

Vienna artist wins Biennale prize for art as activism

Posted on May 10, 2026 by Benigna Mallebrein

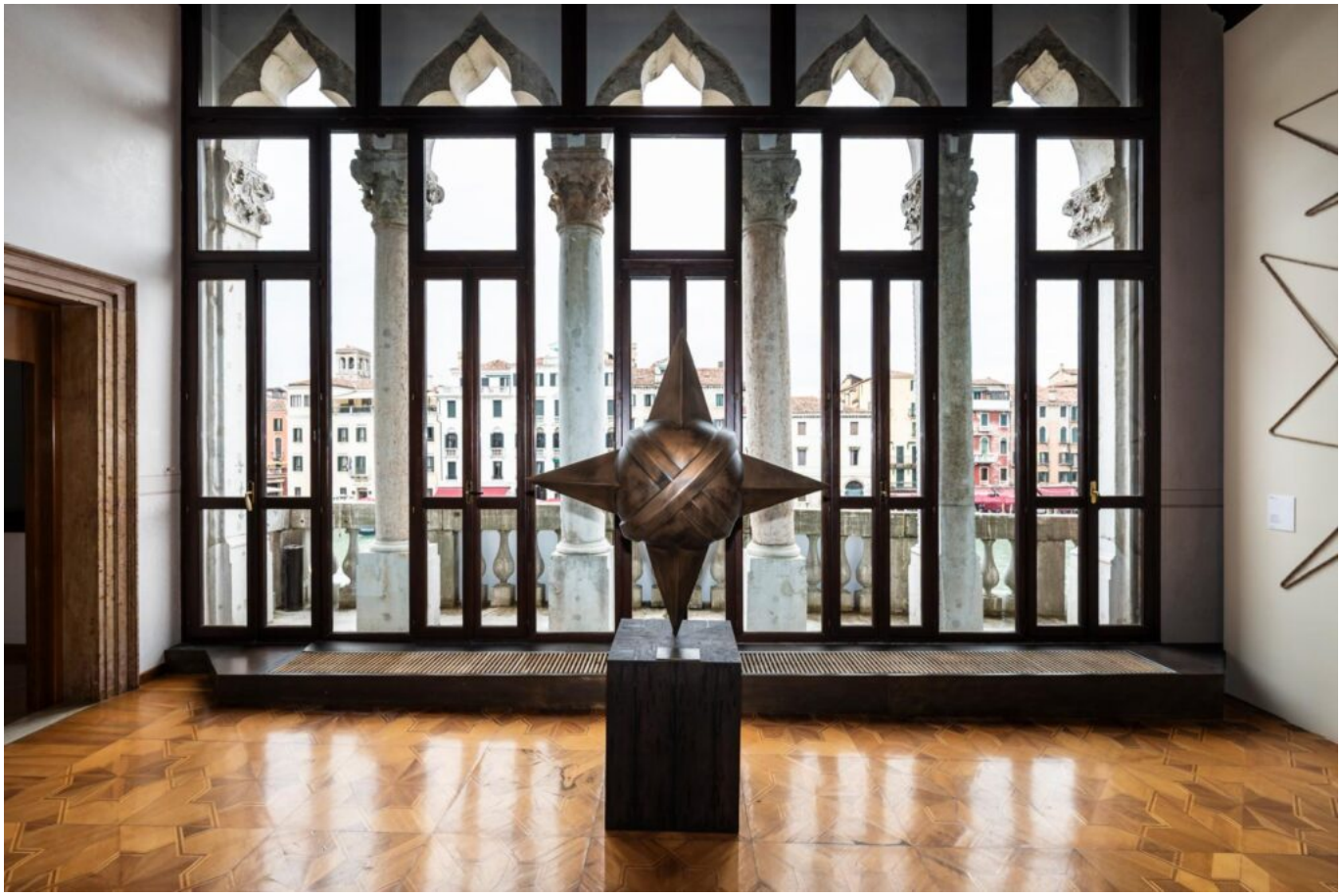
VENICE — The European Cultural Centre in Italy awarded Vienna-based artist Rita Sabo the Special Prize Artist as Activist at the Venice Biennale on May 8, 2026. Sabo won the first edition of the prize for her large-scale installation *Unison: The Fusion of High Cultures* at Palazzo Bembo, recognised as a catalyst for cross-cultural dialogue and for its commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Fifteen cultures, one cosmic constellation

Italy Now joined Sabo as she guided us through the four rooms she curated at Palazzo Bembo. Threads connect 15 cultures across the installation, ranging from Sumerians, Egyptians, Mayans, Celts and Buddhists to Hindus, Daoists, the Dogon, and others, forming what the artist describes as a cosmological constellation of cultural memory and knowledge. Cosmic sounds fill the rooms, part of a soundscape Sabo helped design.

“With this exhibition, I have been able to realise a project close to my heart for 13 years,” she explains. “The stars inspired me to create this work. I connect 15 cultures to a cosmic constellation of stars using threads.” Four further civilisations complete the framework. “The Roman, Greek, Hebrew and Arab have merged to form a unison, a unified whole of advanced civilisations. They prompt us to look within. They convey immense energies. I express this through large-scale formats and a complexity that is almost three-dimensional. I choose the colours according to my inner feeling. And as you can see, I love gold,” she adds, smiling.

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Sacred Planet by Rita Sabo *(Credits: Rita Sabo)*

Art as a living, experiential present

Born in the North Caucasus, Sabo grew up in Israel and Switzerland, where she also studied, as well as in London. Her practice sits at the intersection of spirituality, scale and cultural memory. “Cultures do not compete, but remember, merge and carry forward,” she says. “Touching the metaphysical, they merge into a polyphonic field where past, present and future appear simultaneously, not as an archive, but as a living, experiential present.”

The project was curated by Tayfun Belgin and realised with the support of the Association for Art in Public, Düsseldorf, within the framework of *Personal Structures: Confluences 2026*, organised by the European Cultural Centre Italy. The exhibition brought together 175 artists from over 40 countries.

Unison: The Fusion of High Cultures, Palazzo Bembo, until September 6, 2026.

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