



La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

61. INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA
GERMAN PAVILION

RUIN

PRESS RELEASE
MAY 5, 2026

GERMAN PAVILION AT BIENNALE ARTE 2026
HAS OPENED TO THE PUBLIC

The German Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia presents *Ruin*, an exhibition by Henrike Naumann and Sung Tieu, curated by Kathleen Reinhardt. ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for International Relations) is the commissioner of the German contribution to the biennial.

Ruin is a space in which the polychronic traces of physical and social structures, German ideologies, and lives once lived remain materially present. With formal vocabularies spanning minimalist clarity and maximalist opulence, Henrike Naumann and Sung Tieu actively grapple with the Pavilion's architecture, using it as an ambiguous mirror for contemporary social dynamics. The title "ruin" not only describes the decay of physical structures, but also gestures toward bankruptcy—whether financial, political, or moral. Spaces of East German history—the vanished GDR Pavilion, the demolished Palace of the Republic, the burning Sunflower House at Rostock-Lichtenhagen, where a 1992 pogrom targeted asylum seekers, former Vietnamese contract workers of East Germany, and other migrant communities without any government intervention—serve as curatorial blueprints for addressing how historical absences create zones of broken time that can be reconfigured through artistic imagination. The works presented here address not a past that has passed, but one that is perhaps even more present and tangible today.

Sung Tieu envelops the pavilion's monumental façade, shaped by its National Socialist reconstruction in 1938, in a trompe-l'œil mosaic. The mosaic renders the skeletal remains of a prefabricated apartment block on Gehrenseestrasse in East Berlin—once the artist's childhood home and one of the largest dormitory complexes for Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR, later inhabited by successive migrant communities, and subsequently caught up in the speculative frenzy of the real estate market, while currently being torn down. More than three million marble tesserae simulate the surface and fractures of a structure originally conceived as a paradigmatic form of socialist egalitarian housing. Oscillating between illusion and index, Tieu intertwines personal memory with architectural representation, thereby subverting dominant historical narratives. Moreover, the work reveals historical continuities in administrative discipline, surveillance, and marginalization that have outlived various political systems. The title *Human Dignity Shall Be Inviolable* refers to Article 1 of the German Constitution and translates its principle into an architectural realm of tension. Transposed onto the overdetermined architecture of the German Pavilion, the façade produces a dissonant overlay in which two incompatible systems of representation are held in tension. At the same time, the work embodies a beauty and a longing that undermine the intertwining of architecture with structures of power. Within the pavilion's inner wings, Sung Tieu extends this inquiry through a group of works dedicated to her mother, foregrounding her experience of life and labor as both materially specific and structurally embedded within these same regimes that shape, regulate, and measure the body.

Henrike Naumann reflects on socio-political issues through interior design, exploring the friction between opposing political opinions in relation to

taste and personal everyday aesthetics. Her immersive readymade-object installation in the pavilion's main space melds references to the postwar period in East and West Germany into an "archaeological prehistory of the present," in which East Germany becomes an inner front—a border that will not disappear. Working with the set pieces of a past that will not pass, Naumann offers a glimpse into a future that can become a present reality sooner than expected. Objects are set against a mint-green backdrop evoking the wall color of former Soviet army barracks in the GDR. A relief made of chairs serves as a chronology of 20th as well as 21st century German history, while rows of curtains explore a central artistic theme of Naumann's work: homeyness as a parallel-operating emotional space. Inspired by traditional Erzgebirge dioramas of farmhouse parlors, a large relief frame depicts an interior in the style of New German Design (Neues Deutsches Design). Aside is an upholstered and furnished interpretation of a Socialist Realist mural that references the motif of the work *The Mechanization of Agriculture* (*Die Mechanisierung der Landwirtschaft*, 1960/61), created by Naumann's grandfather, the artist Karl Heinz Jakob, which is now hidden behind a drywall partition in Chemnitz. A central Hauberk curtain alludes to a pause in time following the fall of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War: a remilitarization following demilitarization—and the anticipation of an impending war.

While Henrike Naumann reinterprets our immediate future through her use of historical traces and materials, Sung Tieu approaches figurative forms and conceptual abstraction as reflective rather than opposing media to create narratives about visibility and invisibility, desire, and rejection.

Together, Naumann and Tieu's interventions transform the German Pavilion's architecture and historical resonances into sites of reflection and resistance—mobilizing ruin not as a noun, but as a verb, referring to the ongoing processes of ruination triggered by current political endeavors to silence how history is told from the margins.

The Giardini, and particularly the German Pavilion, may be read as a political topography in which the presentation and interpretation of art reveal the historical and contemporary intersections of history, politics, and social values. With their overlapping formal, political, social, and historical implications, the works by Sung Tieu and Henrike Naumann join the chorus of *Minor Keys* of this year's Biennale exhibition and encourage us to understand pasts, presents, and futures as polyphonic and multiperspectival, to make room for opposites, and to act in resistance within them.

PROGRAM

The performance *TRÜMMERFRAU* by the Venetian vertical dance group Il Posto will inaugurate Henrike Naumann's installation and recur on selected dates throughout the course of the biennial. First dates are May 7, May 9, September 12, and November 21. Further dates will be announced on the German Pavilion's website.

In November, the final week of the show is dedicated to discursive events in Venice, focusing on the works by Sung Tieu and Henrike Naumann. The program is organized in cooperation with Eva Bentscheva (Dresden University of Technology) and Matteo Bertelé (Ca' Foscari University of Venice).

INFORMATION AND DATES

Press material is available in the press section of the German Pavilion's website. Alongside the opening of the German Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, an accompanying publication featuring artistic contributions by Henrike Naumann and Sung Tieu as well as texts by Bakri Bakhit and Clemens Villinger, Sabeth Buchmann, Kathleen Reinhardt, and Kerstin Stakemeier will be published by DISTANZ Verlag.

The press tour at the German Pavilion will take place on May 6, 10.15 a.m. Registration to the tour is not required. Please note that an accreditation for the preview of the biennial however is required.

The 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia runs from May 9 to November 22, 2026. You may find all the information you need to plan your visit as well as details on ticket sales on the biennial's website: www.labiennale.org.

ABOUT IFA

ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen is the commissioner of the German Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia. Since the 1980s, ifa has helped secure seven Golden Lions, including four for Best National Participation at the biennial. Through its work in the fields of art and civil society, ifa fosters understanding and trust between people around the world. It supports democratic societies and advocates for freedom in art and science as well as freedom of expression. By contributing its international expertise and networks to discussions on art, culture, politics, and society, it helps broaden perspectives both in Germany and worldwide.

ifa provides spaces for artistic production and critical reflection, using its art collection and fostering art as a driving force for democratic social change. In the field of contemporary art, ifa supports exhibitions by artists living in Germany and is involved in international networks and academic discussions on art and cultural exchange. As part of its exhibition funding, ifa supports German and Germany-based artists in participating in biennials around the world and facilitates the participation of artists from developing and transitioning countries in biennials held in Germany.

ifa is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the state of Baden-Württemberg, and the City of Stuttgart.

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Curator: Kathleen Reinhardt

Exhibitors: Henrike Naumann, Sung Tieu

THANKS

The German Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia is realized by ifa—Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen on behalf of and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office



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