ALMINE RECH

With My Eyes
60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale Di Venezia

Apr 20 — Nov 24, 2024 | Pavilion of the Holy See, Women's Detention Centre, Venice-Giudecca, Italy

Holy See Pavilion at the 60th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION – LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2024

The Dicastery for Culture and Education is joining the 60th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, dedicating the **Holy See Pavilion** to the theme of human rights and the figure of the lowliest , a pillar of the Pontificate of Pope Francis that will give us the immense joy of visiting the Pavilion next April 28. He will be the first Pope in history to attend the Venice Biennale.

The exhibition, with the emblematic and programmatic title ***"With My Eyes,"*** will take place from April 20 to November 24, 2024. The project presented is unprecedented and groundbreaking for the Venice Biennale, thanks to the physical and conceptual installation inside the **Giudecca Women's Prison,** which will host the Pavilion.

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Holy See's Dicastery for Culture and Education and Commissioner of the Pavilion, has appointed two of the most notable curators on the international art scene, **Chiara Parisi** and **Bruno Racine. The curators** have invited eight artists to participate: **Maurizio Cattelan**, **Bintou Dembélé, Simone Fattal, Claire Fontaine, Sonia Gomes, Corita Kent, Marco Perego & Zoe Saldana**, and Claire Tabouret, while the Catalogue will be edited by **Irma Boom** and published by **Marsilio**.

The project is characterised by the coexistence of an artistic community that is established by challenging conventions, a new body that truly reflects the diversity and wholeness of estranged lives. Each endeavour, from **workshops** to **installations**, from **dance** to cinema, from performances to paintings, is an expression of this shared drive, consistent with the urge for a multifaceted dialogue suggested by Pope Francis.

The visits to the Pavillion, available upon reservation and **led by the detainees/conference speakers**, will question the desire for voyeurism and challenge the judgement toward the artists and the detainees themselves, thinning down the boundaries between observer and observed, between those who judge and those who are judged, reflecting also on power structures within art and institutions.

His Eminence **Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça**, explains how "*it is certainly not a coincidence that the title of the Holy See Pavilion focuses on the gravity of the representations of gaze, which is by no means a metaphorical gaze, aloof from reality, sheltered by that anonymous voyeurism that contemporaneity has globalised. The title "With My Eyes" holds within itself something both disruptive and prophetic, suggesting a move towards a different cultural direction, questioning the reality of our time, where the human vision is increasingly deferred and less direct, prisoner of the artifice of screens and the explosion of digital devices. Will we still know what it means to 'see with our own eyes*'?"

For **Chiara Parisi**, the strength of this project lies in its underlying idea: "*In an unexpected corner of the world, artists and female inmates join their expressive forces in an unusual collaboration. The reality of the prison meets the boundless expression of art, and the two worlds are seduced by each other : that is at the heart of the Holy See Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2024, a project with a striking visual narrative. "With My Eyes" invites us to explore the stories and desires of those living inside the prison through projects, workshops, artworks, poems, and living spaces such as gyms and gardens". "The exhibition you will experience is dynamic," Parisi continues, "made of intertwined relationships that have evolved over time, in an environment where being observed or judged must be kept to the outside. This new powerful environment mirrors the things that we desire for ourselves, wherever we are. The journey through the Pavilion, phone-free and undocumented, will allow the inmates to guide you 'with their eyes,' revealing how beauty and hope are interwoven into daily life, and how the need for freedom endures in the complexity and criticality of life."*

Bruno Racine considers a question in need of an answer: *" How can the traditional concept of 'national pavilion' be interpreted today? The uniqueness of the Holy See, a unique State without a national art scene, prompted us to experiment with a new formula. The Giudecca Women's Prison was the answer. The location choice is a manifesto, a statement. Artists from various backgrounds and without distinction of faith come together in this place to bear witness to a universal message of inclusion, working closely with the inmates and enriching the project with their artistic and relational work."* Racine explains, *"Visitors are invited to immerse themselves in this intensely poetic experience, deprived of their digital devices and guided by trained female inmates, thus embarking on a journey that challenges preconceptions and opens up new perspectives on art as a medium for human expression and connection. Although it is forbidden to take photographs, we trust that this experience will remain in the visitor's memory...with their eyes."*

The Pavillion's Institutional Partner and host, the **Ministry of Justice - Department of Penitentiary Administration**, expresses their great joy for the collaboration in the words of the **Head of Department Giovanni Russo**: "*Art is an efficient and powerful means of communication, capable of exploring the language of emotions in all its nuances, a means of social communication that can convey a testimony of our humanity and diversity. The Holy See's innovative idea of setting up a Pavilion inside the Venice Women's House of Detention makes the entire Prison Administration proud, as it fully recognises itself in the values expressed by the Church and its commitment to the salvation of every person, directing its focus towards the guidance and formation of consciences."*

The presence of the Holy See for this and the next two editions of the Biennale Arte will be supported by **Intesa Sanpaolo as the main partner**, which decided to support the Dicastery for Culture and Education in this artistic and human journey.

Paolo M. Grandi, Chief Governance Officer Intesa Sanpaolo, commented, "*Social affairs and art will form a clever blend in the Holy See Pavilion's project that Intesa Sanpaolo is honoured to support. At Intesa San Paolo, a thousand people work every day in social activities to implement programs and initiatives, with special attention to prison communities. With its collection of 35,000 artworks and the Gallerie d'Italia museums, the Bank is a key factor in the international art scene. For us, to accompany the realisation of the Pavilion, with its two souls, means to be consistent in contributing to the dissemination of what is good and what is beautiful, both concepts which are the basis for our commitment."*

The Pavilion's **design and production** are entrusted to **COR Arquitectos** studio and **Flavia Chiavaroli.**

The goal of the proposed exhibition is to lead visitors to a unique personal experience through the encounter with one of those realities that so often are left on the margins of the contemporary artistic debate.

CoopcCulture will manage the online platform for booking guided tours of the Pavilion.