



ARTO CALYPSA DAVID ČERNÝ

6.5.–6.11.2026
Cannaregio 5013, Venice, Italy



Artocalypsa — Absurdity gives birth to meaning.

Cerný's work confronts us with violence in its most brutal — and absurd — form.

The path of the tanks begins with a kiss of inspiration from Leonardo da Vinci, and ends in swamps of human flesh in which the tanks themselves drown.

leads to the thousand aircraft carrier, meticulously crafted and designed to be the most powerful leviathan humanity has ever brought to life. Against itself.

Where do the beginnings of violence lie? In Cain and Abel? Or in monkeys using tools? Are we bound to violence since time immemorial? And are we bound to it forever?

But then, how come we are still here? How come we have not Artocalypsed ourselves already? What balances this evil?

The aircraft-carrier floating-war-city travels this ancient path into today. Chillingly cutting through the distant sky, it escapes above the viewer, hurting not only the eye but tearing at the ear, forming the central arc of the path and, if you will, the "meaning" or spirit of Cerný's Artocalypsa. It is the absurdity of the pinnacle of the human spirit, which at the same time foretells its own artocalypses. The word "art" comes from the word "artificial"; in this way, art is a realm of non-natural, artificial worlds. Its violence is artificial or natural? If violence is natural, will art lead us into the artificial world free from violence? Or will art only create more and more of artificial, mechanical Leviathans? Artificially destroying (natural) life. What is the meaning of this absurdity?

Next to David Cerný, another great Bohemian, comes to mind: Václav Havel. Both battling with absurdity and meaning in their own way. For Havel, unlike many thinkers, absurdity is not an endpoint. On the contrary: Absurdity is a trampoline toward meaning.

If absurdity exists - and it clearly does - so must meaning! In a truly meaningless world, absurdity could not exist. The role of art is to point to this absurdity. It is the individual's role to find their own path through it. To find meaning. For meaning surely exists.

In the installation, something is loudly missing. The solution. The catharsis, the (re)solution, the hope, the hint of an answer, the liberation seem to be missing. No way out.

But it is missing only seemingly. The hope, the solution, is actually present. The way out is here, the answer is part of the installation.

Where? It is literally "hiding in plain sight". The way out is behind the "way out" sign. It's Europe, it's us.

Yes, we are Entropa, we are bureaucratic, we are a cacophony of Kafkaesque voices of the powerless. But we are not violent.

Absurdity gives birth to meaning.

Tomáš Sedláček
Philosopher, economist and author

The exhibition Artocalypsa examines the weapon as an ambivalent cultural principle, a site where the human capacity to create intersects with the possibility of destruction. In David Cerný's work, the weapon is not reduced to an instrument of violence; rather, it emerges as a model of power.

a moment in which an idea becomes an act and a creative gesture begins to bear ethical and historical consequences. Here, the weapon also functions as a disposited (apparative), an arrangement of body, space, and attention that prescribes relations of dominance and vulnerability.

At the exhibition's core stands the key installation *Pistol / Guns*, in which monumental revolvers are directed at one another, closing into a self-contained circuit of aggression. The image reveals the fundamental instability of dominance, reminding us that force projected outward always carries with it the latent possibility of return. Violence is thus presented not as an anomaly or rupture, but as an underlying logic, a structure that perpetuates itself through institutions, images, and language. In tracing this logic, the exhibition examines not only the ways in which power is exercised, but also the processes through which it becomes acceptable, normalised, and ultimately legitimised, embedded within aesthetic forms, ritualised behaviours, and technological regimes of vision.

Newly created works extend the exhibition's inquiry into problematic political figures while simultaneously examining the seductive power of contemporary technologies. They reveal that power today is exercised not only through physical dominance, but through images, information, and technical systems that shape attention and guide decision-making. In this context, the weapon is no longer understood merely as an object, but as an infrastructure, a constellation of processes that organise the conditions of agency, determining what is permitted, thinkable, and feasible, while concealing a constellation of processes that organise the conditions of agency.

A significant layer of the exhibition consists of portraits of Robert Opdenheimer, Werner von Braun, and Leonardo da Vinci. They remind us that the weapon precedes its materialisation, first emerging as thought, calculation, and sketch. Creativity and destruction here arise from the same source: the human capacity for abstraction and construction, that is, techné, a mode of making that does not distinguish between tool, artwork, and instrument of power until it is situated within a specific framework of values.

The exhibition is framed by a looped projection of the opening scene from 2001: A Space Odyssey. The transformation of the thrown bone into technology connects weapon, tool, and technique within a single continuity, recalling that between survival, domination, and self-destruction there lies only a slight, yet decisive, shift in consciousness. It is within this continuity that the question of responsibility emerges: whether the creator remains the originator of their work's effects, or becomes merely a link in a chain in which innovation evolves into an autonomous force.

Artocalypsa does not offer an image of the end of the world; it probes the conditions under which such an end becomes thinkable. It asks what the creator bears at the moment an idea becomes a force that exceeds their control, and where the boundary lies between critique and the fascination that the weapon so persistently generates.

Otto M. Urban
Art historian

When I first saw the rotating head of Franz Kafka, David Černý's monumental kinetic sculpture in Prague, I felt as if I'd been cut deep by an invisible weapon. It left me with a peculiar mix of feelings, ranging from astonishment and laughter to intense reflection. This pushed me to explore his work further. In Czech, Černý fittingly translates to 'black', a word I quickly learned is intrinsically connected to black humour.

Černý does not seek to please or conform to traditional notions of 'beauty'. His works surprise, disturb, and provoke, frequently addressing uncomfortable political realities through irony and satire. In public spaces, his art becomes an active encounter rather than a passive gallery experience. The movement he creates, both physical and philosophical, acts as a catalyst for public discussion. From horizontal ground movement to vertical tension, his sculptures, whether small or monumental, remind us that perspective is never fixed.

In May 2024, David unveiled his public art installation *Butterfly Effect*: two full-scale Spitfire fuselages merged with the giant, delicate wings of Monarch butterflies, symbols of the struggle for democracy during the Second World War. For two days, Národní třída, the street where the Czech Velvet Revolution began, became an animated piazza full of discovery. It was there that I met David.

Our conversations around Havel, Kafka, and airplanes, which he loves, became the basis of an article I wrote for ZETA, an Italian underground magazine known for its experimental approach and visual poetry. This encounter also marked the beginning of a deeper journey into his art, revealing, among other things, a project for the 1999 Venice Biennale titled *Art Theft*. This sharp critique of contemporary art and media, I discovered, was never realised, suggesting that David still had something left unsaid.

Italy, to my knowledge, lacks an equivalent voice of dissent: an artist brave enough to construct complex mechanisms of thought and confront themes such as freedom, war, and weapons in public spaces. Yet Černý's work resonates deeply with our heritage, recalling Leonardo's fusion of art and mechanics, Arcimboldo's imaginative assemblages, and the unfulfilled ambitions of Futurism. This connection inspired the idea of bringing his unique work to Italy, through an exhibition intended to ignite dialogue and spark debate.

After countless challenges, we finally made it happen in Venice, a city that is itself a work of art and a theatrical setting. When I reflect on how this project came together, starting as a complete outsider with little to no resources, it all comes down to cause and effect. According to Lorenz's Chaos Theory, a small action, such as the flap of a butterfly's wings, bravely speaking to someone on the street, or even, as Černý famously did in 1991, painting a Soviet tank pink and placing a middle finger on it, can generate unpredictable consequences. Perhaps this exhibition will trigger its own chain reaction. My recommendation is simply to enjoy it while you can.

Lorenzo Polo
Initiator of the exhibition

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Opening Hours
Tuesday–Sunday

May–September
11:00–13:30 and 14:00–17:30

October–November
10:00–13:30 and 14:00–16:30

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