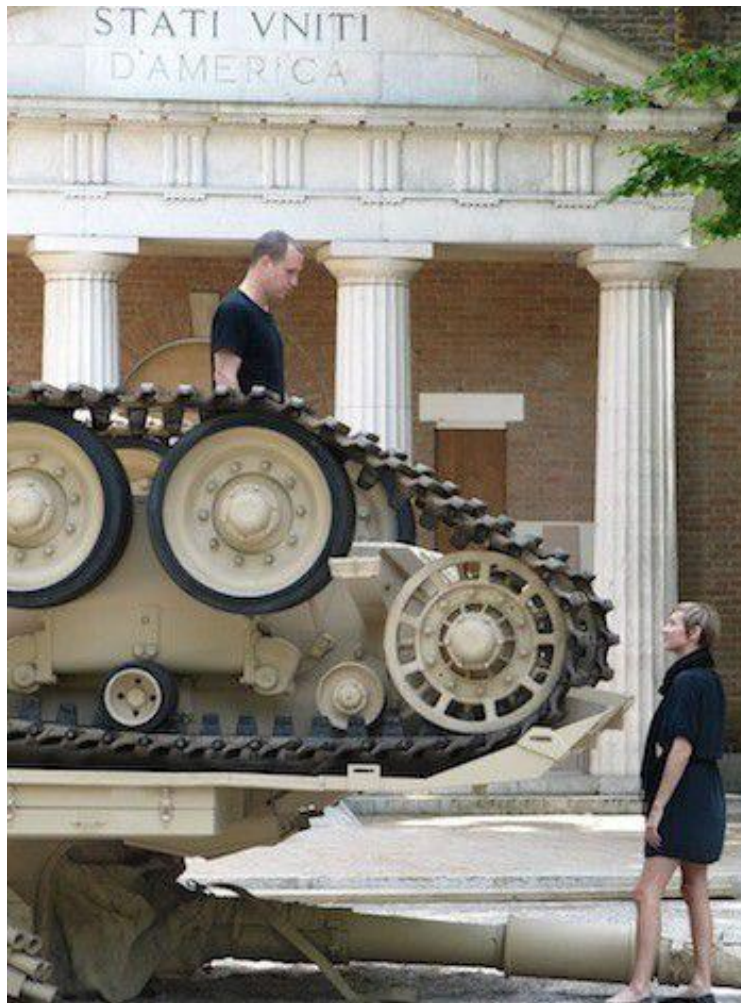


Report from Venice: IMA's Venice Biennale

Flounder Lee
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Allora and Calzadilla's 'Tank'

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Opening weekend of the **Venice Biennale** is a pilgrimage for art aficionados. Once every two years the art world floods this city of canals to see what work each country has to offer. Countries have different ways of picking the artists to represent them and

ideologies can definitely emerge. Sometimes you can get conservative shows (Canada's), sometimes not (UK's). As the commissioner for the US pavilion, Lisa Freiman, chose the latter track.

Read David Hoppe's [feature story](#) about the IMA and the Venice Biennale.

As the senior curator of Contemporary art at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Freiman went with Puerto Rican artists, Allora and Calzadilla. This duo turned things upside down, literally in fact.

There are six components to the work. The one that cannot be ignored is the upside-down, 60-ton tank in the courtyard. At certain times, an athlete runs on a treadmill on top of the tank. This turns the treads and the sound carries over the whole Giardini section of the Biennale. People start following the noise, leading to the spectacle.

Inside, the pieces are of a quieter, but still impressive, sort. In two rooms, replicated business class seats from Delta and American airlines are placed. These props are used by gymnasts at platforms for their performances.

The final room before exiting is filled with a giant pipe organ, except, instead of keys, you have an ATM. Withdraw money and you are rewarded with unique music from the pipes. Spectacle, commerce, identity, sport and nationalism are keys for considering this show.

Outside the U.S. pavilion there was still much to explore. Luckily, I had fellow Hoosiers with which to explore since [Herron School of Art and Design](#) had a study abroad class there and I joined up with them for the weekend.

Venice's Pavilion features boats tipped up at high angles with video monitors showing waterfalls; the whole place is lit blue, each end of the crescent building has walls of video of water; it's surreal and striking and fitting for a city so dominated by boats and water.

Nearby, Macedonia's Pavilion features artist Igor Toshevski who showed in Indianapolis at SpaceCamp in January of this year, a giant leap from the Murphy Building to the Biennale, but this just proves that the Indianapolis gallery scene can draw world players.

At Basilica di San Giorgio, Anish Kapoor's "Ascension" is breathtaking. The column of smoke that rises from floor to roof of the church is ethereal. The piece is elusive and compelling, referencing spirituality and a temporary transcendental state — the best piece of Kapoor I have ever seen. It is much more moving than the "bean" in Chicago.

After closing one night, two other Herron people and I were able to visit Mike and Doug Starn's Big Bambu, which has been previously installed in the Met in New York. They've been working on this gigantic platform/tree house structure for years. It's a wonderful sight during the day, and even more amazing at night.

There are hundreds more pieces, pavilions, and events, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention the most beautiful piece to be found. For Saudi Arabia's first participation in the Biennale, they chose two sisters, Raja and Shadia Alem. The video and sculptural installation had me and my fellow Indy viewer awestruck. Referencing Mecca and Venice, the piece is mesmerizing — the mirrored cube and spheres and the video and light projections making the room magical.

The U.S. pavilion is only one of the dozens represented, but this year it stands near the top thanks to some bold choices by the IMA and [Lisa Freiman](#). Indianapolis is taking a strong position in the global art scene lately and this helps bolster those efforts immensely.

Flounder Lee lives in Indianapolis where he teaches at Herron, makes art, and runs the SpaceCamp Gallery in the Murphy Building.

Tags



[David Hoppe](#)