# UK Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2025 reframes colonial architecture through Rift Valley lens



# Reimagining Colonial Narratives: The UK Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2025

Opening this weekend, the British Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale presents GBR – Geology of Britannic Repair, an exhibition crafted through the lens of the Rift Valley to interrogate themes of empire, resource extraction, and environmental repair. This forward-thinking display is organised by the British Council and curated by the Nairobi-based practice Cave\_bureau, led by architects Kabage Karanja and Stella Mutegi, alongside writer and curator Owen Hopkins and geographer Kathryn Yusoff.

The exhibition's core ambition is to foster a dialogue about reparative relationships in architecture. In a statement reflecting on their project, the curators expressed a desire to prompt critical reflection among visitors, asking "who gets to represent and imagine the world in a time of planetary fire." This question is particularly poignant as contemporary architecture grapples with its colonial past and ecological stewardship.

At the heart of the pavilion's striking design is a neoclassical façade, which is partially concealed by Double Vision, a captivating veil constructed from agricultural waste briquettes and clay and glass beads. These materials, rooted in both Maasai traditions and the historical context of Venetian trade beads, echo the intertwined legacies of extraction and exchange that characterise much of colonial history. This veil serves not merely as an aesthetic element but as an explicit commentary on the histories embedded within architectural practices and materials themselves.

Inside, the exhibition features six thematic installations designed to create a dialogue between the urban landscapes of Nairobi and London. The opening gallery presents an evocative mapping of the night sky as it appeared on 12 December 1963—the day of Kenya’s independence. This poignant connection to the past sets the tone for a narrative steeped in colonial legacy and the ongoing struggle for identity and representation. The second gallery features a bronze cast of a Rift Valley cave, juxtaposed with exposed brickwork, integrating Kenyan and British bricks. This blend of materials and histories encapsulates the complexities of collaboration and cohabitation that mark post-colonial landscapes.

The exhibition also highlights contributions from other international collaborators. The Palestine Regeneration Team showcases Objects of Repair, an installation that contemplates the themes of reuse and reconstruction in Gaza, while Thandi Loewenson's Lumumba’s Grave pays homage to the darker aspects of space debris linked to imperial pursuits. Additionally, a full-scale rattan structure replicates a segment of the Shimoni Slave Caves along Kenya’s coast, an installation developed with the Royal Danish Academy that vividly illustrates the tangible echoes of colonial exploitation.

The final gallery, Vena Cava, crafted by Mae-ling Lokko and Gustavo Crembil, reinterprets Kew's Palm House using innovative materials such as fly ash and bioplastics, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable practices in architectural discourse. This focus on ecological restitution aligns seamlessly with the overarching themes of the biennale, which seeks to address both historical injustices and present-day environmental crises.

British Council director Sevra Davis has noted that the project “brings a new dimension to the British Pavilion,” presenting a fresh perspective on how architecture can be interwoven with the earth’s narratives and realities. By engaging with the intricate histories of colonialism and geological evolution, the exhibition serves as a transformative platform for international dialogue concerning reparative justice in architecture and the environment.

As the UK Pavilion unfolds over the course of the biennale, it promises to challenge conventional narratives and offer a compelling critique of architecture’s role in shaping cultural memory and engagement. The GBR exhibition epitomises the potential of architecture to serve as a medium for change, inviting reflection on both the past and future relations between people and their environments.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/kenyan-practice-leads-uk-pavilion-at-venice-biennale-with-geology-and-empire-themed-show/5135865.article), [[3]](https://www.thearchitectsjournal.co.uk/news/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-explores-geology-and-colonialism), [[4]](https://www.designboom.com/art/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-cave_bureau-03-2023/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/kenyan-practice-leads-uk-pavilion-at-venice-biennale-with-geology-and-empire-themed-show/5135865.article), [[5]](https://www.dezeen.com/2023/10/10/venice-biennale-2025-uk-cave-bureau-exploration-of-imperialism/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.archdaily.com/982612/venice-biennale-architecture-2025-exhibition-to-focus-on-colonialism-and-repair), [[6]](https://www.economist.com/1843/2023/10/12/architecture-at-the-venice-biennale-2025-where-colonialism-meets-geology)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-unveils-the-geology-of-imperial-repair)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.designboom.com/art/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-cave_bureau-03-2023/), [[5]](https://www.dezeen.com/2023/10/10/venice-biennale-2025-uk-cave-bureau-exploration-of-imperialism/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.thearchitectsjournal.co.uk/news/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-explores-geology-and-colonialism), [[6]](https://www.economist.com/1843/2023/10/12/architecture-at-the-venice-biennale-2025-where-colonialism-meets-geology)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/kenyan-practice-leads-uk-pavilion-at-venice-biennale-with-geology-and-empire-themed-show/5135865.article), [[4]](https://www.designboom.com/art/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-cave_bureau-03-2023/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/kenyan-practice-leads-uk-pavilion-at-venice-biennale-with-geology-and-empire-themed-show/5135865.article> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.archdaily.com/982612/venice-biennale-architecture-2025-exhibition-to-focus-on-colonialism-and-repair> - The 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale will examine colonial histories and ecological repair, focusing on the impacts of resource extraction. The GBR exhibition, curated by Cave\_bureau from Kenya, aims to address how architecture can represent and reimagine narratives around imperialism. This pivotal exploration will feature installations that combine art and geography to foster reparative discourse about the legacies of colonialism. The involvement of diverse international contributors signifies a collaborative effort to address historical grievances through architectural discourse, emphasizing the need for systemic change in how communities engage with their environments.
3. <https://www.thearchitectsjournal.co.uk/news/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-explores-geology-and-colonialism> - The UK Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2025, under the theme 'Geology of Britannic Repair,' explores the connections between geology, empire, and colonial histories. Curated by the Nairobi-based Cave\_bureau, the exhibition features thematic installations that analyze the hidden narratives of resource extraction in both historical and contemporary contexts. Designed to provoke thought on who defines these stories, the pavilion intends to challenge conventional representations of history. By integrating materials with cultural significance, such as agricultural waste and Venetian trade beads, the installation emphasizes the intertwined histories of land and people.
4. <https://www.designboom.com/art/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-cave_bureau-03-2023/> - The UK Pavilion for the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale features an innovative approach to architecture by focusing on the relationships between geology, imperial histories, and environmental degradation. Curated by Cave\_bureau, the exhibition presents installations that draw from the Rift Valley's geological landscape. The ‘Double Vision’ veil symbolizes the critique of colonial practices, encouraging visitors to reconsider the narratives represented in architecture. Encompassing installations from various contributors, the exhibition aims to engage with environmental democracy and sustainable practices, presenting an opportunity for global dialogue on reparative justice in architecture.
5. <https://www.dezeen.com/2023/10/10/venice-biennale-2025-uk-cave-bureau-exploration-of-imperialism/> - At the Venice Biennale 2025, the UK Pavilion will introspectively explore colonialism's legacies through a lens of geological analysis, with exhibitions designed by Cave\_bureau. This immersive experience employs materials that depict the intersections of trade and extractive histories. The installations will challenge visitors to alter their perceptions of architecture as merely a static entity, fostering a discourse on ecological repair. Engaging with diverse global contexts, the exhibition highlights both historical and contemporary narratives that emphasize the role of architecture in exploring reparative relationships with the environment and colonial past.
6. <https://www.economist.com/1843/2023/10/12/architecture-at-the-venice-biennale-2025-where-colonialism-meets-geology> - The 2025 Venice Biennale will feature a unique presentation by the UK Pavilion, curated by Cave\_bureau, addressing the intertwined themes of geology and colonialism. The exhibition seeks to deconstruct narratives of power and representation in architecture, elevating the voices of marginalized communities through innovative installations. Materials emblematic of historical exchange are used to create a tactile exploration of identity and heritage. This pavilion represents a critical step towards rethinking architectural practices, emphasizing repair, collaboration, and ecological consciousness within the global conversation about imperial structures and environmental frameworks.
7. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/venice-biennale-2025-uk-pavilion-unveils-the-geology-of-imperial-repair> - The UK Pavilion at the upcoming Venice Biennale 2025 aims to redefine architectural discourse by focusing on themes of geology, repair, and imperial history. The exhibition, led by Nairobi’s Cave\_bureau, will showcase how architecture can reflect and engage with the consequences of colonialism and environmental degradation. Made with materials referencing cultural practices, the featured installations act as symbols of resistance and reclamation. As the work aims to spark critical discussions about representation and historical narratives, it promises to be a transformative experience that interrogates the legacies embedded in architecture and culture.