. The colourful houses and boats form a colourful palette at the foot of the church tower which is dangerously slanted.



Near the bridge to the neighbouring island is a quay with poles to spend the night. The boat bounces the entire night on the waves of the motorboats. The maximum allowed speed does not mean much to the people here. The vaporetto sail on and off, pick up tourists, bring inhabitants. At nightfall the island is again conquered by tourists.

Today we sail past Torcello through the Canale Silone to Portigrande. In this part of the lagoon, the atmosphere is one of utmost quiet. Even the shining aeroplanes take off quietly from Airport Marco Polo. Foreigners hang enormous nets on poles which look like trampolines above the landscape. Eventually the canal ends between the water sport companies in front of the channel in Portigrande.

We sail with the current back past Mazzorbo, the ruins of Ile Madonna del Monte. Here the local fishermen noticeably adhere to the channel. It becomes very tight when two vaporetto and a water taxi pass us all at the same time. The glass factories of Murano appear in sight.

Before Murano the busy Canale del Mariani in. We keep the vague skyline of Venice on starboard. Along Le Vignole boats with vegetables and fruits from Sant'Erasmus, the agricultural

island, pass. Then we sail to the Isola Sant Francesco del Debero. We dock in front of the monastery and walk to the chapel. Everything is closed and quiet except for two construction workers who haul a large wooden cross on its foundations.

The plan was to spend the night here, but the quiet and limited space for manoeuvre makes us anxious. We prefer to end the day in the tumult of Burano. It is enjoyable to do groceries there. Besides a shore, there is vast choice in the various little shops. We are helped in a pleasant manner. With vegetables, fresh bread, mussels, scampi's and a good bottle of Venetian white wine, we stroll back to the boat.

The fourth day starts with the predicted dull weather: no rain, no sun, and no wind. However, it is still charming that we can experience this too. Murano and Vencie stand grey on the horizon. We sail the busy water beltway around the city, past the Arsenal, Sant Elena and over the Baccino di San Marco. An impressive cruise ship docks. The proportions to the buildings on the shore are entirely lost. It becomes quiet around us once again. We are heading towards the lesser part of the lagoon. A vaporetto sails towards us and afterwards our boat glides lonely through the water once again. Ahead of us the contours of



the ugly industry near Marghera take shape.

At the end of the Canale Nuova di Fusina large ocean ships appear in sight. The almost straight Canale Malamocco is twelve meters deep. Many inhabitants of the lagoon believe that this canal plays an important role in the disordered water management. The boredom sets upon us. Fortunately we can, now and then, look up against passing ocean ships.

Eventually we reach the coiling Canale di Valgrande. A thin sun gives a pretty interplay of lines, of poles and nets on the water. We approach the end of the lagoon exploration. Gioggia appears in sight. As bonus we sail past the shipwreck in front of the shore for a last beautiful sight.

