



Timor-Leste Pavilion

at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia

Across Words

Reaffirming the cultural resilience and artistic ambitions of Southeast Asia's youngest country, Timor-Leste presents *Across Words* for its second pavilion at the La Biennale di Venezia — and its first in the Arsenale.

At the heart of the exhibition is nonagenarian weaver and activist **Veronica Pereira Maia's** seminal textile work, ***Tais Don***, created to commemorate all 271 victims killed in 1991 at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili during the Indonesian occupation. Whilst *tais* is a traditional handwoven textile created primarily by women bearing patterns and shapes, Pereira Maia has inscribed each of the five panels with the names of the victims. Illiterate herself, she has used an approximation of the alphabet, mediating oral knowledge, written language and cultural resilience into material form.

Tais Don is featured in Europe for the first time at the 61st La Biennale di Venezia, inviting the audience to reflect on the significance of the written word in the face of trauma and oral history. It is surrounded by newly commissioned sound and video installations: ***CUALE (Flow)*** by **Etson** Caminha and ***Fraze ne'ebe seidauk hotu (An Unfinished Sentence) by Juventino Madeira.*** Created in deep resonance with each other, these works explore questions of cultural identity through an auditory and visual journey into Timor-Leste's multiple forms of communication.

Located between Australia and Indonesia, Timor-Leste is Southeast Asia's youngest nation and a recent member of ASEAN. After over four hundred years of Portuguese colonization and a subsequent 24-year Indonesian occupation beginning in 1975, it gained independence in May 2002**.**

For centuries, the nation's heritage was carried by more than thirty distinct local languages. It is only within the last three decades—approximately from the 1999 referendum for independence to the present—that Tetum Prasa has transformed from an oral trade language into a formalized register for government, education, and literature.

Curator Loredana Pazzini Paracciani said it is this polyphony of language that underpins Timor-Leste's social fabric. "Timor-Leste is a lineage-based society that, since ancestral times, has relied on kinship and territoriality as fundamental pillars of social organisation. Within this framework, linguistic diversification is not merely a cultural by product; it is a defining feature of the Timorese identity.
"Recent rapid evolution has created a unique linguistic environment in which ancestral idioms and contact languages like Portuguese, English and Indonesian interact. This polyphony of sounds and languages serves as the projects *fil rouge* and marks the welcoming gesture to the pavilion.

“In bringing these multi-generational artists together, the Pavilion seeks to decolonise the viewer's gaze, opening it to a process of mutual growth and an understanding of Timor-Leste not as a static entity, but as an evolving society,” Pazzini Paracciani said.

Unfamiliar lullabies, voices, and sounds greet the viewers of the pavilion to establish the project’s inquiry into language as a generative force within Timor-Leste’s layered systems of communication: visual, written and oral. Rather than seeking linguistic cohesion, the people of Timor-Leste proudly locate their identity in a multiplicity of ancestral dialects and official idioms. Within this diversity, a unique unity emerges—a cohesion found *"across words."*

The Timor-Leste Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia will be located in the Arsenale.
Commissioner: Jorge Soares Cristovão, Secretary of State for Arts and Culture of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Curator: Loredana Pazzini Paracciani
Artists: Verónica Pereira Maia, Etson Caminha, Juventino Madeira
Organizer: Ministry of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Advisors: Simon Fenby, Dr Maria Madeira, Dr Kim McGrath, Prof Dr Apinan Poshyananda.

It includes a Q&A with artists Verónica Pereira Maia, Etson Caminha and Juventino Madeira, artists’ and curator’s biographies and installation images.

The 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia is held from May 9 to November 22, 2026.

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