

The artists, Lonnie Holley, Mr. Imagination, Charlie Lucas and Kevin Sampson were invited by the American Folk Art Museum (funded with the generous support of the Ford Foundation) and Benetton to create large site specific installations as the first exhibition in Benetton's newly acquired Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice to open on June 1, 2011 during the Venice Biennale. The inclusion of four African American self-taught artists during the 54th Venice Biennale would have been revolutionary because the artists, who have been historically excluded from the American art canon, would have had the opportunity to exhibit within a broader contemporary art dialogue during the world's largest art event. Unfortunately this potentially groundbreaking exhibition was abruptly canceled two weeks before the artists were to depart for Venice. The four artists and I, as curator, decided to travel to Venice anyway to create an exhibition during the Biennale even though we had no materials and financial support.

L'Espece Re-Evolution offered these American artists the opportunity to create an exhibition in less than one week in one of the most beautiful spaces in Venice, a 1000 year old garden located on the Zattere on Dorsoduro next to the Vedova Foundation and near the Pinault and Guggenheim collections. Limited by time and working with only materials they found on the streets and in the waters of Venice, the four artists created almost 50 site specific works that respect the Venetian spirit of this special place.

A press release follows:

**L'Espece**

# **RE – EVOLUTION**

**Zattere, Dorsoduro 49, Venezia**

**You are invited Sunday, June 5, 2011, 5 to 8 PM  
to the opening of an exhibition by American artists:**

**Lonnie Holley, Mr. Imagination, Charlie Lucas, and Kevin Sampson**

***«The Roots of the Spirit»***

**On view from June 5 to July 31, 2011, organized by Martha Henry to  
coincide with the 54th edition of the Venice Biennale**

**Lonnie Holley, Mr. Imagination, Charlie Lucas, and Kevin Sampson are renowned  
as self-taught American artists but refer to themselves as simply American artists.**

The exhibition, «*The Roots of the Spirit*», on view in Venice at L'Espace Re-Evolution from June 5 to July 31, 2011, presents four African American artists who have integrated their experiences in Venice, once the crossroads of the world, with the city's own encounters with Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Their artworks express both their African and American culture, their everyday lives, their dreams, and their aspirations. L'Espace Re-Evolution, an 11th-century garden completely unknown to the public located on the Zattere on Dorsoduro, is one of the most beautiful spaces in Venice.

In less than one week and working only with materials found on the Venice streets and in the canals, the four artists created nearly 50 site-specific works that reflect the spirit of this special site. Lonnie Holley combined sculptures with paintings that read as a diary of his sojourn. The ghostly appearance of Mr. Imagination's silver wire mesh dress and shoes alludes to the garden's secret past. Charlie Lucas painted two works on bedsheets that are consistent with his philosophy of art and life. Kevin Sampson created an ephemeral wall installation of grottoes and shrines using seaweed and bones in an attempt to connect the past with the present.

The artists' work is included in many major American museum collections: American Folk Art Museum, New York; Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama; American Visionary Museum, Baltimore, Maryland; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, Chicago, Illinois, among others.

The artists and curator acknowledge the support of the Ford Foundation.

**L'espace Re-Evolution is open by appointment only.**

**Contact Venice: Karine Trotel, Gallery Director      00 39 348 342 17 06**  
[ktrotel@yahoo.fr](mailto:ktrotel@yahoo.fr)

**Contact New York: Martha Henry, Curator      011 212 308 2759**  
[mh@marthahenry.com](mailto:mh@marthahenry.com)

**Vaporetto stop: S. Salute**