



Padiglione Nazionale
della Repubblica di San Marino



61. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Pavilion of the Republic of San Marino at the
61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

MARK FRANCIS

Sea of Sound

Curated by Luca Tommasi

Tana Art Space, Venice
9 May – 22 November 2026

Mark Francis will represent the Republic of San Marino at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia with the project *Sea of Sound*, curated by Luca Tommasi.

The Pavilion, designed and produced by FR Istituto d'Arte Contemporanea S.p.a., will be hosted in a new venue located between the Arsenale and the Giardini, reaffirming FR's role as organiser.

The **Pavilion of the Republic of San Marino** at the **61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia** is now officially open to the public. It can be visited free of charge **until 22 November 2026** at **Tana Art Space** (Fondamenta de la Tana no. 2111), a new venue strategically located between the Arsenale and the Giardini.

The official opening took place on Friday, 8 May, in the presence of the highest Institutions of the Republic, as well as a wide audience of authorities and invited guests.

Representing the world's oldest Republic is Northern Irish artist **Mark Francis** (Newtownards, Northern Ireland, 1962) with the project ***Sea of Sound***, curated by **Luca Tommasi**. The exhibition presents a previously unseen body of paintings by the artist, who has long explored the physical and poetic relationships between art, sound, and science.

The San Marino Pavilion is conceived and produced by **FR Istituto d'Arte Contemporanea S.p.A.**, a San Marino-based gallery led by **Roberto Felicetti**, **Vincenzo Rotondo**, and **Alessandro Bianchini**, with the support of the **Secretariat of State for Education and Culture** and under the supervision of **Valentina Garavini** as Commissioner.

"Mark Francis's painting stimulates a simultaneous visual and auditory experience, manifested in elaborate works poised between abstraction and the representation of visual memory. The brushstrokes are arranged on the canvas in an ascending movement that reflects, both in colour and in the scale of the individual bands, the intensity and energy of acoustic



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frequencies. In doing so, the artist does not passively develop a kind of diagram inspired by scientific data but, within a fully postmodern perspective, places his own subjectivity at the centre, independently interpreting the sonic and visual stimuli that inform his work”, **writes curator Luca Tommasi.**

Since the 1990s, Mark Francis has developed a practice primarily focused on abstract painting – an auditory and emotional experience translated into works that evoke sound through visual representation, within a synesthetic and multisensory dimension.

“When I paint”, explains **Mark Francis**, “the action of the brush mixing colours creates the illusion of sound. Pressure spreads the paint, producing varying intensities of tone. As each band of colour begins to merge with another, I find myself confronted with new and sometimes unexpected colours and sounds. At the end of the painting process, I am faced with a ‘sea of sound’. It is as if the colours begin to sing as they join forces and coalesce. From a distance, the regularity of the forms combined with the variability of colour produces a blurred effect. The restless eye cannot settle in any one place for long, so the viewer is invited to move closer. Up close, the texture and complexity of the surface are revealed and the blurred effect disappears, prompting the viewer to step back once again. The paintings are static, yet they contain sensory impulses, and what is seen, heard, and felt depends on the observer”.

The Pavilion is **arranged across two rooms**: in the entrance space, the film ***Listening Field*** introduces the viewer to the artist’s visual world; in the second room, **a selection of large-scale**, previously unseen paintings – executed in oil on canvas or aluminium – allows for a deeper engagement with his research.

To date, ***Listening Field*** is Mark Francis’s first and only work involving moving images: a seven-minute sequence of images and sound that could, in principle, continue indefinitely. Created in collaboration with filmmaker and animator Ian Cross, the video renders tangible what might occur within a small section of a painting. The visual elements are accompanied by sound – a deliberately non-melodic composition – created by composer Marco Genovesi, in atmospheric dialogue with the abstract forms.

The invitation extended by the Republic of San Marino to Mark Francis to represent it at Biennale Arte 2026 is motivated not only by the quality of his research but also by a strong affinity with the theme of the edition curated by Koyo Kouoh. *In Minor Keys* introduces a reflection on perception and attentive listening to the world. Mark Francis’s practice, capable of rendering the invisible visible, engages with low frequencies and subtle hums, revealing the constant and persistent presence of sound around us.

The Pavilion’s graphic identity originates from a painting onto which the three iconic towers of Mount Titano are superimposed, acting as transmitters of waves of freedom, independence, and creativity – privileged listening points and acoustic refuges above the “sea of sound” evoked by the artist.



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The San Marino Pavilion is realised with the support of Passepartout S.p.A. (main sponsor), Comac International A.M., D'Amico D&D Italia, Elenka, FR Art Gallery, and M.G.M.

Further information on the national participation of San Marino at the Biennale Arte 2026 is available at www.biennaleveneziasanmarino.com, Facebook: @biennaleveneziasanmarino, Instagram: @biennaleveneziasanmarino. Official hashtags: #biennaleveneziasanmarino #markfrancis #seaofsound

For the entire duration of Biennale Arte 2026, the work *Sound Break* (2024) by Mark Francis will be exhibited at the National Gallery of San Marino as an initiative aimed at encouraging the public to visit the San Marino National Pavilion in Venice.

Mark Francis is a Northern Irish painter who lives and works in London. Born in 1962 in Newtownards, County Down, he earned a BA in Fine Art from St. Martin's School of Art (1981-1985) and an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea School of Art (1986). Francis has developed an extensive practice primarily centered on abstract painting. His influences and interests are constantly evolving, focusing on the relationship between art and science. He has exhibited in institutions and galleries across the UK and internationally, including the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery (Dublin), Milton Keynes Gallery, Manchester City Art Gallery, and the Royal Academy in the landmark Saatchi exhibition *Sensation* (1997). In 2022, he presented *Re-Echo* at Palazzo Collicola, curated by Marco Tonelli – his first solo exhibition in a public Italian museum. His works are held in numerous collections, including the Tate Gallery, IMMA Ireland, and the Arts Council England.

Born in Monza in 1972, **Luca Tommasi** began his decades-long journey in the art world in 2002 at Finarte Auction House, where he became an auctioneer and later a director, gaining in-depth knowledge of the art market and its dynamics. From 2008 to 2012, he curated exhibitions at the Civic Gallery of Seregno while also opening his own galleries, first in Monza and later in Milan. He has curated exhibitions in both public and private spaces and has appeared as a television presenter, promoting primarily British and international artists and contributing to the dissemination of their work in Italy. To date, he has curated 25 exhibitions in public institutions in Italy and abroad (including New York, Dubai, and Sofia) and published an equal number of catalogues with leading Italian publishers. He specializes in late 20th century British painting and, in 2025, published his essay *Young British Artists: from Frieze to Sensation* (Silvana Editoriale).

FR Istituto d'Arte Contemporanea S.p.A., is a modern and contemporary art gallery founded in 2006 in San Marino by Roberto Felicetti, Vincenzo Rotondo, and Alessandro Bianchini. The choice of San Marino as its headquarters reflects both the Republic's central position within the Italian territory and its longstanding commitment to creativity, which historically attracted renowned artists and intellectuals. FR's activities include consulting and commercial projects in the Italian art market as well as the organisation of exhibitions dedicated to major figures of 20th-century Italian and international contemporary art. Among its exhibitions are: *Essere*,



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Adesso, solo show by Anne Cecile Surga (Luca Tommasi Art Gallery, Milano), *Al di là della forma. Mostra sul Novecento Storico Italiano* (Palazzo Granieri della Rocca, Turin); *La fine dell'avanguardia. Da De Chirico a Guttuso*, curated by Vittorio Sgarbi (San Marino Art Gallery, Palazzo Arzilli), the solo exhibition of Pablo Atchugarry at the Waterfront in Porto Cervo, *Pablo Atchugarry e i principali Movimenti Artistici italiani del XX secolo* (former Church of SS. Trinità, Cuorgnè). FR Istituto d'Arte Contemporanea S.p.A. confirms its role as organiser of the San Marino Pavilion at the Biennale Arte 2026 (*Sea of Sound*, solo show by Mark Francis curated by Luca Tommasi), following the positive results achieved at the 60th International Art Exhibition (*Nomader*, a solo exhibition by Eddie Martinez curated by Alison Gingeras), the 59th International Art Exhibition (*Postumano Metamorfico*, Palazzo Donà Dalle Rose, 2022), and the 18th International Architecture Exhibition (*Ospite Ospitante*. La Fucina del Futuro, 2023).

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TECHNICAL DETAILS

Pavilion of the Republic of San Marino

61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Title: *Sea of Sound*

Commissioner: Valentina Garavini

Curator: Luca Tommasi

Exhibitor: Mark Francis

Scientific Committee: Vincenzo Rotondo, Roberto Felicetti, Alessandro Bianchini, Alessandro Gea

Venue: Tana Art Space

Address: Fondamenta de la Tana no. 2111, 30122 Venice, Italy

Dates: May 9 – November 22, 2026

Pre-opening: May 7, 1:00 PM–7:30 PM; May 8, 9:00 AM–3:00 PM

Official inauguration (by invitation): May 8, 6:00 PM

Summer hours: 11:00 AM–7:00 PM (from May 9 to September 27)

Autumn hours: 10:00 AM–6:00 PM (from September 29 to November 22)

Closed on Mondays, except May 11, June 1, September 7, and November 16

Free admission

Web: www.biennaleveneziasanmarino.com

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Hashtag: #biennaleveneziasanmarino #markfrancis #seaofsound

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Press kit: <https://bit.ly/biennaleveneziasanmarino2026>



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