

ArtReview sent a questionnaire to artists and curators exhibiting in and curating the various national pavilions of the 2026 Venice Biennale, the responses to which will be published daily in the leadup to and during the Venice Biennale, which runs from 9 May through 22 November.

Belu-Simion Fainaru is representing Israel; the pavilion is in the Arsenale

AR Tell *ArtReview* what you plan to exhibit in Venice. What has influenced or inspired you?

I plan to exhibit the installation *Rose of Nothingness*. The work is inspired by the poetry of Paul Celan, particularly his image of "black milk," a symbolic liquid that brings together life and death, matter and spirit. Black water drips into a rectangular pool, creating a quiet framed emptiness that invites contemplation and lingering.

The pool evokes ink—a symbol of writing and memory—binding the artistic experience to collective consciousness. Water, as a vessel of life, resonates with Israel's drip irrigation innovation, suggesting creation under conditions of scarcity. Rooted in Jewish mystical thought, especially Kabbalah, the work engages with cycles of creation, rupture, and rectification or mending (*Tikkun*), emerging from the infinite source of being (*Ein Sof*). Water mediates concealment and revelation, body and soul, past and future, carrying time, memory, and responsibility.

Installed in Venice, where the Talmud was first printed in the 16th century, the installation gains historical resonance as a living, open, continuously evolving visual text. It unfolds in the tension between presence and absence, inviting reflective engagement with time, memory, and sustainability.

AR In what ways (if at all) does your work relate to the theme of the Biennale exhibition, *In Minor Keys*?

My installation integrates organically with the Biennale's theme, *In Minor Keys*, as it strives to evoke a subtle, silent experience. Much like a minor chord in music, the work invites slowing down, attentiveness, and mindful intent, operating through intimacy and reflexivity. The drip-irrigation system in the installation generates a rhythm of pulses and pauses, establishing a field of silent presence. Water is not merely a physical substance but a constellation of images: a tear, a spring, beauty, and time. The reflecting pool forms a "world within a world," a realm of repose and focused attention.

The drippers embody ideas of eco-poetics and the poetics of technology, becoming a source of restrained abundance; tear-like drops pulsating as part of life's melody. The cyclical action produces an inner, circular temporality, allowing viewers to synchronize with the work's rhythm and gradually immerse themselves in it. At the same time, the installation embodies a space of rectification—ecological as well as spiritual—offering a meditative environment in which the viewer merges with the cyclical drip, and the boundaries between body, space, and time dissolve. The work thus resonates with the Biennale's theme as a poetics of water, time, and rupture, and as a space of restoration and contemplative listening.

AR Why is the Venice Biennale still important, if at all?

In my view, the Venice Biennale remains one of the most important and influential events in contemporary art. It continues to serve as an international focal point, bringing numerous countries together to present current trends while offering a

platform for dialogue on global issues. That said, its importance to me lies primarily in the encounters it generates between artists and curators from around the world, as a platform for exchanging ideas, for conversation, and for imagining future collaborations. It enables artists to operate within an international field—in a world of ideas and images that connects different people and cultures. I believe that art does not belong to a single nation. It moves between broader cultural contexts and human encounters, allowing each artist to express himself freely and to cross national boundaries.

AR What role does a national pavilion play at a time of increasing confrontational nationalisms? Is it about expressing difference or commonality?

The Biennale began as an international art event. The city of Venice sought to compete with the great world fairs of the nineteenth century, which were "summit meetings" of nations that showcased technological innovation and their achievements of progress, such as Paris's Eiffel Tower and London's Crystal Palace. Today, more than 130 years later, reality has changed. Although we are witnessing a resurgence of nationalism, I believe we are living in an era in which the artist is, first and foremost, an individual who crosses borders, rather than a representative of a state. Therefore, for me, the pavilion is not a space of national representation or competition between countries, but a platform for artistic freedom of expression, for dialogue between people, and for human experiences in which the viewer, as an individual human being, stands at the center, rather than the nation or the homeland.

AR Who, for you, is the most important artist (in any discipline) that your country has produced?

For me, Marcel Janco, whom I had the privilege of meeting, is one of the most important artists in Israeli art, and I find points of affinity between us that strengthen my sense of identification with him. Like Janco, I was born in Bucharest, Romania—though we belong to different generations—and I, too, immigrated to Israel as an adult, navigating life as both a migrant and an outsider within the local culture. Janco was awarded the Israel Prize, the country's highest honor, and years later I was humbled to receive the same recognition.

Beyond personal achievements, Janco's lasting contribution to world art is especially significant. He was among the founders of Cabaret Voltaire and a leading figure in the Dada movement, which transformed Western art and championed the power of art to break conventions and open new spaces for expression, thought, and emotion. I feel a deep kinship with this vision. These days, I am presenting a solo show within Janco's permanent exhibition at the Janco Dada Museum, Ein Hod, Israel.

AR What is something you want people to know about your nation that they might not know already?

Many people may not realize that Israel was a pioneer in the invention of drip irrigation, the very system I use in my installation. It is a life-changing agricultural solution, developed to address water scarcity with precision and efficiency. In the context of the global water crisis, drip irrigation takes on broader significance, as vast regions, particularly in the Global South, face desertification and water shortages that threaten food security and demand forms of agriculture adapted to unstable water sources.

Drip irrigation technology offers a model of careful, precise, and responsible use of a vital resource, delivering water directly to the plant's root, minimizing evaporation and waste, and maximizing the benefit of every drop. It demonstrates how innovation can emerge from need and become a tool for resilience and sustainability, especially for communities confronting extreme drought and changing climate conditions. What began as a practical solution for local survival has evolved into an answer to a far larger question: how humanity might share limited resources through a consciousness of mending and global solidarity.

AR Given that you are exhibiting in a national pavilion, is there something (a quality or an issue or attitude) that distinguishes the art of that nation from that of others? That makes it particular? Are there specific contexts that it responds to? Or do you think that art is a universal language that goes beyond social, political or geographic boundaries?

Indeed, I believe that art is a universal language. To me, the very essence of art lies in its ability to touch fundamental human experience: emotion, memory, pain, hope, identity, and belonging. These experiences are not confined to any one nation; they are shared by human beings everywhere.

While every work is created within a particular cultural context and carries local baggage, once it encounters a viewer, it exceeds the circumstances of its making and opens a dialogue that moves beyond spoken language and political borders. Art does not erase differences; it creates a space in which they can be contained without becoming enclosed within them.

I believe that art offers artists a space for free expression, where complex questions may be asked, conventions challenged, and identity articulated openly. Especially in times like these, art can serve as a bridge, enabling empathy and offering a human perspective amid an increasingly polarized and violent public discourse. For this reason, even though I exhibit in a national framework, I do not perceive it as a declaration of seclusion, isolation, or differentiation, but rather as an opportunity to bring a distinct voice into a broader, universal, border-crossing human discourse.

AR What, other than art, are you looking forward to seeing – or doing – while you are in Venice?

I am deeply interested in books and libraries. While in Venice, I intend to visit the rare Jewish literary treasures held at the Renato Maestro Library and Archives in the Jewish ghetto. Venice was a major center of Hebrew printing, and it was there, in the sixteenth century, that the first printed edition of the Talmud appeared—a foundational text that has shaped Jewish life and law. The library holds some 2,500 rare volumes dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. I look forward to exploring them, as each volume is a glimpse into the past and a potential inspiration for a work that responds to the book and its text.

AR Could you give us a brief overview of your average working day while creating your presentation in Venice?

I am a dedicated hard worker. Most of my days are devoted to artistic practice, from the initial planning stages through execution. In the process, I concentrate on the elements I wish to convey: form, space, and experience. The work is not only physical but also deeply conceptual. I continually reflect on how the viewer will

experience the piece and consider how it will resonate in the context in which it will be presented.

AR Can art really change the world?

As an artist, I see art as a haven of sanity within an unstable reality, steeped in conflict and upheaval; a sphere where I can speak freely, yet always with responsibility and a critical awareness of both myself and the society around me. For me, art is not merely a personal or aesthetic expression, but an invitation to a living, ongoing dialogue with people. This encounter introduces a possibility for shared existence: a space where difference is not threatening but enriching, where multiple voices coexist; a space in which one can listen, question, and linger in complexity without rushing to judgment. Art, for me, is an act of connecting, a continuous attempt to build bridges between people, experiences, identities, and narratives, allowing for hope, understanding, and empathy in a turbulent and violent world.

In this context, the complex question arises: can art change the world? Art operates within the inner space of the individual. It subverts certainties, opens cracks, and offers new perspectives. Perhaps its role is not to "change" the world directly, but to enable a gaze, conversation, doubt, and hope. Perhaps change is a byproduct of the very existence of a space in which one may inquire and imagine a different reality, while making room for freedom of expression.