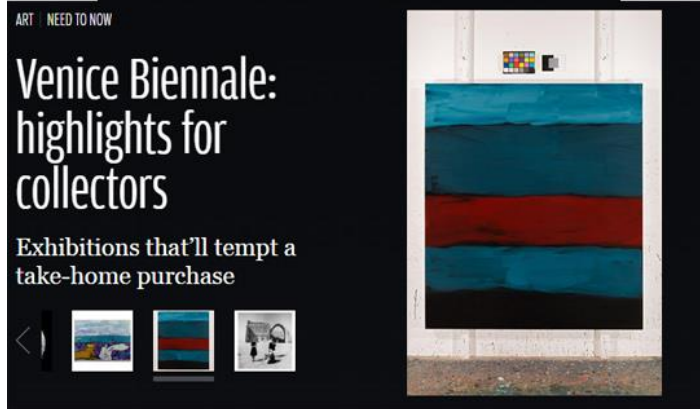


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how to spend it



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As an art festival rather than an art fair, the Venice Biennale is not generally thought of as a place to buy art – but it does, nonetheless, offer an unparalleled opportunity to examine art trends around the world and spot emerging artists, as well as the latest work by well-established ones.

A 5m-high steel mesh head of a girl (second picture) by the Spanish artist Jaume Plensa occupies San Giorgio Maggiore – one of the most splendid churches on the Grand Canal – but it is his row of alabaster ones in the adjacent Officina dell'Arte Spirituale that is particularly captivating. His works sell for between \$100,000 and \$2.5m and are wonderful exponents of the beauty of art aided by technology. Although they are sculpted mainly by hand, they are also carved using lasers, giving them a degree of precision that captures the most tender nuances in facial expression and form.

The tranquillity and stillness of the young beauties offer a welcome reprieve from the dystopian bleakness of many of the other offerings at this year's Biennale, as do Emily Young's sculpted heads (such as *Artume*, third picture) – made not only in alabaster but also from onyx, red marble and river-green stone – which are on sale in the Convent of the Madonna dell'Orto for between \$25,000 and \$250,000.

In terms of painting, two shows, one by Peter Doig and the other of works by Cy Twombly, are the undisputed stars of this year's Biennale. At Palazzetto Tito, Doig, Britain's most expensive living painter (his *Swamped* recently sold for nearly \$26m), is showing bright yet quiet paintings studded with lions (such as the example in the fourth picture) and the flowers and foliage of Trinidad (where he now lives), prices for which start at around \$500,000. The Cy Twombly show at Ca' Pesaro International Gallery of Modern Art surveys six decades of the artist's work – ranging from his humble scribbles on wood from the 1950s to the frenzied colourful graffiti (such as the example in the first picture) of works created in 2011 – the year he died. The show features his glorious Paesaggio paintings, inspired by the hills of Lazio. (At an auction last week, prices for his works started from around \$250,000 for a drawing.)

Another highlight is Irish-American artist Sean Scully's big exhibition at the Palazzo Falier. His buzzing stripes and squares of colour (such as *Landline Dark Red*, in fifth picture), inspired by the landscape of his birthplace in Ireland, now sell for up to \$1.4m.

Despite the hours that most of us spend in front of computers, contemporary artists who successfully use this technology are still remarkably thin on the ground. One of the most impressive is Rashid Rana, representing Pakistan in the India and Pakistan Pavilion, whose works sell for between \$50,000 and \$250,000. On a screen occupying an entire wall of a room in the 17th-century Palazzo Benzon on the Grand Canal, he has set up a live link with a replica of the same room positioned off a market square in Lahore. Visitors can see shoppers or anyone else coming and going in real time across the planet – Skype style. Aside from the funfair appeal of his work, what's striking is its optimism – that technology can unite where politics and distance fail. If there is one must-see in the entire Biennale, it is this.

Equally cheering are the clever video installations of Wu Tien-Chang in the Taiwan Pavilion in the Palazzo delle Prigioni, a former prison inside the Palazzo Ducale. In the video installation *Farewell, Spring and Autumn Pavilions*, what appears to be a retro young sailor sings of his lost love while dancing like a marionette in a modern twist on kabuki theatre. (This work is not for sale, but his other creations can be bought for between \$145,000 and \$197,500).

For those interested in photographs, the Iraq Pavilion in Calle Dandolo on the Grand Canal makes for startling viewing. One set, by the Cartier-Bresson of Iraq, Latif al-Ani, documents Baghdad during the 1960s and 1970s in all its grainy black and white glory (such as the example in the sixth picture, *US couple in Ctesiphon*). Others, by Akam Shex Hadi, show members of tribal communities under the control of Isis – represented by snakes of the black cloth that has become their sinister calling card. The curators of the Iraqi Pavilion will not reveal what these artists sell their work for – but elsewhere for €25 you can buy a book of published drawings by refugees in a camp on the Syrian border, selected by the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Proceeds from the book all go to help the refugees themselves – making this perhaps the most worthwhile buy of all.

For more Venice highlights, see the best of the biennale or curator Okwui Enwezor's tips for a perfect weekend in the watery city.

Basilica of San Giorgio, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 30133. **Ca' Pesaro**, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Santa Croce 2076, 30135. **India and Pakistan Pavilion**, Palazzo Benzon, Calle Benzon 3927, 30124. **Iraq Pavillion**, Calle Dandolo, Grand Canal, 4137. **Madonna Dell'Orto**, Cannareggio 3512, 30121. **Palazzo delle Prigioni**, Castello 4209, 30122. **Palazzetto Tito**, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Dorsoduro 2826, 30123. **Palazzo Falier**, Grand Canal San Marco 2909, Calle Vitturi O Falier, 30124. www.labiennale.org.