

francesco bonami's **venice**

Although Florentine by birth, the curator has a rich history with the city of *serenissimo*

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No Biennale in the past 10 years has passed without Francesco Bonami mounting a project of some sort. It was fitting, then, that he scored the role of artistic director of the 2003 installment. For him, Venice is much more than a mere host city. “What intrigues me is the relationship between Venice and the Biennale,” he explains. “There’s a deep contrast between the ancientness of the surroundings and this contemporary art event. It’s a positive sort of tension that makes things quite interesting.”

street smart | Venice reminds me of New York, because I walk everywhere—the water taxis are just outrageously expensive. And all that walking gives the city a very human dimension. One thing I’ve always found extremely interesting is that, without your noticing it, certain senses—like your sense of direction—get highly activated. You always have to decide which way to go and it makes you very sharp. But if you haven’t been there often you should buy a map, for sure.

churchgoing | There are many fantastic churches here, but my favorite may be **San Giorgio degli Schiavoni**, near Campo Gatte. It’s tiny and has a great Carpaccio painting, *The Call of Saint Matthew*. It’s quite an amazing place to visit, because it’s a very small building, and you see the work in an intimate setting without so many tourists around you. The grave of Canova in the **church of the Frari** on Campo dei Frari is also amazing, because of the way the pyramid-shaped mausoleum’s Neoclassical

language intersects with, and contradicts, the Gothic nature of the church.

dream house | If you want to leave Venice for a short trip to the mainland, the **Villa Malcontenta** is fantastic. It’s a 16th-century mansion by the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio that floats on a swamp near the river Brenta, and it’s absolutely astounding, both architecturally and in terms of its setting. The white of the *intonaco* walls and the perfect balance of the interiors and their dimensions make it one of the most spectacular buildings I’ve ever seen. Yet it’s built to a private, human scale.

a big production | Along with Daniel Birnbaum, I am personally curating the Italian pavilion in the **Giardini di Castello**, and there’s one recent sculpture by Jennifer Pastor, *The Perfect Ride*, which is very complex and so big that the doors of the pavilion needed to be enlarged. Also, Damien Hirst’s 2001–02 *Pill Cabinet* had 10,000 pills and took more than a week to be installed.

survival of the fittest | This year there will again be many exhibitions beyond the main ones in the Arsenale and the Giardini. The big challenge in Venice is seeing everything during the three professional days before the Biennale opens to the public. The best strategy is to start from the edges and work toward the center. Because after three days, you’ll be too exhausted even to take a five-minute boat ride.

rest stops | I have selected artists and curators to oversee 10 separate exhibitions, instead of staging a single, big Aperto show with 150 artists, one after another. This way, you can see a chunk and assess it for yourself. People will be more able to create their own route. We’re trying to break up the Corderie, which is the largest part of the Arsenale, with some resting areas, so people can sit between sections, have a coffee and some water, and reflect—so they don’t have to jam it all into their brain.

la dolce vita | It doesn’t take much effort to find the real Venice, away from the crowds. You just have to leave the vector that runs from the train station through Piazza San Marco to the Giardini. You can go into the residential neighborhood behind the Arsenale, for example, or around the university near **Campo Santa Margherita**. And the whole **Garibaldi neighborhood** around the Giardini is still very working-class and not affected by the tourist flow.

a sight to see | To view Venice from a distance, take a vaporetto to the small isle of **San Giorgio Maggiore**. You can go to the top of the church there—another Palladio building—and see the whole lagoon, with the Doge’s Palace directly opposite you.

and for dinner | I like **Acqua Pazza** (San Marco 3808–10, on Campo Sant’Angelo) and **da Remigio** (Castello 3416) near the Arsenale.

INTERVIEW BY MARC SPIEGLER