

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE  
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE  
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

# BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 230418c

Tuesday 18.04.2023

## Press Conference to present the Holy See Pavilion at the 18th Edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office, Saint Pius X Hall, Via dell'Ospedale 1, to present the Holy See Pavilion at the 18th edition of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023, taking place from 20 May to 26 November 2023, on the theme: "Social friendship: meeting in the garden".

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education; the architect Roberto Cremascoli, curator of the Holy See Pavilion; the architect Álvaro Siza, responsible for the executive project (*by live link from Porto*), and the architects Emanuele Almagioni, Giacomo Borella, and Francesca Riva (Studio Albori), responsible for the executive project (*by live link from Venice*).

The following are the interventions by His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça and the architect Roberto Cremascoli:

### Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça

#### *The Holy See at the Venice Biennale*

Coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the election of Pope Francis, the Holy See returns to the Venice Biennale, and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, which I represent here, is responsible for the organization of the Pavilion. The coincidence of these two events opens up the possibility of a dialogue that we consider important: to see how some of the main themes of this pontificate can be key to a dialogue with contemporary architecture and converge in a vision that takes the risk of imagining a different future. It is precisely on the future - and the reflection we are required to make about it - that the general curator of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, Lesley Lokko, wanted to make an impact, using these words: "We architects have a unique opportunity to propose ambitious and creative ideas to help us imagine a fairer and more optimistic future together".

We can say that the proactive attitude in the direction of a more just and inclusive future is universally recognized in Pope Francis' encyclicals: *Laudato si'* (2015) and *Fratelli tutti* (2022). They are both texts that not only help us to make a critical, precise and sincere diagnosis of the present, but also challenge us to lift our gaze, rediscovering the ability to dream, with decision, the prophecy of a better world. Not by chance, many consider them to be compasses of a future to be built together.

In the encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis speaks of architecture and the challenge to reflect not only “the spirit of an age” where technology and globalization dominate. The Pope’s message in the face of the difficulties and contradictions of our historical present is not to stop trying to “recover depth in life” (LS no.113). In the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis writes in the first person the following statement: “I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions” (No. 215). Now - we ask ourselves - when does the encounter become culture? It is worth meditating on the answer offered by Francis: when we are “passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone” (no. 216). These are not exactly magic solutions, but instead it is the humility of accepting that our love for life asks us to live it as a patient laboratory of research, of risks taken that then become bridges, determined to leave no one behind or outside.

It is therefore under the banner of encounter that the Holy See returns to the Venice Biennale in this year 2023. In his ten years of pontificate, marked precisely in 2023, Pope Francis has acted and spoken about involving everyone, without forgetting the peripheries, the poor and refugees. This already constitutes a legacy for the future, around which all those who desire a fairer world, less wounded by social inequalities, meet. This is clearly evident in the two architectural projects in which the Holy See Pavilion proposal consists. The architect Álvaro Siza, who at the age of ninety presents himself as a reservoir of youth for the world, wagers on an architecture that is not fixed within four walls, but dislocated. It is a living, figural, “outgoing” architecture, an intense political and poetic manifesto on what the encounter between human beings is or can become. On the other hand, Studio Albori’s complementary proposal places all living people inside architecture, making us all co-responsible for our common home. Álvaro Siza and the collective of architects at Studio Albori are the guarantee of proposals that are both masterly and innovative, making us reflect on the contribution of architecture, presenting it as a laboratory practice of the future and in the end not far from typically spiritual questions.

I think it is also an extraordinary opportunity to count on the active participation, in this project for the Holy See Pavilion, of the Benedictine Abbey of the island of San Giorgio and its non-profit branch for the contemporary arts, the *Benedicti Clastra Onlus*. And today we have the pleasure of having here among us those responsible, Abbot Stefano Visintin and Dr. Carmelo Grasso.

As commissioner of the National Pavilion of the Holy See, and on behalf of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, I want to express my enormous gratitude to the curator of our Pavilion, the architect Roberto Cremascoli, the true creator of the exhibition itinerary which will certainly inspire the interest of many visitors. I would like to add my thanks to the entire scientific and technical team that accompanies him and to the sponsors who financially support the project. And of course, a word of gratitude to the Vatican Press Office and all the journalists for their cooperation in making this important initiative of the Holy See known to the general public.

### Intervention of Architect Roberto Cremascoli

Good morning to you all,

I am honoured to be the curator of the Holy See’s participation in the *18th International Exhibition of Architecture at the Venice Biennale*, and I thank the Holy See Dicastery for Culture and Education, and its prefect Cardinal de Mendonça, our commissioner.

It is always a privilege to participate in projects within the Venice *Biennale*: I have already done so as national curator, as or as an exhibition designer or even as an exhibitor.

In 2016, I was in fact national curator for Portugal together with Nuno Grande.

Portugal, like the Holy See, does not have a permanent venue at the Venice biennials, unlike the many countries present at the editions. The venues are mostly concentrated within the enclosure of the *Giardini della Biennale* and *Arsenale*. I think it is an extra resource, however, to go in search of a place to organize the national pavilion because it places us in relation with the city and the lagoon territory and requires us therefore to be in some way useful to the territory itself. Useful to create a relationship between the territory, the residents and the biennial with its public. Useful in such a way that, just as in 2016, the Portuguese national pavilion was hosted inside a construction site that had been lying idle for years in Venice, on the very island of Giudecca: the council houses in Campo di Marte (1986), designed by Álvaro Siza. Our initiative as part of Biennale 2016 made it possible for work to resume afterwards, reanimating an almost dying body. Currently, just a short distance from the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, the building site is under construction and soon to be completed. New apartments will be delivered to the lagoon community.

Let us now discuss other utilities available to the community and visitors of the upcoming biennial. The participation of the Holy See is hosted by the Benedictine community in the spaces managed by *Benedicti Claustra Onlus* in the Palladian monastery at San Giorgio Maggiore.

Taking care of the planet, as we take care of ourselves, and celebrating the culture of encounter are the teachings from Francis' encyclicals *Laudato si'* (2015) and *Fratelli tutti* (2020), which become the guide to the exhibition itinerary of the Vatican's participation in the 18th International Architecture Exhibition *La Biennale di Venezia* 2023. The Benedictine monastery thus becomes the setting for "Social Friendship: Meeting in the Garden", in response to the theme "The Workshop of the Future" proposed by the general curator of the exhibition, Lesley Lokko.

In the monastery, the construction of a real process takes place: the evocative dimension of a project that is not necessarily designed to define a finished space, but rather a *modus operandi*. With the "installations" created, we have been concerned with creating order through drawing and the practice of simple gestures, taking our cue from everyday use and the monastic way of life.

At the beginning of the route, the photo and video story by Marco Cremascoli and Mattia Borgioli will illustrate the actual process. the visitor will be greeted by the installation *O incontro* (The Encounter) by Álvaro Siza.

A sequence of figures is arranged from the main gallery through the rooms to the garden. They welcome us with open arms, on their knees or greeting us. They dialogue with the untouched space of the convent, they dialogue with each other, they dialogue with the visitors. With their gestures they lead us to the meeting in the garden, the place of contemplation.

The *first act* (of the process) in the garden was that of Studio Albori, together with the group of horticulturists Michela Valerio, Agostino Vallonzer and Riccardo Bermani (*About Cultural Association*), to bring order to the garden, integrating the existing essences with the new plantings of the vegetable garden, consisting of various sections of vegetables (for convent or outdoor consumption), aromatic and medicinal herbs, wild herbs and edible flowers (for the contemplative spaces). The arrangement of the crops is identified with an element of nature, sun, earth, air, water, associating the edible part of the plants with their element: the fruits need the sun (tomatoes), the roots and tubers grow underground, the flowers and perfumes move in the air, the leaves are rich in water. Wherever possible, there is a division of the garden into geographical areas to relate the origin of the essences: in the fruit-sun section there are mainly plants from the Americas and in the root-ground section a predominance of plants from the Mediterranean basin (southern Europe, Middle East, Near East).

The *second act* (of the process) in the garden, transformed into a vegetable garden, is performed according to the design and construction of the *Studio Albori* collective of architects (Emanuele Almagioni, Giacomo Borella, Francesca Riva), which, thanks to the development of a multidisciplinary practice, approaches the project by combining architectural activities with participatory and ecological processes. Through the reuse of material taken from the removal of a dwelling in Cortina d'Ampezzo, artefacts were created to house the chicken coop

and others that make it possible to stop in the garden, shelter, meet or simply contemplate. These are the constructions of a kiosk with pergola (lemon house), a sunshade with seats, the seed store with pergola and shelter, and a greenhouse.

I will now quote the text by Mirko Zardini, who is responsible for the scientific project *Social Friendship: meeting in the garden*:

*In the face of the current debacle, the ambitions we should nurture are "boundless". At the same time, the complexity of the problems and the comprehension of the commitment required suggest first of all a certain modesty, particularly regarding the role that architecture could play (renouncing the assumed salvific role that it often likes to play), and then to make use of all available opportunities, actions and tools, even the less conspicuous ones. Indeed, it is probably by restarting from the apparent banality of our everyday world, from our daily actions, that we could reformulate our vision of the world. "Thinking of the world as a domestic environment", suggests Ina Praetorius, for example, in order to escape the idea of a reality understood only as a market, and re-evaluate that domestic work that has been disqualified for centuries, at the same time putting an end to the patriarchal idea that underlies it. At a time, and on an occasion such as the Venice Architecture Biennale, when architecture's presence is often linked more to words than to deeds, we preferred to propose some modest actions, to initiate processes, to present concrete facts such as cultivating a vegetable garden, reusing materials, creating a place for conversations. Not a proliferation of words or activities, but a place of pause and quiet, of silence, where to reflect on how, and from where, to start again.*

Studio Albori reminds us that at the first meeting in San Giorgio, José Tolentino de Mendonça invited us to "make architecture take a step backwards" (only a poet could make such a delicate suggestion, usually one that is more forward).

A step backwards is that of the master Álvaro Siza, who preferred to let Palladio's spaces be as important as his installation that dialogues and encounters those very spaces.

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