



JOE PINTAURO'S VENICE: AN ACCORDIAN-FOLDED COLLECTION OF IMAGES FROM "NUNC ET SEMPER."

By Betsy J. Craz

Sag Harbor Renaissance man Joe Pintauro could have written a play about the Venice he describes as "the only city in the world coupled to the sea by a conjugal promise."

He might have devoted an entire poem to its famous Caffè Florian, where "violins play and people dance in a ballroom made of sun, air, and of the naked night."

Or he could have alluded in his next novel to the Caffè drapes, "made of the cloth which caught the wind and conducted Marco Polo from Venice to the other side of the world and returned him."

Instead, with the help of Sag Harbor artist Scott Sandell, Pintauro poured his lifelong fascination with Venice, St. Mark's Square, and Caffè Florian into a 12- by 18-inch linen-covered clamshell box.

In its multi-layered visual offerings and the lyrical narrative text contained therein, the box represents a year-long labor of love bearing the evocative title, *Nunc et Semper* (Now and Always). And while it has the distinction of being the first artist's book produced at the Almost Beachfront Digital Studio at Stony Brook Southampton under the aegis of TSR Editions, to call it merely a "book" would be a misnomer.

More than a book, "it's actually more like a mobile installation," Pintauro said in a recent phone interview about the genesis of the project, the process of bespoke publishing, and an exhibit accompanying the release of *Nunc et Semper* on July 26 at Stony Brook Southampton's Avram Gallery.

More than a book, it is a treasure trove of

# A Story Of Venice

*An author and artist work together to create a portrait of an ancient city*

multi-dimensional visual experiences, Sandell says, designed to conjure the emotional drama of arriving in St. Mark's Square. "Opening the book to look at the images," he said in a separate interview, "requires a little more audience participation than just taking a book off the shelf and cracking it open."

More than a book, *Nunc et Semper* is like an "elegant toy," Pintauro says, comprised of two very large compilations of images composed and printed on accordion folded prints. The first one is 18 inches in height by eight feet wide, when unfolded, juxtaposing eight photographs of St. Mark's Square. Underneath it, a 10-foot accordion print rests on one very lightweight sheet of Japanese kozo paper, under which are six frame-worthy prints. In all, *Nunc et Semper* offers more than 30 feet of images that Sandell says were hand crafted

"with love over a lot of time."

Woven throughout the lavish images is Pintauro's poetic prose, capturing his first visit to Venice in 1964 as he "motored along the purple waters of the Grand Canal." Taken together, the text and images will likely awaken in those who delve into the box their own memories of Venice. For those unlucky souls who have not yet traveled there, the book offers a tantalizing and sometimes mysterious taste of what's to come.

The inspiration for *Nunc et Semper* derived from Pintauro's vivid memories of the romantic and architectural treasures he found in St. Mark's Square. His interest in creating a different kind of account of those memories in an artist's book was stimulated when he attended the annual Writers Conference at Stony Brook Southampton last summer. It was there that Sandell proofed and developed Pintauro's 5-foot-tall photograph from Venice, "Blood Gun."

The results of that one-off collaboration and the geographic convenience of the campus convinced Pintauro that the logical next step was an artist's book of his favorite St. Mark's Square images. He knew both his vision and his work would be in good hands.



“Scott is so brilliant and enthusiastic and very accommodating,” said Pintauro. “He’s amazing.”

Pintauro and Sandell formed a dream team for the studio’s first title. But the journey from concept to fruition is never easy. For one thing, “you have to love the idea of process,” Sandell said. Each and every print, whether a stand-alone or part of the accordion compilations, was individually proofed for color, contrast, even format at least 50 times, he explained, until each was “singing.”

What’s more, not only must each of the images work alone or carry its weight in a compilation, all must form a harmonious statement together. “It was a parlor trick, actually,” Sandell said with a smile that belied the amount of time and work involved.

Also tricky were the distractions of Pintauro’s and Sandell’s respective day jobs. Pintauro is working on a plan to stage a new version of his play “Snow Orchid” at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York, writing a novel, and working on myriad photography projects. For his part, Sandell, the director of visual arts at the Almost Beachfront Studio, has been commissioned to install his own large-scale prints in different venues from coast to coast and is preparing for an August installation in the Sag Harbor Whaling Museum that will be a pendant exhibition complementing D.A. Pennebaker’s retrospective.

Still, the two were determined to finish up their first collaboration by this summer, and they spent many hours at the studio and on the phone adding and subtracting photos until Pintauro’s singular vision finally emerged.

Technology aided in the process. The studio is equipped with four wide-body Epson



ONE OF THE IMAGES FROM  
“NUNC ET SEMPER.”

*“...the only city in  
the world coupled to  
the sea by a conjugal  
promise.”*

**JOE PINTAURO**

digital printers that can print on everything from lightweight Japanese kozo paper to wood veneer, canvas, or silk.

“These are the same machines that the original digital print shop, Nash Editions, uses,” said Sandell. “And our machines use custom, highly pigmented inks developed by Jon Cone of Cone Editions.”

Key to the development of especially fine prints like these, Sandell said, is the studio’s collaboration with Legion Paper, the firm that developed heavyweight printmaking papers for use in digital printers. Legion’s president, Josh Levine, suggested the use of a Cartiere Magnani paper that was made just north of Florence, in a mill that was established in 1404.

“We used the Cartiere Magnani for the narrative panels, and 209 gram Moab Entrada for the rest of the project,” Sandell said. “Joe wanted a little bit of Italy in the box.”

“To be able to sit with the book,” Pintauro said, “and to feel St. Mark’s Square around me — the music, the people dancing — and remember it all and feel the memories come flooding back will be thrilling. And to be able to share that experience with other people who feel the same about Venice is why I’m doing this.”

Visitors will have an opportunity to experience Pintauro’s Venice on July 26 at the Avram Gallery in the Fine Arts building at Stony Brook Southampton, where an edition of *Nunc et Semper* will be on view along with an exhibit of more images, some up to 10 feet wide.

“Everyone who has been to Venice has a story,” Pintauro said. “This is mine.”