

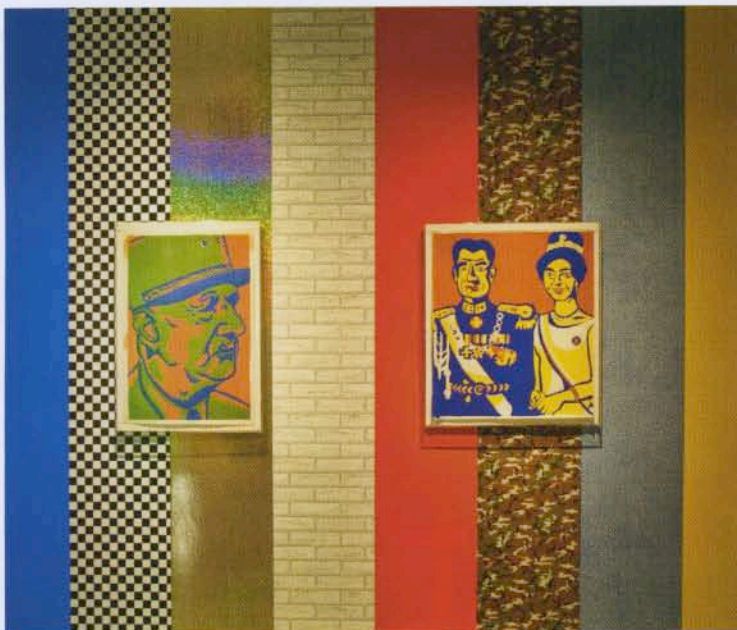
# Venice's Contemporary Masterpieces

Artist and writer **Matthew Rose** takes us on a tour of modern art in an old-world city at the Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana museums

**Walking through Venice** is one of the greatest aesthetic pleasures on offer anywhere. Labyrinthine and mythic, the city, a collection of floating jewels dotting the Adriatic, celebrates not only our collective cultural history but also civilization's beautiful mind.

For more than 1,000 years, Venice thrived in the arts, materializing as the world's most magical city. Wandering along its canals and climbing its stone footbridges, my eyes graze over the salt-eaten façades and massive worn wooden doors. I put my hand into the deep well of time, and then discovering a little *campo*, or square, it's a moment I get to keep all to myself. There's a gorgeous quiet to all this, and all sounds—lovers, children, my own footsteps—waft into a deep silence. "La Serenissima," one of Venice's nicknames, is apt.

And yet the city continues to reinvent itself: The newest work of magic here is American artist Charles Ray's eight-foot-high white-painted steel



boy examining a frog pulled, as it were, from the lagoon. *Boy With Frog* was made specifically for the point on the quay of the rehabilitated 17th-century customs house Punta della Dogana, François Pinault's vast new art museum. The Punta della Dogana and the Palazzo Grassi form the François Pinault Foundation, twin spaces devoted to exhibiting the massive contemporary art collection belonging to the French luxury-goods magnate.

When I walk through the Punta della Dogana to see the recent "Mapping the Studio" exhibition, Ray's *Boy* stands outside braving the wintry elements and *acqua alta* (high waters), guarding the giant triangular building while, inside, Maurizio Cattelan's headless horse is moored into a high brick wall. This isn't your ordinary art space.

I meander through a dozen and a half cavernous spaces, climbing stairs and entering rooms to discover strange new worlds, such as the thousands of tiny handmade soldiers in nine large vitrines by Brit *enfants terribles* Jake

**Above:** Aerial view of the Punta della Dogana. **Left:** Paintings by Otto Muehl hang on a wallpapered wall—titled *Castor*—by John Armleder on the second floor of the Palazzo Grassi.

