

Eddie Martinez to Represent San Marino at 2024 Venice Biennale

BY MAXIMILIANO DURÓN | January 29, 2024 9:00am



Eddie Martinez. PHOTO JASON SCHMIDT

American artist Eddie Martinez will represent the Republic of San Marino, the small, landlocked country on the Italian peninsula, at the 2024 Venice Biennale. The exhibition will be curated by Alison M. Gingeras and will be realized by the FR Istituto d'Arte Contemporanea, with Paolo Rondelli, former head of state, serving as commissioner.

Taking the title “Nomader,” the exhibition will bring together a suite of new paintings, drawings, and sculptures. Martinez is known best as a painter; his drawings and sculptures have not been exhibited as frequently.

In an interview with ARTnews, Gingeras said that Martinez has often used the term “nomader” when describing his practice, and that this ties into the theme of the Biennale’s main exhibition, “Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere,” curated by Adriano Pedrosa, the artistic director of Museu de Arte de São Paulo and the first curator of the Biennale to be based in Latin America.

“It’s so him—it’s so deadpan,” she said. “Literally, it means a nomad, turning the noun into a verb. But colloquially, it also sounds like ‘no matter.’ Drawing has always been the generative engine of his work, and how the paintings and even the sculptures come about. He’s always drawing. If you have a coffee with him or sitting there in the studio with him, he’s drawing. Those fragments often are what he uses to build out the finished paintings.”

Gingeras first worked with Martinez ahead of her two-part 2015 exhibition “The Avant-Garde Won’t Give Up: Cobra and Its Legacy” at Blum & Poe (now Blum), which looked to reevaluate the postwar art movement that took

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its name from the first letters of the three cities where its artists were based, Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam. The exhibition paired the work of Cobra members like Asger Jorn, Constant, Karel Appel, Christian Dotremont, and Ernest Mancoba alongside that of contemporary artists like Mark Grotjahn, Jacqueline de Jong, Julian Schnabel, Walasse Ting, Bjarne Melgaard, and Martinez.

“Eddie was a big part of that show,” Gingeras said. “He came at his drawing practice very much in the spirit of Cobra, both in terms of its embrace of automatic drawing but also the iconography and what he was looking at—his own canon of art history was very close to the spirit of the Cobra artists. That kind of conceptual mobility in his practice was interesting to me and really unique, especially in the American landscape.”

This year, the pavilion will be staged at La Fucina del Futuro (5063B Calle San Lorenzo, Castello), where San Marino also held its pavilion for the 2023 Architecture Biennale. The site is a former metal works; Gingeras said its interior is still very raw.

“When you enter, the first space really feels like a workshop, so in that space, we wanted the viewer to almost be immediately confronted with like an island of drawing that is almost like a mental map,” Gingeras said. “It’s a way of trying to transport the energy of how he makes work in the studio to the exhibition. Because if you’re looking at a painting in a neutral, white cube space, you don’t necessarily see what goes into the making of it.”

She continued, “Again, that resonates with the theme of ‘Foreigners Everywhere,’ of this idea of migration both in a political sense and also in a sociological sense and even in a conceptual sense. Eddie allows himself, almost forces himself to constantly migrate through different modes of making and different visual languages—whether it be abstraction or figuration, or some sort of hybrid—and that really is legible in the drawings.”

Several of the national pavilions this year take their cue from the main exhibition’s theme, which Gingeras said likely has to do with just how important of an issue migration is, especially in Italy.

“The mandate is also to connect to a larger dialogue with the Biennale,” Gingeras said of her pavilion. “This is just my own speculation because I can’t speak for other artists or curators of those pavilions, but if you think about the history of the Venice Biennale, it’s this kind of nationalism that is inherent to the way it’s structured. These little buildings are, in many ways, are relics of a colonial thinking and a certain kind of nationalistic pride.”

She continued, “I’m very curious to see how all the different countries have approached this theme because, obviously, the question of migration is a defining issue of our time. We, as a species, are always on the move. This need to move—the right to move, the right to migrate physically across artificial borders, national borders, but also mental borders are so vital to being human. I see Eddie’s whole work through an allegorical lens for that, the fact that he’s constantly trying to be make his own work foreign to himself through this constant shifting his own language and iconographies.”