

VOGUE

ARTS & LIFESTYLE

An Insider's Guide To The Venice Biennale

A jewel in the crown of the international art scene, the Venice Biennale runs from early May until late November. Here, seven Biennale experts share their insider tips with *Vogue* – from what to see to where to eat.

Running from early May until late November, the Venice Biennale is the crowning event of the international art calendar. During preview week, curators, collectors and critics inspect the sprawling exhibition programme in a FOMO-ridden panic that they might overlook some obscure highlight. After that, it's open to the ticket-holding public.

The Biennale is not one, but dozens of allied events, ranging from official national presentations through to scrappy pop-ups. Getting a grip on the who-what-where can feel overwhelming – but in a fun, art-saturated kind of way.

At the heart is the Biennale exhibition – a monster of a thing, split over two venues in the Arsenale (a former shipyard complex dating back to the 12th century) and Giardini (a park) to the east of the city. This year, the whole thing is in the hands of curator Ralph Rugoff, New York-born director of the Hayward Gallery in London. Titled *May You Live In Interesting Times*, it promises a celebration of ambiguity, paradox and sleight of hand – the title is a bogus Chinese curse, reflecting a show that responds to “times in which fake news has real effects”, as Rugoff puts it.

Both the Arsenale and Giardini sites also house some of the 90 national presentations that will be staged this year. The Giardini are dotted with permanent exhibition pavilions: here you'll find duo Bárbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca's defiant and celebratory commission for Brazil, Swinguerra, and Laure Prouvost's octopus-inspired film installation for France among the offerings.

At the Arsenale, national exhibitions occupy the far segments, beyond the main biennale exhibition. Here you will find presentations by countries including Ireland – sculptures by Eva Rothschild – and Italy, this year curated by Milovan Farronato, director of the appropriately trend-setting Fiorucci Art Trust. Then there's the first (hotly anticipated) Ghana Pavilion, designed by David Adjaye and featuring works by El Anatsui, Ibrahim Mahama, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and John Akomfrah, among others.

Don't overlook the national exhibitions scattered around the city itself. Every permanent gallery, museum and foundation in this art-drenched city is also rolling out special exhibitions: at Victoria Miro, new work by Njideka Akunyili Crosby in *The Beautiful Ones*; at Punta della Dogana, the poetic group show *Luogo e Segni (Place and Signs)*; and at V-A-C Foundation, the exhibition *Time, Forward!* exploring progress and speed through art.

Among the exceptional one-off projects this year is ceramic artist Edmund de Waal's *Psalm*, a meditation on exile and language in two parts: an installation in porcelain, gold and marble in a 16th-century synagogue in the Venetian Ghetto, and a pavilion of books by exiled writers.

Venetian Heritage is celebrating its 20th anniversary in style with **Dior** with a ball inspired by the art of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. The evening features live performances with costumes designed by Maria Grazia Chiuri (proceeds go to the safeguarding and continuous restoration of Venetian art and culture). If you didn't get an invite to Saturday's exclusive event fear not, the non-profit organisation's exhibition *Domus Grimani 1594 – 2019*, a collection of classical statuary assembled by Giovanni Grimani in the 16th century, has been installed in the extraordinary vaulted Tribuna at the Palazzo Grimani. This was where they were displayed almost five centuries ago during Grimani's lifetime; on his death in 1594, he left them to the city. The route through the Palazzo to the Tribuna has been restored, complete with some original furnishings, to evoke the building as it would have been in Grimani's time.

All these exhibitions are but snowflakes on the tip of the Venice iceberg – it's an extraordinary, if somewhat overwhelming, event and – like the city itself – full of discoveries, riddles and surprises.

But how to do it in style? We turned to seven Biennale experts for advice.