



Yan Pei-Ming,  
*Oltre il muro - Regina Coeli, Rome, 2025*  
 Watercolour on paper, 110 x 80 cm

Courtesy the artist, Dicastero per la Cultura  
 and l'Educazione della Santa Sede,  
 MASSIMODECARLO

By Cristiana Perrella

Twenty-seven portraits by Yan Pei-Ming (Shanghai, 1960) – one of the most compelling and masterful painters of our time – offer a rare and poignant glimpse into the humanity residing within Regina Coeli, Rome's historic and most well-known prison, standing just a few hundred meters from the Vatican.

A place burdened by severe issues of overcrowding and liveability – home to Italy's highest suicide rate – Regina Coeli embodies the tension between confinement and the yearning for freedom. The very notion of Hope, the central theme of the 2025 Jubilee, seems a fragile, elusive concept within these walls. Thousands pass its imposing facade daily along the Lungotevere, in the heart of the city, yet few pause to consider the lives enclosed within, and even fewer hear their stories. The prison exists on the periphery of public discourse, a space rendered invisible by indifference and silence.

With *Beyond the Wall*, Yan Pei-Ming breaks this silence, rendering visible what remains hidden. His portraits capture the faces of inmates, prison officers, volunteers, a doctor, and the chaplain – individuals often excluded from our gaze, yet undeniably present, feeling, dreaming. His signature expressive brushwork and rapid execution exude their essence with intensity and depth, revealing not just subjects, but stories, identities, and a shared humanity.

Portraiture, throughout art history, has conferred dignity and presence upon its subjects – a recognition that is both personal and collective. Here, it becomes an act of restitution, affirming the intrinsic worth of those depicted. Those serving time for past mistakes, whose lives cannot be reduced to their crimes. Those working within the prison's confines, often under excruciating conditions. Pope Francis, in *Spes non confundit*, the Bull of Indiction for the 2025 Jubilee, echoes this urgency: dignified conditions for the incarcerated are essential, for only through dignity can one “look to the future with hope and renewed commitment to life.”

Yan Pei-Ming - *Beyond the Wall* inaugurates Conciliazione 5, the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education's new contemporary art space, curated for the 2025 edition by Cristiana Perrella.

A continuously open window onto art's ability to engage with the urgent themes of our time – free, profound, and transformative. A space where new questions emerge, where thought is ignited, where the potential for cultural, civic, and spiritual renewal takes form.