

**THE HAPPENSTANCE.03**  
Into the Mouth of the Wolf

Scotland  
+ Venice

Palazzo Zenobio before © Architecture and Design Scotland

# CHANCE

POSSIBILITÀ  
E LUCE

Night-time film screening in Palazzo Zenobio  
Image: Daniele Sainbo



# THE HAPPEN STANCE

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

In this dispatch, anti-curator of The Happenstance, Peter McCaughey, tells the story of one day to illustrate how, from the moment the Scottish team find the garden, “the daily incidence of co-incidence and good fortune is uncanny.” The day is run through breathlessly, with a score of bird song, singing, music, talking, playing and making resounding throughout the day. The “expect to get lucky” mantra leads to the chance encounter which increases the serendipity and manufactures the magic (with some tension to add a bit of spice!) - all happening in that one day, amongst days, in the Garden of Epiphanies.



Issue 1  
An Introduction



Issue 2  
Venice Reflective



Scotland  
+ Venice



Issue 3  
Into the Mouth  
of the Wolf



Issue 4  
My Experience  
as a Fellow at  
The Happenstance



Issue 5  
Venice /  
Local Context



Issue 6  
Play



Issue 7  
Tools of the Trade

**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.**



Issue 8  
One A-Z of  
Making Connections



Issue 9  
Participatory Practice



Issue 10  
A Conversation,  
A Workshop  
and Afterwards



Issue 11  
An External  
Perspective



Issue 12  
On Legacy



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**‘this freespace runs on a principle of anti-curation, if it’s important to them, it’s important’**



Tai Chi in the garden



**‘I begin to refer to the garden of Zenobio as the Garden of Epiphanies’**



Image: Sean Campbell





Peter and Russis Mr Gobby welcomes people into The Happenstance  
Image Brian Harley

# Into The Mouth Of The Wolf

## Peter McCaughey

I pluck a three-leafed clover from the grass in Zenobio as the deal is being struck between Samuel and M+B Studios. It's a sign. I call home to share the great news. As I describe the scene, I pace the football pitch that will become the stage for The Happenstance. I explain our good fortune - the last venue on the list, the small workshop space that we are hiring (which is neither here nor there) but this field, unused by the Armenians who run Palazzo Zenobio, this field will be the making of the project. Grass in Venice! Who thinks of that!?

A shamrock in Venice! What are the chances? So it begins. The incidence of coincidence and good fortune will be at times uncanny - so much so, that I begin to refer to the garden of Zenobio as the Garden of Epiphanies. To share a sense of this, here is a diary entry for 5th June 2018.

### A day amongst days, 5th June 2018, The Happenstance Garden

**One.** The Happenstance is full of the sounds of children playing. I hold up a deckchair, the black canvas horizontal, and Alberto translates the English noun (that is also a verb) printed on the canvas. The children rush to interpret the command. They DANCE. They HIDE. They RACE. They BUILD. The kids have been turning up every Tuesday and Wednesday for the last few weeks for the free summer school we are running. A chance conversation. A resource, a need. Another Yes. Their parents have started to turn up too. They love the deckchairs, sit in the sun and quietly shoot the breeze.

**Two.** The backdrop is birdsong and banter. In every corner of the garden something is being made - den building, printmaking, flag-bearing, new songs, chance encounters.

**Three.** Roberto starts his Tai Chi class for the mums in the back of our garden. There's a great moment when four generations of one family line up in a row, doing Tai Chi for the first time.

**Four.** Roberto switches to his class with broadswords - this crew are the professionals, perfectly spaced and moving in sweet synchronisation, their large silvered scimitars glinting in the late afternoon sunshine. It's really eye-catching and, to the Biennale visitors who wander in, it's a beautiful counterpoint to the languorous sun loungers.

**Five.** Christian turns up early for a soundcheck - he's arranged an evening of Italian line dancing and is

a bit anxious as people are apparently coming from a fifty-mile radius. We help him set up, and now the garden is full of the sound of Italian folk music.

**Six.** The boys from Paradiso Perduto have rocked up with large plastic fish crates full of ice - yikes, it's gonna be a party. They are excited to have the space and have brought a film that will slot into our outdoor cinema open programme. The film is by Calypso Adamo, one of their crew. We haven't seen it, we don't need to, this freespace runs on a principle of anti-curation - if it's important to them, it's important.

**Seven.** The line dancers, Tarantella - style, begin to take over the front space. They are deeply invested, performing an old idea they are passionate to keep alive.

**Eight.** There's a bit of tension in the garden. The dancers are really enjoying themselves but their music is not the vibe for the Paradiso boys, who are itching to start, and we negotiate a compromise. Their film runs at

**Nine.** I go up to our flat that overlooks the garden and pause at the window. It's dark, and the Armature is silhouetted against the projected Happenstance film trailer that we run every night before that evening's screenings. Christian's music is still playing, and I suddenly see it clearly for the first time. Lee and Ambrose's armature with its colourful caps, our flags, the dance. It's a medieval encampment! Perfect with this age-old city and its latent superstitions and customs. The film starts. And guess what. It's extraordinary. Venetian Amazonians explore

Poveglia, the abandoned island due south of Venice... As the film plays, a couple from Normandy wander down the narrow vennel of Calle de Vecchi, step through the wee doorway set in a high wall and enter into the expansive garden. Often, people are drawn in by the curious sounds travelling on the still night air that's typical of these Venetian evenings, and by Gobby. Apparently, they had been by earlier and Lucia had explained to them that this space is for them, and its resources are theirs. She and Theo are really following our mantra that the next person who comes into the garden becomes the most important person in the garden. Roland Wacogne and his wife Caroline have entered into a magical space. The armature is full of bodies, like dancers forming intricate shapes, and in the front space, on the gable end wall, is our outdoor cinema under the stars, screening Odelissa. And again, it happens. A stroke of luck. Another coincidence. Our Frenchman has a film, *Handiciel*, of his work with him and is moved to show it. Can he show it? Yes. When? Within the hour. What will he show? No idea. Bash loads the film as we run one of our own works made in Scotland.

**Ten.** We stand in a field in Venice, in the balmy warmth of an Italian evening,

and watch as crowds of people in a field in St Hilaire du Touvet, in the French Alps, cheer and applaud as Roland and Bruno Joannes, who is hemiplegic and aphasic, ascend in a paraglider. Now the footage is from the air looking down. There is Roland, and there is the perfect link he's made - the base on the paraglider is shaped like a gondola, a plywood structure built around a wheelchair. It's his gift to Venice. The film is wonderful. Roland is very moved that the project is being seen, and he asks if he can speak afterwards. He takes the microphone to explain the work supporting all ages of disabled people to paraglide, and everyone listens to his voice which is choked with emotion. I stand beside his wife, whose phone rings. She answers. Starts to cry. I bring her out to the front so she can give the phone to her husband, and I announce that their son, Remi, who lives in Venice with his Italian wife, Flavia, has just had a baby daughter, Gaia, and that the youngest Venetian in Venice is now in our garden. A huge cheer, and, for the first time that evening, all the diverse energy aligns. The Garden of Epiphanies. The night continues, the French grandparents hug us and head off down Calle de Vecchi to see their new family.

### RESOURCES

→ [WAVEparticle](#)

→ [Story of an Airborne Gondola between Scotland, Venice and Normandy](#)

→ [Related Films](#)





Image: Sean Campbell

# A day in the life of The Happenstance and the chance encounters and coincidences in the Garden of Epiphanies.



Alberto Lago uses deck chair verb command to motivate local children

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