

## **Intrecciata Venezia**

Curated by Mehdi Dakhli

*Finally, there could be no city in which the element of the bridge is equally evocative, the element that allows us a new connection between the two continents, between the two belongings, between the past and the present of a relationship that must never again be colonial.*

-Vittorio Longhi, "A Bridge Over the Chasm of Indifference"

On the occasion of the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, Lo Studio founder Nadja Romain and Mehdi Dakhli presents "Intrecciata Venezia," an exhibition curated by the designer and creative consultant that takes a contemplative look at Venice's history as a center of cultural exchange. The show places new functional sculptures by Dakhli in conversation with contemporary artworks by Joël Andrianomearisoa, Seyni Awa Camara, Clément Gloaguen, Alexandre Gourçon, Abdoulaye Konaté, and Ibrahim Mahama. This chorus of voices and identities tells the story of the city, which, because of its strategic position in the Adriatic Sea, has served as a bridge between east to west for centuries.

In his own pieces, Dakhli, who is French of Tunisian descent, looks at the architectural traditions of Venice through the lens of his North African heritage. For a series of sconces, he tapped the storied glassblowers of Murano to realize forms that mimic the horseshoe arches found Venetian buildings. This is one of many hallmarks of Islamic architecture commonly found in the floating city, which began incorporating such details after trading posts were established across the Muslim world after the first Crusades. Meanwhile, Dakhli has also collaborated with artisans to incorporate carved pearwood, a noble Venetian material typically used for gondolas and musical instruments, and patinated bronze into other furniture pieces. A timber cabinet references Tunisia's Brutalist Hotel du Lac-a North African structure by an Italian architect- while the bronze legs of his daybed nod to ancient Egyptian and Byzantine forms.

For his first non-functional work, Dakhli addresses a darker side of Venice's past, revisiting the Murano glass beads that were historically traded with Africa for goods or slaves. Made up of 76 cobalt blue orbs, strung together like a rosary, his piece questions the role religion played in legitimizing the slave trade that flourished in Venice through the 15th century. Furthermore, his choice of cobalt for the beads was not accidental, but a reference to this important element, originally mined in Persia and traded through Venice, that would go on to influence painting and

porcelain customs across the globe. That deep blue hue finds itself in conversation with *Motifs Tombouctou et Tunisie*, a work by Malian artist Abdoulaye Konaté, made from dyed and layered textile scraps of the same color.

This piece and another featuring African wax print textiles by Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama both speak to the colonial narratives that are often woven into textiles commodity that came to define Venice. Meanwhile, a fabric work by Alexandre Gourçon, who lives between Paris and Madagascar, is dyed in mango leaf and turmeric by artisans in Benin, alluding to the Venetian spice trade which brought pepper, cinnamon, cloves, and ginger to European cuisine. French-Malagasy artist Joël Andrianomearisoa's ghostly forms can be seen as echoes of Venice's own ghosts, its layers of history, and its constant dance between grandeur and fragility.

The idea of ascendance and transcendence resonates with Venice's role as a timeless muse, inspiring both intimate reflection and awe. A terracotta sculpture by Senegalese artist Seyni Awa Camara seems to summon the ancient spirits that may have passed through Venice. While the abstract paintings by French artist Clément Gloaguen evoke the feelings of fantasy and precarity that impregnate the city, built on water and held up by wooden piles driven into the seabed.

"Venice interests me because it's a place where cultures and heritages intertwine in a very subtle and sophisticated way," explains Dakhli, who believes addressing these often overlooked topics from the past is necessary for moving forward. "A lot is happening culturally and socially again in Venice. I believe the city is on the precipice of a new Golden Age."