

## Holy See Pavilion at the 60. INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2024

The **Dicastery for Culture and Education** is taking part in the 60. International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, dedicating the **Holy See Pavilion** to the theme of human rights and the figure of the last ones and the forgotten, a central pillar of the Pontificate of Pope Francis, who will visit the Pavilion next April 28, being first Pontiff in history going at the Venice Biennale.

The exhibition, with the emblematic and programmatic title *Con i miei occhi* (*With My Eyes*), open from **April 20th to November 24th, 2024**, presents itself as an unprecedented and unprecedented reality for La Biennale di Venezia, thanks to the physical and conceptual installation inside the **Giudecca Women's Detention Home**, which hosts the Pavilion. The project's Institutional Partner and host is the **Ministry of Justice - Department of Prison Administration**.

After the 2013 and 2015 participation in Biennale Arte and the 2018 and 2021 participation in Biennale Architettura, the Holy See intends to structure its presence in Venice over time thanks to the support as main partner of Intesa Sanpaolo, which has chosen to support the Dicastero per la Cultura e l'Educazione in this artistic and human journey and thus the presence of the Holy See in this and the next two editions (Biennale Architettura 2025 and Biennale Arte 2026).

**Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça**, Prefect of the Holy See's Dicastery for Culture and Education and Commissioner of the Pavilion, entrusted the curatorship of *Con i miei occhi* to two of the most important curators on the international art scene, **Chiara Parisi and Bruno Racine**, who called eight artists to participate: **Maurizio Cattelan, Bintou Dembélé, Simone Fattal, Claire Fontaine, Sonia Gomes, Corita Kent, Marco Perego & Zoe Saldana, and Claire Tabouret**.

The exhibition project, with **staging and production** entrusted to **COR arquitectos and Flavia Chiavaroli**. studio, is distinguished by the coexistence of an artistic community that is born defying convention, a new entity that reflects the diversity and unity of distant lives. Every initiative, from workshops to installations, dance to film, performance to painting, is an expression of this shared energy, in line with the urgency of the multifaceted dialogue proposed by Pope Francis.

Visits to the Pavilion, by reservation, led by the **prisoner-conferencers**, will challenge the desire for voyeurism and judgment toward artists and prisoners themselves, eroding the boundaries between observer and observed, judging and judged, to also reflect on power structures in 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 wants to drive our attention on the drama of the representations of the gaze; but not a metaphorical gaze, detached from reality, comfortably protected by that anonymous voyeurism that contemporaneity has globalized. The title With My Eyes contains in itself something both disruptive and prophetic; it proposes a step in a different cultural direction, questioning this our time in which human vision is increasingly deferred and less direct, captured by the 'artifice of screens and the explosion of digital devices. Will we still know what it is to 'see with our own eyes'?"*

For **Chiara Parisi**, the strength of the project lies in its underlying idea: *"In a surprising corner of the world, artists and female inmates join expressive forces in an unusual collaboration, prison reality and unlimited artistic expression meet and seduce each other: this is the heart of the Holy See Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2024, a project with an incredible visual narrative. With My Eyes invites us to explore the stories and desires of those living inside the prison through projects, workshops, works, poems, and vital spaces such as gyms and gardens. "The exhibition you will discover is dynamic," Parisi continues, "an interweaving of relationships that have evolved over time, in an environment where being observed or judged need not enter and that reflects what we desire for ourselves, wherever we are. The path through the Pavilion, without telephones or documents, will allow female inmates to guide visitors 'through their eyes,' revealing how beauty and hope are woven into everyday life and how the need for freedom persists in the complexity and criticality of life."*

**Bruno Racine** starts with a question that seeks an answer: *"How can the historically handed down concept of the 'national pavilion' be interpreted today? The peculiarity of the Holy See, a singular state lacking a national art scene, prompted us to experiment with a new formula. The Giudecca Women's Prison House was the answer. The choice of venue, then, 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 intense 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 Ministry of Justice - Department of Prison Administration through the words of Department Head Giovanni Russo** expresses great happiness for the collaboration, *"Art is an effective and powerful means of communication, capable of exploring the language of emotions in all its nuances; a means of social communication capable of conveying a testimony of our humanity and diversity. The Holy See's innovative idea of setting up a Pavilion inside the Venice Women's Prison House makes the entire Prison Administration proud, as it fully recognizes itself in the values expressed by the Church and its commitment to the salvation of every person, directing its compass toward the guidance and formation of consciences."*

**Paola Angeletti**, Chief Sustainability Officer Intesa Sanpaolo, remarked, *"For the next three years Intesa Sanpaolo is working together with the Holy See's Dicastery for Culture and Education thanks to a collaboration agreement that involves us in a journey of profound human significance. The Bank acknowledges fully the artistic and social value of this exhibition project. With a widespread museum system throughout the territory - the Gallerie d'Italia - and by sharing its artistic heritage with the public, Intesa Sanpaolo arises as a true institution supporting the social and cultural, not just economic, growth of the country."*

The catalogue, published by **Marsilio Arte** and edited by **Irma Boom**, will be available in the second half of May 2024 and will also contain exclusive photographs taken by Jurgen Teller on the occasion of the Pope's visit to the Pavilion.

In addition, on Sunday, **April 21, 2024 at 11 a.m.**, the **Teatrino of Palazzo Grassi** will host a public meeting, titled Togetherness, as part of the Holy See Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2024, aimed at exploring the exhibition project. The meeting, curated by **Hans Ulrich Obrist** and in the presence of His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, will feature talks by artists Claire Fontaine (Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill), Claire Tabouret, Sonia Gomes, and artist and writer Simone Fattal (remotely connected), Corita Kent Centre curators, and Pavilion curators Bruno Racine and Chiara Parisi. Free admission subject to availability.

The online platform for booking guided tours is operated by **CoopCulture**. The viewings are scheduled every opening day of the 60. International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia at 11 a.m., 12 p.m. 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. and reservations are required at least 48 hours in advance at the [link](#).

The Pavilion will be opened from Monday to Tuesday and from Thursday to Sunday, from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Closing day: Wednesday.

Along the visiting route, postcards in four versions featuring the poems written by the inmates and featured in Simone Fattal's work are available for the public to take back home as a unerasable memory of this unique experience.

### Colophon

**Pavilion of the Holy See at the 60. International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia**  
**Women's Prison of Venice - Giudecca**

**Title:** With My Eyes

**Commissioner:** His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See

**Curators:** Chiara Parisi and Bruno Racine

**Participants:** Maurizio Cattelan, Bintou Dembélé, Simone Fattal, Claire Fontaine, Sonia Gomes, Corita Kent, Marco Perego & Zoe Saldana, Claire Tabouret

**Talk:** Hans Ulrich Obrist

**Staging project:** COR arquitectos e Flavia Chiavaroli

**Production:** COR arquitectos e Flavia Chiavaroli

**Organisation:** Dicastero per la Cultura e l'Educazione della Santa Sede

**Institutional Partner:** Ministero della Giustizia

**Main Partner:** Intesa Sanpaolo

**National and International Press Office:**

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To download the press kit: <https://drive.cloud.va/index.php/s/HITvOtbvdhYireP>

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La Biennale di Venezia

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