Nine Dragon Heads, initiated in South Korea in response to the destruction of an important historical site in 1995, evolved into a traveling interdisciplinary platform where artists from all five continents work in locations with transitional characteristics that may be environmentally, economically, or politically troubled, on important cultural, historical, and geopolitical routes.

At various times Nine Dragon Heads has worked on locations on the South Korean peninsula and its islands, including the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and Joint Security Area (JSA) between the North and South of Korea. Other areas recently engaged include Bosnia/Herzegovina, Georgia, and the central Asian locations of Uzbekistan, Turkey, China, Tibet, and Mongolia. Past projects have also taken place in Switzerland, Australia, and New Zealand.

Jump into the Unknown in Venice reiterates a recurring structural specificity of Nine Dragon Heads—a form of open-air practice that engages three islands in the Venetian lagoon (Murano, Lido, Pellestrina), accompanied by exhibition of working traces, artifacts, and performances in the Palazzo Loredan. Conceptually, the exhibition Jump into the Unknown is elaborated in on-going research-based laboratory mode, where individual works bear poststudio, experimental, or situational and performative character. Participating artists don’t aim to place full stops or answer all the questions but look for the creation of a space where experimental open-air and public art practice results in an ethical artistic message.

In the context of the foundational underlying premise of engaging with Jump into the Unknown as a destination/nondestination of the Nine Dragon Heads project in Venice, the deed of a famous Korean Buddhist monk, Jajang (founder of the Tongdosa Temple in 646 CE) is a significant example. In an act of desocialization, Jajang removed the normally ubiquitous statue of Buddha as an object of worship from the Temple and replaced it with a panoramic window open onto the backdrop of the surrounding mountainside. The “mad monk,” as legend names him, dropped the sacral visual formula in his search for a new methodology for engaging with the unknown in the form of the ineffable. This example sits in a specific cultural spiritual context but may also be understood as a modus vivendi within an artistic methodology, a way of approaching understanding through a flexible preexisting frame that also mindfully considers the specifics of a constantly changing situation.

Within Nine Dragon Heads art was never conceived only as an embodiment of professional skills, but as a reflection on the manifest environment through a certain worldview. Thus the application of experimental open-air and public art practice results in an ethical artistic message. 

Magda Guruli