# Scotland returns to Venice Biennale 2026 with groundbreaking queer cabaret project



Scotland is preparing a vibrant artistic return to the Venice Biennale in 2026, marked by a cutting-edge project that merges queer history, Scottish heritage, and personal identity. This exciting initiative will be spearheaded by artists Angel John Castle and Davide Bugarin, in collaboration with Mount Stuart House on the Isle of Bute. Their performance and moving image show promises to challenge simplistic narratives around identity through striking “spatial and drag-inflected interventions” in a yet-to-be-announced venue in Venice.

The duo’s project was selected following an open call and is expected to explore the emotional complexity of shame, pride, and celebration. Drawing on their backgrounds in queer cabaret—performing respectively as “Hairy Teddy Bear” and “Pollyfilla”—their work is deeply rooted in lived experience and performance traditions. Castle and Bugarin's previous exhibitions span prestigious venues like Edinburgh’s Fruitmarket, London’s Tate Modern, and galleries in New York and Manila, reflecting a rich interplay of themes such as queerness, colonisation, and gentrification.

The partnership with Mount Stuart House adds significant historical and cultural depth to the project. This neo-gothic mansion, designed by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson and built between 1879 and 1900, is a Category A listed building on the Isle of Bute. Known for its exquisite architecture, including the Marble Hall and Marble Chapel, the house also houses The Bute Collection—a private art assembly reflecting the Crichton-Stuart family's interests. Opened to the public since 1995, Mount Stuart has developed an active visual arts programme with previous collaborations involving artists of international acclaim.

Scotland’s renewed participation in the Venice Biennale follows a two-year hiatus in 2024. This pause was initiated due to economic considerations and to conduct a sector-wide review, which ultimately found “overwhelming support” to continue Scotland’s presence at the prestigious event. The Scotland + Venice Partnership, comprising Creative Scotland, British Council Scotland, and National Galleries Scotland, is committed to Scotland’s involvement not only in 2026 but also in editions slated for 2028 and 2030.

The funding of approximately £470,000 for Castle and Bugarin’s Venice show is being shared across these organisations, signalling a strong institutional backing for the arts in Scotland. There is also optimism about securing further funding that would allow the work to tour around Scotland after its initial Venice run and a planned presentation at Mount Stuart House in 2027. Morven Gregor, curator at the Mount Stuart Trust, emphasised the importance of bringing this ambitious and performance-driven project to audiences on Scotland's west coast and internationally, celebrating Scotland’s cultural resurgence on the global stage.

Both Castle and Bugarin express a powerful commitment to pushing boundaries in their collaborative practice. Speaking about the project, they highlighted the roots of their artistic journey in the lively and disruptive world of queer cabaret in Edinburgh, and their intention to confront “questions of gendered performance and colonial sound control.” They aim to unsettle easy narratives about identity, using their work as a means to explore contested cultural spaces with honesty and boldness.

Creative Scotland’s head of visual arts, Emma Nicolson, praised the project as both bold and emotionally layered—an embodiment of Scotland’s diverse and ambitious artistic voices. She expressed excitement about the ripple effect the project could have across communities and venues throughout Scotland and beyond, signalling a hopeful future for contemporary Scottish art on a global platform.

This upcoming Venice exhibition will not only mark Scotland’s artistic return to one of the world’s most prestigious art events but also underscore the dynamic interplay between identity, history, and place inherent in contemporary art practice. With the backdrop of Mount Stuart House’s grand history and Castle and Bugarin’s innovative artistry, Scotland aims to make a significant cultural statement at the Biennale and beyond.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Stuart_House), [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.creativescotland.com/news-stories/latest-news/archive/2025/04/scotland-will-return-to-the-venice-biennale-in-2026)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.creativescotland.com/news-stories/latest-news/archive/2025/04/scotland-will-return-to-the-venice-biennale-in-2026)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25333788.artists-going-queer-cabaret-venice-biennale/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Stuart_House> - Mount Stuart House, located on the Isle of Bute, Scotland, is a Category A listed building designed in the Gothic Revival style by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson. Built between 1879 and 1900, it serves as the ancestral home of the Marquesses of Bute. The house is renowned for its architectural features, including the Marble Hall and Marble Chapel, and houses The Bute Collection, a private assembly of artwork and artefacts reflecting the family's interests.
3. <https://scotlandandvenice.com/news/scotland-will-return-to-the-venice-biennale-in-2026/> - The Scotland + Venice Partnership has announced Scotland's renewed participation in the Venice Biennale for 2026, following a pause in 2024. The decision comes after an independent review found overwhelming support from Scotland's visual arts community. The partnership is committed to future editions in 2028 and 2030, aiming to promote contemporary visual art from Scotland on an international stage.
4. <https://www.creativescotland.com/news-stories/latest-news/archive/2025/04/scotland-will-return-to-the-venice-biennale-in-2026> - Creative Scotland has confirmed Scotland's return to the Venice Biennale in 2026, following a two-year pause. The Scotland + Venice Partnership, which includes Creative Scotland, British Council Scotland, and National Galleries Scotland, is committed to future editions in 2028 and 2030. The partnership aims to support the promotion of contemporary visual art from Scotland on an international stage.
5. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/03/29/scotland-pulls-out-of-next-years-venice-biennale> - Scotland + Venice, the arts body responsible for Scotland's presentation at the Venice Biennale, decided to pause its involvement in 2024 to allow for a period of reflection and review. The decision was influenced by the current economic situation, and the partnership intends to consult with the sector and begin a review process over the next few months.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-65105825> - Scotland is to pause its involvement in the Venice Biennale art exhibition in 2024. The Scotland and Venice programme, a partnership involving Creative Scotland, the British Council, National Galleries of Scotland, Architecture & Design Scotland, V&A Dundee, and the Scottish government, will halt the search for Scotland-based artists to participate in the 2024 event while a review is carried out.
7. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23420507.scotland-pause-involvement-prestigious-venice-biennale/> - Scotland's decision to pause its involvement in the Venice Biennale has been met with dismay by some Scottish arts professionals. Martin Boyce, who represented Scotland at the event in 2009, expressed concern that a permanent pause could marginalise Scottish artists by reducing their visibility on the international stage.