Giuseppe Penone’s monumental tree rises from Venetian lagoon as Architecture Biennale opens

This year’s exhibition in Venice brings together artists and architects to explore the question How Will We Live Together?

The Italian sculptor Giuseppe Penone has unveiled one of his most dramatic works at the Venice Architecture Biennale, which opens this week (22 May-21 November), against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic.

Penone’s installation, which comprises an elm tree cradling a heavy stone, is emblematic of the Venice Architecture Biennale’s theme, Curated by Hashim Sarkis, the theme explores the idea of habitat, as the world emerges from the twin disasters of Covid-19 and the Port of Beirut’s explosion.

The installation is described as “a symbolic home where all species can prosper with resilience, adaptation, and hope... It is about the force of gravity, horizontality versus the verticality. The reflection of the branches and the stone in the water evokes a movement of the sun... It’s about the force of gravity, horizontality versus the verticality.”

The exhibition in the Swiss pavilion “investigates the subject of borders taking into account both the political and spatial dimension of the territory and its sensitive social perception”, says a statement. The team of Geneva-based architects and artists behind the pavilion, including the sculptor Pierre Szczepki, documented the views of inhabitants on the border between Switzerland and its neighbouring countries, reflecting their changing views as the coronavirus crisis progressed.

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Biennale is curated by the Lebanese architect Hashim Sarkis. Some of the permanent pavilions, including the Greek, Italian, Japanese, South African and United States, have been transformed into temporary pavilions. Included in these is the German pavilion, which features the work of artist Hans Peter Feldmann. The installation is described as “a symbolic home where all species can prosper with resilience, adaptation, and hope... It is about the force of gravity, horizontality versus the verticality.”

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A close up of Giuseppe Penone’s The Listener installation on view at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia 2021.

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