

The Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia

Work in Progress: Joint Nordic Gesamtkunstwerk Inspired by Cantonese Opera

A joint Nordic Gesamtkunstwerk is taking shape for the Nordic Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2024. The Swedish artist Lap-See Lam has been invited to create the idea and framework for the artwork. The artist Kholod Hawash from Finland and the composer Tze Yeung Ho from Norway join Lam in creating an experimental musical installation and performance inspired by an art form with a two-thousand-year history, Cantonese opera.

The Gesamtkunstwerk is an initiative by Moderna Museet in Sweden, in collaboration with OCA in Norway and Kiasma in Finland. The Nordic Countries Pavilion has been a joint project ever since the building, designed by the Norwegian architect Sverre Fehn, was completed in 1962. The countries take turns hosting and 2024 is Sweden's year to be responsible for the pavilion, under the leadership of Moderna Museet. Each project is decided on jointly in a Nordic committee.

We are very proud of the collaboration taking place in the creation of this large-scale Gesamtkunstwerk. It's a very exciting interaction between Lap-See Lam from Sweden, Kholod Hawash from Finland and Tze Yeung Ho from Norway – and we look forward to following how the artwork's different layers evolve, conveying timely contemporary experiences.

Leevi Haapala, Museichef, Kiasma (Museum of Contemporary Art), The Finnish National Gallery

Ruben Steinum, Direktör, OCA (Office for Contemporary Art Norway)

Gitte Ørskou, Director, Moderna Museet

The Pavilion's Curator About the Artists and the Theme

The Nordic Pavilion's curator for 2024 is Asrin Haidari, curator of Swedish and Nordic contemporary art at Moderna Museet:

“Our three invited participants are all phenomenal storytellers, who use sound and images to amalgamate conflicting feelings of national identity, involving parallel experiences of alienation and cultural affinity.”

“The Gesamtkunstwerk takes us on a journey into the world of fairy tales, where supernatural beings turn the logic of the real world on its head.”

The Gesamtkunstwerk and Cantonese Opera

The Nordic Gesamtkunstwerk is inspired by Cantonese opera, which is characterised by visually spectacular performances in which vibrant, colourful costumes and extravagant headgear are important elements, aside from the distinctive music.

The dramatic narratives often hark back to historical events, classical Chinese folktales or ghost stories. They range from pacy depictions of battle, courage and betrayal to sentimental romantic stories with different entanglements and moral lessons.

Historically the operas were performance by travelling opera and theatre companies. They travelled in red boats on the Chinese river Zhujiang (the Pearl River), camping and performing on its banks.

The Gesamtkunstwerk in Venice uses the sea as a symbol for the relationship between the conscious and the subconscious; it is an element in which the past, the present and what lies ahead can flow together. The ocean currents also carry notions of translocation and transmission of language and cultural heritage.

Lap-See Lam, Kholod Hawash and Tze Yeung Ho are in the process of developing their Gesamtkunstwerk, which will be ready for the opening of the Venice Biennale.

The 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia is open from 20 April to 24 November 2024.

Read more about OCA, Kiasma and Moderna Museet

OCA oca.no

Kiasma kiasma.fi

Moderna Museet modernamuseet.se

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