

SOMALIA
NATIONAL
PAVILION

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La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Federal Republic of Somalia to present first-ever Somalia National Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

SADDEXLEEY

Ayan Farah, Asmaa Jama and Warsan Shire

The Federal Republic of Somalia announces its first National Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Open to the public from May 9 to November 22, 2026, at Palazzo Caboto, Venice. The exhibition brings together Ayan Farah, Asmaa Jama and Warsan Shire.

This marks Somalia's inaugural presentation on a dedicated national platform at the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

Internationally recognized as the "Nation of Poets", Somalia presents a Pavilion unfolding across three floors in a triadic rhythm: three artists, three registers, three strands of relation.

Titled SADDEXLEEY (sa-DEH-ley), the Pavilion takes its name from a Somali poetic form shaped through triadic composition. Derived from *saddex* (sa-DEH), meaning three, it describes a generative logic in which sense unfolds through repetition, variation, and relation. Rooted in Somalia's oral tradition, where poetry functions as social architecture and lived philosophy, the exhibition spatializes poetic form in resonance with Koyo Kouoh's theme of the Biennale Arte 2026 *In Minor Keys*. Word, sound, and matter converge as a living poem, oscillating between fragility and endurance. SADDEXLEEY proposes belonging not as a declaration, but as sensation.

Working across geographies, languages, and disciplines, the artists explore memory and inheritance through textile, poetry, and film. Ayan Farah engages textiles and sediment as carriers of time, allowing material to hold what cannot be spoken directly. Asmaa Jama works across film, performance, and archival gestures to question how heritage is documented and reactivated in space. Warsan Shire's poetry gives voice to displacement and intimacy, shaping language as both witness and archive. Together, their practices converge through rhythm, matter, and voice. Memory is not narrated. It is felt.

Poetry has long operated as Somalia's social architecture, structuring thought, transmission, and collective memory. Rather than presenting poetry as content, the Pavilion adopts poetic structure as methodology, organizing space and perception as an extension of that living tradition - an approach developed by curators Mohamed Mire and Fabio Scrivanti.

The Pavilion is hosted at Palazzo Caboto, positioned between the Giardini della Biennale and the Arsenale at the intersection of three streets: Riva degli Schiavoni, Riva dei Sette Martiri and Via Garibaldi.

The National Pavilion of Somalia is commissioned by Abdirahman Yusuf Mohamud, acting as Cultural Advisor under the mandate of the Office of the Prime Minister of Somalia, and realized with the support of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Somalia, with Galerie Nordenhake and Galerie Kadel Willborn as lead partners, and with additional support from private contributors.

AYAN FARAH

Ayan Farah is a Somali-Swedish artist based in Stockholm. Working with painting, textiles, and material-led research, her practice explores landscape as physical, political, and poetic systems. Focusing on land, water and the knowledge embedded in materials as a carrier of memory, she works with locally sourced sediment and natural elements. Through painting, embroidery, and installation, her work follows the movement of matter across borders and ecologies, where geology, labour, and colonial histories converge. She has exhibited internationally, including at Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Fondazione Prada, Venice; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; and the Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow. Her work is held in major public and private collections, including Moderna Museet and Kadist Foundation.

ASMAA JAMA

Asmaa Jama is a Somali-Danish poet, filmmaker, and multidisciplinary artist based in Bristol. Asmaa Jama's poetry appears in *The Poetry Review*, *Ambit*, and *Magma*. In 2024, Asmaa won the Geoffrey Dearmer Poetry Prize and has been recognised by the Brunel African Poetry Prize, Wasafiri Writing Prize, James Berry Poetry Prize, and the National Poetry Competition. Asmaa's films explore archival memory, myth, and diasporic narratives, including *Before We Disappear* (2021), commissioned by BBC Arts, and *Except this time nothing returns from the ashes* (2022/23), co-directed with Gouled Ahmed. Asmaa's work won the Berwick Film Festival New Cinema Award and has been exhibited at Spike Island, The Africa Centre (NY), The 18. International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. In 2023, Asmaa won the Art X Prize, supported by Yinka Shonibare's G.A.S. residency.

WARSAN SHIRE

Warsan Shire is a Somali-British writer and poet whose debut collection *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* was published by Penguin Random House in 2022. Her first pamphlet, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* was published by Flipped Eye Publishing in 2011. She won the Inaugural Brunel University African Poetry Prize in 2013, and in 2014 she was appointed as the first Young Poet Laureate for London. She was also selected as Poet in Residence for Queensland, Australia where she collaborated with the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts. In 2015 she released a limited-edition pamphlet *Her Blue Body*. In 2016 and 2020 she collaborated with Beyoncé Knowles-Carter on the film adaptation and poetry for the visual album *Lemonade* and *Black Is King*. In 2017 she was included as part of the Penguin Modern Poets series alongside Sharon Olds and Malika Booker. She also wrote the short film *Brave Girl Rising*, highlighting the voices and faces of Somali girls in Africa's largest refugee camp. Her work has been translated and published in dozens of territories around the world.

Commissioner: Abdirahman Yusuf Mohamud;

Curators: Mohamed Mire and Fabio Scrivanti;

Exhibitors: Ayan Farah, Asmaa Jama, Warsan Shire

Venue: Palazzo Caboto, Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, 1645, Castello

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