

“Contemporary Art in Prison: The Challenge of Hope”

Rome, 17 December 2025

A few days before the solemn opening of the Holy Year, the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See announces its contemporary art program, which aims to reflect on the relationship between creative inspiration and the fundamental elements of the major spiritual event that will mark the journey of the Universal Church in the new year. The program takes as its starting point **Hope**, the concept to which Pope Francis mainly refers in the Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee 2025, *Spes non confundit*.

In continuity with the Holy See Pavilion project, focused on the theme of human rights and the marginalized—presented by the Dicastery at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia—the choice was made to begin the art program within prisons, continuing along this path with new collaborations and artistic interventions.

The Jubilee will begin with the Christmas Eve Vigil and the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica by Pope Francis. Following this, according to the established calendar, other Holy Doors will open in Rome and around the world. Particularly symbolic will be the second Holy Door that Pope Francis will open on **December 26** at the **Rebibbia Prison in Rome**.

Accompanying this gesture will be the first of the projects presented today by Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, during the press conference held at the Vatican Press Office.

His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça explains: *“The important thing is for all of us to believe that transformation—our own and that of the world—is possible. Even if it is arduous and painful, it is possible. When we look at each other and allow ourselves to be seen as brothers and sisters, this great miracle occurs: the collective weaving of hope.”*

The Ministry of Justice – Department of Penitentiary Administration, through the words of Department Head Giovanni Russo, expresses great joy for these new shared projects with the Holy See: *“The fruitful collaboration between the Holy See and the Ministry of Justice – Department of Penitentiary Administration (DAP), established some time ago in view of the Jubilee 2025, continues. We responded with enthusiasm and great organizational effort to the Holy Father’s desire to open, even in our prisons, the doors of Hope and Providence—starting with the Holy Door that he himself will open on December 26 at the Rebibbia Prison in Rome. For all—detainees, staff, operators, and volunteers—it will be a moment of communion and prayer to best experience the grace-filled time of the Jubilee. Together with the Holy See, we have planned other significant initiatives, including high-profile artistic projects, which will soon involve people and institutions at other penitentiaries, starting with the one that will be realized in collaboration with the Regina Coeli Prison in the coming months.”*

At Rebibbia, on the occasion of the opening of the second Holy Door, the Dicastery, with curation by **Cristiana Perrella**, has invited the artist **Marinella Senatore** to create a site-specific participatory art project titled *Io Contengo Moltitudini (I Contain Multitudes)*: a self-supporting vertical structure, approximately 6 meters high and 3 meters in diameter, composed of illuminated elements featuring phrases in various languages and dialects. These phrases were chosen from those written by male and female inmates during a workshop with approximately 60 participants, where the artist and the curator presented the project, explaining its purpose and goals while introducing the theme of the Jubilee 2025—Hope.

The artwork will be installed in the square in front of the church of the Rebibbia Prison from **December 21** and will remain on display until mid-February, visible to the inmates and the entire prison community.

As Marinella Senatore states: *“Io Contengo Moltitudini is an illuminated installation created in collaboration with the Rebibbia community. Structurally, it evokes the machines used for firework displays during Roman Baroque festivities. In my practice, artworks are primarily shared, transformative experiences, reflecting my ongoing commitment to active participation and collective collaboration. The selected phrases, gathered with members of the community, are powerful expressions of hope that intertwine into a shared narrative, making the artwork a space for meeting and sharing. Inspired by Southern Italian traditions, the luminarias—crafted in collaboration with local artisans—become ephemeral architectures that create opportunities for gathering and participation. Light has the power to transform a place into a special space where extraordinary things can happen.”*

Cristiana Perrella will also curate the 2025 program for the Dicastery’s new exhibition space, named **“Conciliazione 5.”** This space, open 24 hours a day on Via della Conciliazione, will showcase artworks by invited artists while fostering dialogue with neighboring spaces, offering pilgrims the opportunity to admire the exhibited works.

The first artist invited to open “Conciliazione 5” will be **Yan Pei-Ming**, renowned for his intense, large-scale portraits. He will produce a new body of work focused on the **Regina Coeli Prison**, to be unveiled during the **Jubilee of Artists (February 15–18, 2025)**.

“It is a great honor and joy for me,” says Cristiana Perrella, *“to have been entrusted with curating a project during the Jubilee that stems from a profound trust in art and its ability to address the major themes of our time in a free and profound way, fostering change. Art prompts a different way of seeing and understanding things, challenging conventions and opening the door to transformation. The decision to continue, with the first two projects under my curation, the work begun in prisons with the Holy See Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, clearly signals this trust. Art is once again called upon to give voice to the invisible, those living on society’s margins, and to shed light on an urgent issue—so dear to Pope Francis—that receives little attention in public discourse. Both projects actively involve the prison community—not only inmates but also those who work within prisons. I thank the DAP for this opportunity and the directors of the three institutions for their open-mindedness and collaboration.”*

Cardinal de Mendonça highlights: *“Sometimes art is considered a luxury for the enjoyment of a few. However, art carries a greater ambition: it seeks to reflect the human condition of all. It wishes to astonish us with its extraordinary capacity to engage with all things human. For this reason, experiences that bring contemporary artistic production into sensitive spaces of existence—where raw questions are laid bare—are profoundly important. Prisons are such places. Art can give voice and visibility to dramas that usually remain unseen, raising societal awareness of its immense responsibility to foster active and shared citizenship.”*

Thus, the language of art will accompany inmates and prison communities during the Jubilee with an additional project: **Le Porte della Speranza (The Doors of Hope)**. In parallel with the artistic door created at Rebibbia, similar *Doors of Hope* will be opened in various prisons in Italy and around the world. These installations will be entrusted to internationally renowned artists who will work in collaboration with inmates to create artworks displayed outside prisons—visible to cities and offered not only to art enthusiasts but also to the public at large.

The project’s objective is twofold: to encourage rehabilitative experiences that prepare inmates for reintegration into society, and to foster a cultural and spiritual shift in society’s perception of prisons—from places of punishment to places of rehabilitation.

Davide Rampello, artistic curator of the project, supported by the artistic direction of **Rampello & Partners**, emphasizes: *“Prisons are often considered places abandoned by hope—desperate places. Opening hearts and minds to the values of hope means setting a goal and renewing a life plan. This delicate mission has been entrusted to the sensitivity and care of artists who will share this vision*

with us, turning it into a movement, a manifesto, where truth, justice, goodness, and beauty become tangible works of art. Baudrillard interpreted concreteness as the strength of a community that believes. Together with inmates, by believing (cum-credendo), we will make hope concrete (cum-creta), and beauty will have the power to transform our perceptions, nourishing us with this virtue.”

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