

Carpe Veneto

The 57th Venice Biennale & National Pavilions



Exterior view of the Arsenale, one of the venues for the Venice Biennale. Photo by Andrea Avezzi. Courtesy La Biennale di Venezia.

The appointment of Christine Macel as director of the 57th Venice Biennale (5/13–11/26) is highly anticipated by the international art community, not least because the French museum veteran is the fourth female curator to direct the event since its inception 122 years ago. (The last female director was Bice Curiger, in 2011.) In her regular position as chief curator of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a title she's held since 2000, Macel is credited with founding the Pompidou's contemporary art department.

The Biennale, titled "Viva Arte Viva," will shift its gaze from contentious political topics to focus instead on the artists themselves and the process of creative expression. In her curatorial statement, Macel explains, "The role, the voice and the responsibility of the artist are more crucial than ever before within the framework of contemporary debates." She adds, with fervor: "'Viva Arte Viva' is an exclamation, a passionate outcry for art and the state of the artist."

Visitors will experience the central exhibition in nine "chapters," also referred to as "trans-pavilions," featuring 120 artists from various geographies and generations. Among the presenting artists are the recently deceased Hassan Sharif and Marwan, and internationally recognized figures such as Olafur Eliasson, Rasheed Araeen, Kishio Suga, Gabriel Orozco, Lee Mingwei, Kiki Smith and Sopheap Pich, alongside a younger roster that includes Hajra Waheed, Achraf Touloub, Firenze Lai and Taus Makhacheva.

At the Central Pavilion of the Giardini, an introductory chapter will explore what it means to be a contemporary artist, through a display of studio-like spaces and text-based works that study artists' works through their relationship with art history. Among the eight other topics addressed in the subsequent chapters are emotion, sexuality, spirituality and the environment. In light of this focus on the artists, the Biennale's parallel events will include

a "Tavola Aperta" (open table), where visitors can spend time with "Viva Arte Viva" artists to discuss their practice, and an Artist's Practices Project program, where videos of these creative processes will be screened in permanent spaces in both the Arsenale and Giardini.

Around the city, 87 national pavilions will feature exhibitions that either respond to Macel's theme or address local concerns. New this year is the participation of Antigua and Barbuda, Nigeria, Kazakhstan and Kiribati—the latter of which will present the 35-artist-stong exhibition "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis! / Sinking Islands, Unsinkable Art," as a celebration of the creative practice of the Pacific island nation, while also addressing the increasing environmental concerns it faces, including rising sea levels and climate change. In these next few pages, AAP highlights six pavilions not to miss, with works either newly created for this occasion, or re-presented in expanded forms.