

June 3, 2009, 3:36 pm

For the Moment | Francesco Bonami

By [Francesco Bonami](#)



Image courtesy of the artists Exterior view of the Danish Pavilion. For Sale sign designed by Elmgreen & Dragset and Jani Leinonen.

This week's guest blogger, Francesco Bonami, was born in Florence and lives in New York. In 2003, he directed the Venice Biennale; next year, he'll curate the Whitney's. With Alison Gingeras, he staged the current show in Venice of the Pinault Collection. Bonami is also the artistic director of Fondazione Sandretto in Turin and of Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery in Florence.

VENICE — This week, the art-world tsunami is crashing down here for the 53rd Biennale, which opens to the public June 7 and runs through November 22. Hoteliers and restaurateurs of this extremely impractical but unique city are not so keen about the art hordes, made of people who want to pay less and stay longer. Still, the Biennale crowd does elevate the atmosphere around here, which is usually filled with backpackers and package-tour-goers, who today, during the press preview, are getting jammed up at the Ponte dei Sospiri. The bridge is currently covered up with ugly advertising courtesy of the sponsor of the renovation. It's the ultimate paradox — the ugly saving the beautiful, and may prove to be the best "art" installation in town this week.

If someone told you that the Ponte dei Sospiri eyesore was an off-site idea dreamed up by the Scandinavian artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, you wouldn't argue. The two

artists are honored at both the Danish and Nordic pavilions, where they have announced that the Danish pavilion is for sale — they've even invited real estate agents to the opening.



Photo by Mark Ellwood Mr B., the neighbor, face down and very realistic in the pool outside the Danish Pavilion.



Francesco Bonami

The 53rd Biennale is directed by Daniel Birnbaum, a Swedish philosopher turned curator who titled the exhibition “Making Worlds,” which, it should be noted, is different than making stories. As a former Biennale director, I can say that titles are meant to contradict the exhibition, which will certainly feature at least one artist who doesn't create any kind of world, an artist whom the vicious press will make into a scapegoat to settle old matters with the curator. But from what I have seen in the sneak preview, Birnbaum has made sure all the installations represent some kind of world. The entire Biennale is a world in itself, and this time it feels like you're entering into a fairy tale or at least an adaptation of Mozart's “Magic Flute.” Paolo

Baratta, the president of the Biennale and a cunning political pharaoh, seems to be extremely happy with his choice of Birnbaum — the youngest Biennale director to date — so happy that Baratta has transformed the former Padiglione Italia venue here into the Padiglione Biennale, which will be up all year round. The venue contains a bookstore designed by Rirkrit Tiravanija, a cafe designed by Tobias Rehberger, an educational center conceived by Massimo Bartolini and a library for the community — all of which will make it a unique zone of conviviality.

The other building everyone here is excited to see is the newly renovated Punta della Dogana by Francois Pinault. I sing nothing but praise of the building. Today the mayor of Venice and Francois Pinault will unveil “Boy With Frog” by the artist Charles Ray in front of the museum. I predict this work will compete for fame with the little mermaid in Copenhagen. The ancient winged lion of Venice standing on one of the columns in Piazza San Marco will probably start to suffer an identity crisis.



Photo by Joshua White, copyright Charles Ray, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York "Boy With Frog," by Charles Ray.