

La Biennale di Venezia 61st International Art Exhibition

Statement by **Pietrangelo Buttafuoco**
President of La Biennale di Venezia



As the world turns up the volume and voices distort in the din – to the point of all meaning being obscured – there remains only one way to communicate: by creating a listening zone tuned in to a lower frequency. More intimate, welcoming, human, but no less charismatic.

And Koyo Kouoh herself, in taking the basic concept underpinning her exhibition to the extreme, is thereby even more present in her absence. It all began under a large weeping fig tree at Ca' Giustinian, the headquarters of La Biennale di Venezia. That tree marked the start of a friendship and a deep commitment to La Biennale, and that green canopy – murmuring Gurdjieff's teachings on the 'permanent centre of gravity' – witnessed a pact sealed with the glorious smile of those who know, see and imagine far beyond the passing days and months.

Koyo Kouoh's Exhibition bears the hallmarks of the universal and of the future. Beneath that tree, she had glimpsed the only possible solution: a reconnection with life and the Earth. And in the shade of another tree, a large mango laden with fruit, this time in Dakar, Senegal, in the courtyard of the RAW Material Company, the school she founded, the thought continued to unfold. That's where the project of a lifetime of study and research is rooted. That's her legacy.

The pages of *In Minor Keys*, which Koyo sent to La Biennale almost a year ago, offer a striking insight into her curatorial practice and spell out a crystal-clear notion of her own concept of an exhibition. Koyo presents us with this concept through the very idea of sowing seeds, and it is through her teachings that her team and La Biennale di Venezia now offer it to the world. It is an exhibition permeated with spirit, with a sacredness that puts the person, the human being, back at the heart of things, rediscovering the sense of being in the world by reacquiring a sense of proportion with respect to all earthly elements, and by looking to the sky once more. Koyo Kouoh's journey is one that reappraises human relationships, starting from people's own backyards. The little things, which are also great ones. The human dimension, the benchmark of everything, which a part of the world, yet one the most opulent and overdeveloped world – identified in the name 'West' – has long since lost sight of, misplaced. Thus, from the powerhouse of Africa, and from one of its leading voices, comes a whisper that leads us back to authenticity, acknowledging that the greatest happiness lies in the use of our own hands – a revelation that brings us back to the Earth, to our bodies and our senses. To a humility towards what is greater than us and what cannot be explained but merely intuited. There are gardens, plants, the scents of fruits and flowers. There are Shrines, in the form of Lares and Penates, to look to so as not to stray from the main path, namely the figures of Issa Samb and Beverly Buchanan, to whom, by logic, we cannot but compare Koyo herself, now she has rejoined the world of the invisible and the immaterial. And then there are the Schools, examples of sociality and the driving force of connection between people. Performative rituals, such as processions. The importance of sentinels, guardians, those who accompany, protect and guide us throughout our existence, displayed here as mythological sirens. And then there is rest, human rhythms, the breaks that will form an integral part of the journey through this Biennale Arte, like pauses in music.

And the joy of authentic art, that which so faithfully resembles real life.

We would like to thank the **Ministry of Culture**, the **local Institutions** that support La Biennale in various ways, the **City of Venice**, the **Veneto Region**, the **Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Venezia**, and the **Italian Navy**.

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We thank the important **international Donors, organisations and institutions** who have contributed to the success of the Biennale Arte 2026.

Thanks to Koyo Kouoh and, on this occasion, her outstanding team, who from the very beginning embraced the Curator's vision with passion and generosity, contributing decisively to the realization of the Exhibition.

Finally, our thanks go to our colleagues—the many **highly skilled professionals** of La Biennale—whose great dedication made the realization and management of the Exhibition possible.