

Venice Biennale 2024 // News

Pope drops in on the Venice Biennale and visits the Vatican pavilion

Supreme pontiff praises Corita Kent and Frida Kahlo at women's prison



Pope Francis at the Santa Maria della Salute on his visit to Venice
Courtesy Città di Venezia

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Pope Francis visited the Holy See pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale on 28 April, marking the first time the supreme pontiff has attended the international exhibition (20 April-24 November). The Pope met the president of the Venice Biennale, Pietrangelo Buttafuoco, and its curator, Adriano Pedrosa, who organised this year's exhibition under the theme *Foreigners Everywhere*.

According to a statement issued by the Comune di Venezia (city council), the 87-year-old Pope travelled to the northeastern Italian lagoon city by helicopter, touching down in the prison courtyard on Giudecca Island.

During his speech at the pavilion, the pope singled out the late Catholic nun and activist Corita Kent—along with Frida Kahlo and Louise Bourgeois—as female artists whose works have “something important to teach us”, reported [CNN](#). Kent’s vivid graphic works, promoting tolerance and peace, are on show in the prison’s staff cafeteria.

Pope Francis, cited in a tweet posted by the Venice Biennale account on X (formerly Twitter), said: “The world needs artists. This is demonstrated by the multitude of people of all ages who frequent art venues and events. [...] I beg you, dear artists, to imagine cities that do not yet exist on the maps: cities where no human being is considered a stranger. That's why when we say [#ForeignersEverywhere](#), we are proposing 'brothers everywhere'.”

Tours of the Giudecca prison, which have to be booked in advance, are given by inmates in uniforms that they made and designed themselves; many of the works in the show, entitled *With My Eyes* and curated by Chiara Parisi and Bruno Racine, were also created in collaboration with the detainees.

These include poems by inmates fired in lava rock by Simone Fattal, paintings of their family photographs by Claire Tabouret and a film partly shot in the prison by Marco Perego and the actress Zoe Saldana, the star of James Cameron's *Avatar* films. The façade of the building is adorned with a mural by Maurizio Cattelan which depicts the soles of two dirty feet.

Crucially Pope Francis also highlighted how Venice is at risk from climate change. "Venice is one with the waters on which it stands, and without the care and protection of this natural environment it could even cease to exist," he said in an address to around 10,000 people delivered in St Marks' Square. Last week Mayor Luigi Brugnaro introduced a €5 charge for day visitors in a bid to prevent "overtourism".

The Holy See participated for the first time in the Venice Biennale in 2013 with a pavilion inspired by the biblical narratives in the Book of Genesis. It also took part in 2015 when the artists Monika Bravo, Mario Macilau and Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva represented the Vatican.