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Venice Architecture Biennale 2023: who, when, and what to look forward to

As we gear up for the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, we explore what's in store for visitors at the world's famous celebration of building design

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In preparation for the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, we revisit the US Pavilion's celebrations at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection museum during the 2008 festival, as reported in Wallpaper's December issue of the same year (Image credit: James Mollison)

BY ELLIE STATHAKI
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The Venice Architecture Biennale 2023 is almost upon us, and anticipation is running high. This year's theme, 'The Laboratory of the Future', caters to a wide range of topics to be unpicked – as it should – promising exciting debate, spearheaded by this year's curator [Lesley Lokko](#).

The full list of official contributors has now been announced revealing a mix of established names and emerging studios from the global scene - from David Adjaye and Francis Kéré, to [Dream the Combine](#) and [Cave_bureau](#). A total of 89 contributors will form the main show (and over half of them are from Africa or the African Diaspora), which will be divided into six sections - all of which having impressively obtained a sustainability credential, flagging the importance of rethinking the festival model towards a more environmentally friendly future. At the same time, and for the first time ever, the events will include the Biennale College Architettura, which will run from 25 June to 22 July 2023, as fifteen renowned international tutors - such as Marina Otero, Nana Biamah-Ofori, Sarah de Villiers and Manijeh Verghese - will work with fifty students, early career practitioners and academics from around the world during a four-week teaching programme.

Meanwhile, ahead of kick-off, Nigerian artist, designer and architect [Demas Nwoko](#) has been announced as the recipient of the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.



Dream the Combine's Jennifer Newsom and Thomas Carruthers, shot for the January 2022 Issue of Wallpaper*
(Image credit: Hugo Yu)

Lokko sees the 18th iteration of what is probably the grandest festival of the built environment in the world, as 'an agent of change.' In architecture particularly, the dominant voice has historically been a singular, exclusive voice, whose reach and power ignores huge swathes of humanity – financially, creatively, conceptually – as though we have been listening and speaking in one tongue only,' she says. The 'story' of architecture is therefore incomplete. Not wrong, but incomplete. It is in this context particularly that exhibitions matter.'



Sir David Adjaye in front of the Smithsonian National Museum he designed, shot for the February 2016 issue of Wallpaper*
(Image credit: Photography: Stefan Ruiz)

Meanwhile, spread across the Giardini park, the Arsenale grounds and several other locations in Venice, a wealth of national responses from different countries, as well as various collateral events, are set to offer a rich backdrop for more, deep architectural conversation. The world's biggest architecture festival is about to kick off – opening to the public on 20 May, and running through to Sunday 26 November 2023.

Venice Architecture Biennale 2023: the main exhibition



Lesley Lokko, shot for the August 2022 issue of Wallpaper*
(Image credit: TINO CHIWARIRO)

Curated by Lokko, the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023 main exhibition theme, titled 'The Laboratory of the Future', puts Africa in the spotlight. 'Africa is the laboratory of the future,' Lokko said during the Venice Biennale press conference in May 2022. 'We are the continent with the world's youngest population, the fastest urbanisation, growing at a rate of four per cent per year, often at the expense of local ecosystems – so we are at the forefront of climate change, too. Yes, the show will focus on Africa, but we are not only talking about Africa – we use it as a place in order to try and understand everything everywhere. After all, the Biennale itself is a workshop for the future.'

The architect and academic, who is in the process of setting up the brand new African Futures Institute in Accra, a new architecture research institute and school in Ghana, drew on her extensive research and address book to discuss important, timely issues of diversity and inclusion in architecture, the role of African culture and power in the world – and beyond.



Architect Sumayya Vally outside Johannesburg, shot for the May 2021 issue of Wallpaper*
(Image credit: Mikhael Subotzky)

The full list of participants at the main show includes [Adjaye Associates](#); [atelier masōmi](#); [basis](#); [Cave_bureau](#); [Hood Design Studio](#); [Ibrahim Mahama](#); [Kéré Architecture](#); [Koffi & Diabaté Architectes](#); [MASS design group](#); [Olalekan Jeyifous](#); [SOFTLAB@PSU](#); [Studio Sean Canty](#); [Sumayya Vally](#) and [Moad Musbahi](#); [Thandi Loewenson](#); [Theaster Gates Studio](#); [urban american city \(urbanAC\)](#); [AD—WO](#); [AMAA Collaborative Architecture Office For Research And Development](#); [Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation](#); [autonoma](#); [BDR bureau and carton123 architecten](#); [DAAR - Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal](#); [David Wengrov and Eyal Weizman with Forensic Architecture](#) and [Nebelivka project](#); [Dream the Combine](#); [Dualchas](#); [Estudio A0](#); [Flores & Prats Architects](#); [Gbolade Design Studio](#); [Gloria Cabral and Sammy Baloji with Cécile Fromont](#); [Grandeza Studio](#); [Huda Tayob](#); [Kate Otten Architects](#); [Killing Architects](#); [Le laboratoire d'architecture](#); [Liam Young](#); [Low Design Office](#); [MMA Design Studio](#); [Neri&Hu Design and Research Office](#); [Office 24-7 Architecture and Lemon Pebble Architects](#); [orizzontale](#); [Rahul Mehrotra with Ranjit Hoskote](#); [SCAPE Landscape Architecture](#); [Stephanie Hankey](#), [Michael Uwemedimo](#) and [Jordan Weber](#); [Studio Barnes](#); [Suzanne Dhaliwal](#); [Sweet Water Foundation](#); [The Funambulist](#); [Twenty Nine studio](#); [Ursula Biemann](#); [White Arkitekter](#); [Wolff Architects](#); [ZAO/standardarchitecture](#); [Studio of Serge Attukwei Clottey](#); and [Sweet Water Foundation](#).



Architect Tara Gbolade, shot for the January 2021 issue of Wallpaper*
(Image credit: Elena Heatherwick)

Complementing the main shows, a new Venice Architecture Biennale feature will be launched, titled 'Carnival'. This will include lectures, discussions, film and performances, crucial in drawing in the public and enhancing the dialogue between architecture and the world. 'Conceived as a space of liberation rather than a spectacle or entertainment, Carnival offers a space for communication in which words, views, perspectives, and opinions are traded, heard, analysed, and remembered,' Lokko said at the recent Biennale press conference. Carnival is supported by Rolex, the exclusive partner and official timepiece of the exhibition.



Guillaume Koffi and Issa Diabaté
(Image credit: Koffi & Diabaté)

Applied Arts Pavilion Special Project

This special section of the exhibition is returning this year with a focus on modernist architecture and 'the ways in which this distinctive architectural style was initially developed and employed as a tool to support colonial rule before being adapted by West African architects to promote the excitement and possibilities of the period that followed Ghana becoming the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence in 1957.' The show, titled 'Tropical Modernism: Architecture and Power in West Africa' is curated by Christopher Turner (V&A) with Nana Biamah-Oforu and Bushra Mohamed (AA).



Ghana Independence Arch, Accra by Public Works Department built by Kwame Nkrumah for Queen Elizabeth's visit to Ghana in 1961
(Image credit: Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

'Through close study of the work of the Department of Tropical Studies and its collaboration with KNUST, the V&A's Venice presentation explores the ways in which Tropical Modernism was adapted by Ghanaian architects to promote Nkrumah's Pan-African ideals during a transitional moment in which new freedoms were won and a break with the colonial past was articulated through architecture. It considers the power of architecture, both as a means of colonial suppression and a symbol of nascent political freedom, as well as exploring the specific legacy of Tropical Modernism in West Africa,' said Dr Christopher Turner, keeper of art, architecture, photography & design at V&A and the exhibition's lead curator.

Venice Architecture Biennale 2023: the national pavilions

The Venice Architecture Biennale main show is always framed by the multi-layered responses and the variety of the national participations – some presented in dedicated pavilions in the Giardini park, and others spread across different venues all around Venice, instigating a journey of exploration for visitors (often in more senses than one, as they navigate the city's labyrinthine network of canals and alleys in search of shows). Some previews have already been released, but more are to come in the next few weeks...

British Pavilion



Jayden Ali, Joseph Henry, Meneesha Kellay and Sumitra Upham will head the British Pavilion participation
(Image credit: Jayden Ali, Joseph Henry, Meneesha Kellay, Sumitra Upham)

The **British Pavilion** will be led by a group of creatives – **Jayden Ali**, Joseph Henry, Meneesha Kellay and Sumitra Upham – focusing on a series of installations by six artists and designers, including a new film and soundscape. 'Dancing Before the Moon,' as the show will be titled, was conceived to promote 'everyday rituals (from growing food and cooking to playing games and dancing) are tools for diasporic communities to establish spaces and present new ways of thinking about architecture and the built environment,' the team explained. The artists, Yussef Agbo-Ola, Mac Collins, Shawanda Corbett, Madhav Kidao and Sandra Poulson, will reflect, through their work, on global cultural practices that impact space. 'The British Pavilion at the Biennale Architettura 2023 is a space for rethinking the role that people play in shaping the built environment. It demonstrates the need for architecture to look beyond buildings and economic structures and towards everyday social practices, customs and traditions in order to meaningfully reflect how people use and occupy space,' says Ali.

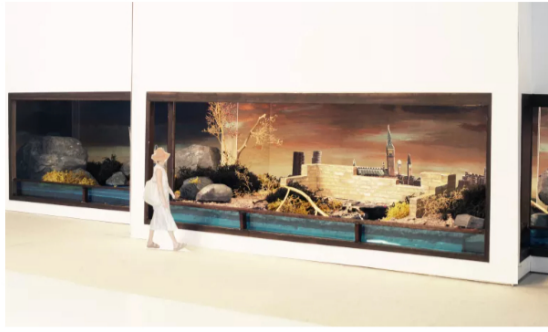
Uzbekistan Pavilion



From the Uzbekistan Pavilion research. Toprak Kala, also known as the 'Fortress of Earth', is an ancient city located in the Kyzylkum Desert of Uzbekistan. This photo, taken from the top of one of the city's defensive walls, offers a breathtaking view of the surrounding desert and the remains of the city's ancient buildings.
(Image credit: Vyacheslav Pak)

The **Uzbekistan Pavilion 2023** places heritage at the heart of their contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennale. Its creators take their cues from the festival's overall theme, 'The Laboratory of the Future', as envisioned by curator **Lesley Lokko**, who imagines the exhibition as 'a kind of workshop; a laboratory where participants and the audience imagine what the future can hold'. Responding to this, The Art and Culture Development Foundation under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan (ACDF) in Tashkent has appointed French-Moroccan office Studio KO to curate their participation to the 18th iteration of the architecture biennale. The practice's previous involvement in Tashkent saw the transformation of a 1912 diesel station into the future Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) - the country's first contemporary art centre. It exemplifies the studio's ability to breathe new life into historic structures while preserving their essence.

Danish Pavilion



(Image credit: Christian Friedländer)

The Danish Pavilion, curated by Josephine Michau and in collaboration with landscape architectural firm Schönherr, will be titled 'Coastal Imaginaries', and promises to focus on climate change, and specifically the rising sea levels. Schönherr proposes 'a design for the city which would allow it to better coexist with the rising seawater and rainwater levels that result from climate change, and which pose a significant threat to Copenhagen.' The city, which is often hailed for its quality of living, is one of many parts of the world under threat due to coastal changes. The exhibits aim to highlight this, while offering changes to its landscape infrastructure to help prevent flooding.

Korean Pavilion



(Image credit: Courtesy Arts Council Korea)

'2086: Together How?', the Korean representation at Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, asks questions about the impact of the environmental crisis in some fifty years. The show is curated by artistic directors Soik Jung and Kyong Park, and looks into case studies of small communities in South Korea. 'Each community is a case study which utilizes the community leader's deep knowledge of the place and the architect's spatial analysis to evaluate its current state, and propose site-specific future scenarios leading up to 2086. For instance, in the case of Gunsan, practitioners have explored how to work with abandoned homes and buildings to return the old city's urban landscape to a more natural state. Moreover, each project is motivated by central concerns of how to cope with decaying urban centers and rural villages due to centuries of uneven capitalist development thinking. As such, these projects are about how the past can be connected with the future, and how localism can reshape globalism,' says Soik Jung.

Swiss Pavilion



(Image credit: tbc)

Artist Sander and architecture historian Philipp Ursprung are behind this year's Swiss Pavilion. Their exhibit is titled 'Neighbours' and it is set to highlight both the spatial and structural proximity of the Swiss pavilion to its neighbour and the professional bond of the two architects: Bruno Giacometti (Swiss pavilion) (1907 - 2012) and Carlo Scarpa (Venezuelan pavilion) (1906 - 1978).'

UAE Pavilion



(Image credit: Dina Al Khatib)

Curator Faysal Tabbarah examines how arid environments can be rich spaces of productivity and natural wealth, in the UAE Pavilion's exhibition, 'Aridly Abundant'. Tabbarah, who is Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Architecture at the College of Architecture, Art and Design at American University of Sharjah, examines architectural possibilities in this particular environment in various parts of the world: 'The overarching question I'm exploring through Aridly Abundant is: What architectural possibilities can emerge when we reimagine arid landscapes as spaces of abundance? The National Pavilion UAE's exhibition at Biennale Architettura 2023 delves into themes, lessons and questions based on learnings from within the UAE's arid landscapes that other places around the world facing the threat of aridity and desertification can find use, including countries across Africa, Asia, and southern Europe such as Italy, Spain, and Greece.'

Estonian Pavilion



(Image credit: Arvi Anderson, Kerlin Vasser)

Bringing the discussion around architecture back to the context of the home, the Estonian display is curated by Aet Ader, Arvi Anderson and Mari Möldre. Titled 'Home Stage' it will be hosted inside a real life rental apartment -address: Salizada Streta 96, Venice. The Estonian pavilion exists in the format of a durational performance, where ordinary domestic duties as well as fictional outbursts, both scripted and non-scripted, all take place in the public eye. One of the performers, Paula Veidenbauma, is intrigued by how issues of invisibility, such as care, aggression, and loneliness, contrast and accelerate in tandem with the vast visibility of real estate, which especially in Venice is driven by hyper-tourism and gentrification, said Möldre.

Australian Pavilion



'Isolation' by Sarah Rhodes
(Image credit: Sarah Rhodes)

This year, the Australian Institute of Architects presents 'Unsettling Queenstown,' zooming in on the namesake settlements found all over the former British Empire. These hubs, investigated in this installation through fragments of real and fictional 'Queenstowns', drawing for instance on the Queenstown of Tasmania, are used to explore ideas of colonialism and resource extraction. The show is curated by Anthony Coupe, Director at Mulloway Studio and Emily Paech, Project Lead Interpretation + Urban Environments at Mulloway Studio, academics Ali Gumillya Baker, Associate Professor at Flinders University and Julian Worrall Professor of Architecture and Head of School of Architecture and Design at the University of Tasmania, and Tasmania-based photographic artist Sarah

Rhodes. The team stated: 'The British Imperial hangover is pervasive in every corner of the globe: there is quite literally a Queenstown on every continent, bar Antarctica. Unsettling Queenstown unites decolonial theory and praxis, weaving elements from real places and gleanings from current architectural intelligence in search of ingredients to contribute to Venice's Laboratory of the Future.'

Brazilian Pavilion



(Image credit: Brazilian Pavilion in Venice)

Co-curators of the Brazilian Pavilion Gabriela de Matos and Paulo Tavares look at notions of decolonisation, national identity, diaspora, indigenous knowledge systems, as well as around Brasília and modernism, while connecting to Lokko's main theme through the vector of the African diaspora. Titled 'Terra', the exhibit draws on the past to compose 'possible futures, focusing on the role of land in shaping our understanding of heritage and identity.' The pavilion is set to feature projects born of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian knowledge about land and territory, as well as bespoke commissions such as an audio-visual piece by Brazilian filmmaker Juliana Vicente, archival photographs compiled by historian Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto, the ethno-historical map of Brazil by Curt Nimuendajú, and the *Brasília Quilombola map*.

German Pavilion



(Image credit: German Pavilion in Venice)

Thinking about the past while planning about the future, the German contribution is titled 'Open for Maintenance – Wegen Umbau geöffnet'. Curated by ARCH+ / SUMMACUMFEMMER / BÜRO JULIANE GREB it focuses on themes of care and maintenance. Maria Eichhorn's work *Relocating a Structure*, Germany's contribution to the Biennale Arte 2022, becomes part of the exhibit as the team this year 'squats and maintains' the pavilion, taking it over in its existing condition. The whole Pavilion becomes a 'found object' as notions of sustainable architecture, circular economy, as well as preservation and repair come into play.

Polish Pavilion



(Image credit: Barbara Kaja Kaniewska)

The Polish Pavilion will be filled by the frames of four life-size houses. The project, titled 'Datament', is set to serve as an instigator of conversation around physical and digital, data and real life. The installation was created drawing on works and thoughts of artist Anna Barlik and architect Marcin Strzala, guided by curator Jacek Sosnowski.

Saudi Arabian Pavilion



(Image credit: Saudi Pavilion)

The Saudi Pavilion team in Venice Architecture Biennale 2023 is led co-curators Basma Bouzo, Noura Bouzo, Joharah Lou Pabalate, and Cyril Zammit, along with architect AlBara Saimaldahar. Their installation places the country's cultural heritage at its heart, while trying to propose 'innovative solutions that contribute to improving societies.' CEO of the Architecture and Design Commission, Dr. Sumayah Al-Solaiman, said: 'We are proud to be participating at the Venice Architecture Biennale for the second time. Taking part in such events, provides us with a global platform to showcase the Kingdom's architectural vision with the world. We look forward to engaging with architects and designers from all around the globe to share thoughts, exchange ideas, and learn from different experiences.'

Scottish Pavilion



Orkney Coast
(Image credit: Amy McEwan)

Commissioned by the Scotland + Venice partnership and curated by the Architecture Fringe, -ism, and /other, 'A Fragile Correspondence,' the title of the Scottish contribution to the biennale, will take place this year at the Arsenale Docks. From the forests around Loch Ness, the seashore of the Orkney archipelago, and the industrialised remnants of the Ravenscraig steelworks, the project takes us on a journey through three Scottish landscapes across the Highlands, Islands and Lowlands,' write the curators. 'Through these creative explorations, and by proposing a new lexicon of terms and definitions, the exhibition looks to see the potential in possible futures that sensitively work in correspondence with the land rather than simply upon it.' The displays will be arranged into four distinct areas. Visitors will be guided through the landscapes of Loch Ness, Orkney, and Ravenscraig before reaching a reading room and project lexicon.

Singapore Pavilion



Along both sides of the pavilion, visitors will find a series of cards asking questions that aim to pinpoint the qualities that transform the urban landscape beyond a human-oriented, loveable city. These questions cover the fields of design for dementia and neurodiversity, rewilding, biodiversity, nutrition, and biomimicry ecosystems.
(Image credit: Singapore Pavilion)

The Singapore Pavilion delves into concepts around measurements and impact, in a project led by curators and architects Melvin Tan, Adrian Lai and Wong Ker How. Titled 'WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH? The Performance of Measurement,' the pavilion ponders on how to measure community interaction, how to evaluate intangible qualities and importantly, 'how much is enough?' Visitor interaction and data collection are to be incorporated into the displays too, as guests are invited to answer four questions, as they walk around the centrepiece: a Values Measurement

Machine, 'a spectacular series of analogue plotting machines marking data on five-metre-tall calligraphic scrolls.'

Spanish Pavilion



(Image credit: Spanish Pavilion)

'Foodscapes', Spain's contribution to the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, takes a different route. Co-curators and architects Eduardo Castillo-Vinuesa and Manuel Ocaña explore their fascination around their country's agri-architectural context and infrastructure, which they call 'the food engine of Europe.' Sustainability and future planning here is approached through ideas around food and nourishment, as well as feeding our cities and the world.

Turkish Pavilion



(Image credit: Andrea Avezz, courtesy La Biennale di Venezia)

Meanwhile, the Turkish Pavilion takes a more theoretical path with its display, titled 'Ghost Stories: The Carrier Bag Theory of Architecture.' Curated by Sevince Bayrak and Oral Göktaş, the show takes its cues from Elizabeth Fisher's Carrier Bag Theory of Evolution, which argues that, 'rather than hunting tools, the first cultural device used by humans was probably a carrier bag, which allowed them to transport the vegetables they gathered.' The team draws parallels between this approach and architecture, proposing the exploration of architecture and abandoned buildings with a view to tell their stories and the truths they reveal. The exhibit will be accompanied by a manifesto, as well as a book to delve deeper into the subject.

The Venice Architecture Biennale 2023 is on from 20 May to Sunday 26 November 2023 (with a pre-opening vernissage on the 18 and 19 May)

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