

How art reaches Venice for the Biennale

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VENICE — Getting artwork to a Venice exhibition is no ordinary logistics operation. With 354 bridges and 177 canals threading through the lagoon city, the journey demands meticulous planning, specialist local knowledge, and a tolerance for the unexpected.

Dorothea van der Koelen, director of the Mainz-based gallery bearing her name, is overseeing two exhibitions at this year's Venice Biennale: *Beyond the Boundaries*, marking the 25th anniversary of her Venetian outpost La Galleria, and *Towards the Light*, a solo show by artist Lore Bert held at San Fantin Church.

A 3.5-tonne truck

The operation begins before dawn in Mainz, where a 3.5-tonne lorry, nicknamed "fat Paola" by the team, is loaded with artworks secured inside wooden crates and wrapped in plastic sheeting. Water splashes during canal transport make waterproofing essential. After an eleven-hour road journey, the truck reaches Tronchetto, Venice's main freight hub on the city's western edge.

From there, the cargo transfers to a flat-bottomed boat captained by Alfredo, a specialist who knows every narrow canal, bridge clearance, and landing stage along the route. His expertise determines which passages minimise heavy lifting, though carrying crates over bridges cannot always be avoided.

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Packed paitings on boat *(Credits: Dorothea van der Koelen gallery)*

No margin for error

Timing at each venue is critical. When the boat arrives at San Fantin Church, Lore Bert's works must be unloaded and unpacked immediately: there is no on-site storage. Empty crates are reloaded while the boat continues to the gallery, where the process repeats before returning to Tronchetto.

The days that follow are consumed by installation work and rounds of consultation with architects, heritage conservation officers, and the local Curia, standard requirements when working inside historic Venetian buildings.

By the Saturday of the opening week, after six consecutive working days, both exhibitions are complete. "This marks not an end but a beginning," van der Koelen said. "Now come the photographing, filming, and preparations for the months of the Biennale ahead."

What visitors encounter as a seamless, polished show is, in reality, the product of precision logistics, hard-won experience, and many pairs of hands, proof that in Venice, even art must travel by water.

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