La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

PAVILION OF CUBAN REPUBLIC

61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

HOMBRES LIBRES / FREE MEN

Commissioner: Daneisy García Roque
Curator: Nelson Ramirez de Arellano Conde
Exhibitor: Roberto Diago

Il Giardino Bianco - Art Space

Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, 1814. Venice
From 9 May to 22 November 2026

Roberto Diago, "Hombres Libres / Free men", 2025.
Installation, mixed materials, variable dimensions ©Estudio Diago. Courtesy of: Estudio Diago

‘Hombres Libres / Free Men’ is the project by artist Roberto Diago for the Pavilion of Cuban Republic at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, curated by Nelson Ramirez de Arellano Conde and the commissioner of Daneisy García Roque. The exhibition, open from May 9 to November 22, is located at Il Giardino Bianco - Art Space, at Via Garibaldi 1814, between the Giardini and the Arsenale.

Roberto Diago’s work stands as a perpetual reminder that freedom is not given, it is conquered; it is not a passive state, but a continuous practice—a constant tension that demands keeping memory sharp and dignity intact.

The installation ‘Hombres Libres/Free Men’ consists of a group of sculptures (heads) of various dimensions that advance toward the viewer, receiving and confronting them. They display scars that rise in relief from oxidized metals, wood, plastics, and salvaged materials —a tactile memory that refuses to be flattened by oblivion. In this poetics, freedom does not imply hiding a history of pain under the makeup of assimilation, but rather exhibiting it like a medal.

This reclamation begins in the very epidermis of the piece, confronting us with black skin not as a smooth, docile surface, but as a geographical map of trauma and resistance. The keloid thus becomes an assertion of identity: the irrefutable proof of having survived punishment and that the flesh, though marked, remains sovereign.

Through this lens, the concept of a "free man" transcends the legal definition of one unshackled; for the artist, a free person is one with the courage to acknowledge their marks, to dignify their precarity, and to hold their gaze before a history that attempted to erase them. It does not represent victims, but rather constructs a genealogy of survivors who have crowned themselves.

Juan Roberto Diago Durruthy

Born in Havana, Cuba, 1971. Lives and works in Havana, Cuba.

Painter, Sculptor, and Installation Artist, is a graduate of the San Alejandro Academy of Fine Arts. He currently serves as a Consulting Professor at the University of Arts (ISA) and is a member of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC).

Utilizing found materials, his art explores a permanent theme: the essence of the enslaved within the contemporary Black man. His work addresses the historical conflict of the African diaspora, reflecting a spirit of resistance and the daily struggle for survival. By interlacing these materials piece by piece, he reveals the wounds of the past, while imbuing the work with the strength to endure.

Roberto Diago has established a formidable international trajectory spanning over three decades, with a presence in prestigious art circuits across Europe, Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean.

His solo career includes landmark exhibitions at the Ethelbert Cooper Gallery at Harvard University, the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, and Casa América in Madrid. A consistent figure in major global biennials, Diago has participated in the 47th and 57th International Art Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia, the Havana Biennial, and the Dakar Biennale (2022), alongside historic showcases such as "Artes de Cuba" at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

His work is held in prominent public and private collections worldwide, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the CIFO and Pizzuti Collections in the U.S., the Museum of Black Civilizations in Senegal, the National Museum of Fine Arts in Cuba, and the Reina Sofia Museum in Spain.

His pieces have been exhibited in hundreds of solo and group shows across some 25 countries. His work is held in approximately 20 major national and international collections.

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