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PERSONAL STRUCTURES

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PALAZZO BEMBO_ECC ITALY_©FEDERICO PILLI



PERSONAL STRUCTURES 2026

AN ALTERNATIVE MAP OF VENICE AND NEW SPACES OF IDENTITY

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During **the Venice Biennale**, public attention traditionally focuses on the national pavilions. Yet a significant portion of contemporary artistic processes unfolds beyond the official route—in parallel platforms where new artistic languages often emerge before gaining institutional recognition.

One such platform is *Personal Structures,* an international exhibition initiative organized by the **European Cultural Centre Italy (ECC Italy)** and held alongside the Venice Biennale.

In 2026, the project is presented under the theme *Confluences*, inviting audiences to consider art as a space where disciplines, memory, technologies, geographies, and identities intersect. More than 175 artists from over 40 countries contribute to a multilayered dialogue about contemporary reality.

Originally founded in 1998 by Dutch artist René Rietmeyer as a long-term research initiative, *Personal Structures* was subsequently developed into an international platform connecting art, architecture, critical theory and research practices through exhibitions and philosophical symposia under the direction of Rachele De Stefano, Sara Danieli and Lucia Pedrana at ECC Italy.

Over time, the project has become a stable international platform where artistic installations coexist with research, architectural practices, and conceptual investigations.

The first exhibition and symposium took place in 2005 at the Ludwig Museum in Koblenz, Germany. Since 2011, *Personal Structures* has been part of the Venice Biennale collateral events program, and in 2026 it is presented for the eighth time, reaffirming its international significance.

Unlike the official Biennale, traditionally structured around national representation, *Personal Structures* emphasizes individual artistic voices, hybrid methodologies, and interdisciplinary intersections. This makes it especially relevant for artists and curators engaging with themes of identity, memory, political sensitivity, and cultural transformation.

Platforms like these increasingly capture shifts in artistic thinking faster than official institutions, because they operate not through geopolitical representation but through intersections of research-based practices.

In 2026, the project further expands through PS Design, a new direction exploring the convergence of art, design, and experimental research.

THREE SPACES, THREE WAYS OF EXPERIENCING ART

The uniqueness of *Personal Structures* lies not only in its conceptual framework but also in its spatial architecture. The exhibition unfolds across several locations in Venice, each creating its own mode of experiencing art.



CROSSLINES: UNLOCKED IDENTITIES
CURATORIAL PROJECT BY JULIA SYSALOVA
AT PERSONAL STRUCTURES
ARTIST: ALINA ALTUKHOVA

Palazzo Bembo, a historic palace on the Grand Canal and one of the project's central venues. International exhibitions focused on contemporary visual languages are presented here. My curatorial project, *Crosslines: Unlocked Identities,* is exhibited at Palazzo Bembo.

The project is supported by ART E$TATE Magazine as an official media partner, contributing to broader international visibility and dialogue around the exhibition and its participating artists.

Palazzo Mora, a more experimental environment where traditional architecture enters into dialogue with installations, research-driven approaches, and interdisciplinary practices.

Marinaressa Gardens, an open urban setting that allows artworks to move beyond interior spaces and become part of the city's everyday rhythm.

This distribution transforms the exhibition into a kind of cultural topography, where viewers move between different modes of experience: historical, urban, and contemplative.

CONFLUENCES: ART AT POINTS OF INTERSECTION

The 2026 theme addresses the phenomenon of convergence and interpenetration. In an era shaped by accelerated migration, digital transformation, and shifting collective identities, the idea of fixed boundaries appears increasingly inadequate.

In this context, art functions not as an illustration of reality but as a tool for registering transitional states—between the personal and the collective, the material and the digital, memory and projection.

Within *Personal Structures 2026*, I present the curatorial project *Crosslines: Unlocked Identities,* exploring identity as a system of emotional, cultural, bodily, and digital intersections.

While working on the project, I increasingly began to think of identity not as a fixed category but as a system of transitions. Perhaps the ability to transform while preserving an inner core has become one of the essential forms of resistance today.

The exhibition brings together four artists, each proposing a distinct model of identity transformation from archetypal narratives of becoming to explorations of the body, internal space, and cultural simulacra.

NATALYA RADUENZ: ON INTERNAL POINTS OF TRANSFORMATION

“For me, *Crosslines* is a project about the internal moments in which a person quietly changes themselves. In the *She Could Fly* series, I work with crossroads in women’s lives—moments of vulnerability, loss, choice, and trust that remain within us and continue shaping who we become years later.

Personal experience, cultural memory, and inner transformation become spaces of dialogue, where each work offers its own trajectory of human formation.”

Raduenz’s works approach identity not as a stable condition but as a gradual process of internal displacement.



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ARTIST: VEERA ROMANOFF



VEERA ROMANOFF: IDENTITY UNDER PRESSURE

Veera Romanoff examines identity as a condition of sustaining form under pressure.

“I do not depict the body, I think through it. *Crossline* is a series of three works in which transformation unfolds not as a singular event, but as a sequence of threshold states, each requiring its own mode of perception.

I work with the body in tension between performativity and presence. The figure holds its inner world together against disintegration, remaining in a state of extreme resistance. In these works, the body acts as a force entering into conflict with its own form: it breaks through its shell, disrupts boundaries, and resists fixation.”





ARTWORK BY ALINA ALTUKHOVA

ALENA REZANOVA: ON THE INNER ARCHITECTURE OF IDENTITY

“In my work, I explore identity as an unstable internal architecture, continuously reconstructed through memory, experience, and internal conflict. I am interested in the moment when previous coordinates of the self cease to function while new ones have not yet taken shape.

For me, *Crosslines* is a transitional space where transformation becomes not destruction, but a way of assembling oneself anew.”

ALINA ALTUKHOVA: CULTURAL PROJECTIONS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

“Through the image of *Barbie*, I address the ways mass culture shapes ideas about identity, success, femininity, and desirable futures.

I am interested in the boundary between authentic identity and the roles society encourages us to adopt.

Within the context of *Crosslines*, I view identity as the result of continual collisions between personal experience, collective memory, and cultural projections.”



NATALYA RADUENZ, ALENA REZANOVA
JULIA SYSALOVA, VEERA ROMANOFF

BEYOND THE VENICE BIENNALE

Today, Venice is no longer defined solely by its primary exhibition route. Increasingly, it is these parallel institutional platforms that become spaces where new artistic languages first emerge. *Personal Structures* occupies a distinctive place within this process, not as an alternative to the official system, but as an autonomous territory of inquiry where art is approached above all as an instrument of thought.

If the official Biennale continues to reflect the geopolitical map of the world, *Personal Structures* increasingly engages with another map: a map of fluid identities, research practices, and new ways of understanding humanity in an era of constant transformation.



RACHELE DE STEFANO
EUROPEAN CULTURAL CENTRE ITALY

COMMENTARY BY RACHELE DE STEFANO
Head of Architecture & Exhibition Organizer

"I believe that the complex challenges we face today demand an interdisciplinary approach. Issues such as climate change, social inequality, migration, and digital transformation cannot be addressed by a single discipline or from a single perspective.

Architecture plays a fundamental role in researching and developing solutions for these challenges, but contemporary art brings another essential dimension. Artists have the ability to question established narratives, evoke emotion, and humanize the conversation by addressing identity, memory, and lived experience. These emotional and cultural dimensions are just as important if we want to create built environments that are resilient, inclusive, and capable of adapting to the constantly changing realities of our societies.

The dialogue works in both directions. Artists benefit from engaging with architecture because it deepens their awareness of how the built environment shapes perception, behavior, and everyday life.

At the same time, architects can gain new perspectives from artistic practices that challenge conventions and encourage more imaginative and human-centered ways of thinking about space. As curators, this is precisely the kind of platform we want to create here in Venice: a place where different creative disciplines can meet, exchange ideas, and learn from one another.



SARA DANIELI
EUROPEAN CULTURAL CENTRE ITALY

This year, for example, we expanded the dialogue with PS Design, bringing together designers from across Europe and beyond to present projects that explore light and materials in conversation with the unique architecture of Venice's historic palazzi. We hope this is only the beginning of an even broader interdisciplinary exchange in the years to come".

COMMENTARY BY SARA DANIELI
Exhibition Organizer & Head of Art

"We believe that Personal Structures create meaningful encounters that extend beyond geographical, cultural, and institutional boundaries.

The national pavilion model remains one of the defining characteristics of the Venice Biennale and continues to play an important role in presenting distinct cultural narratives. At the same time, contemporary artistic practice has become more interconnected. Many of today's most pressing questions are no longer confined to national identities, but emerge through exchanges, mobility, and shared experiences.

As an independent cultural organization, ECC Italy is free from national or political agendas. We bring together diverse practices around a shared curatorial theme, creating conversations between cultures, generations, disciplines, and different perspectives.

Alongside internationally established artists, we continue to present emerging practitioners, universities, foundations, and artists whose work contributes important perspectives but may not always have had the opportunity to be visible within major international exhibitions. We believe these different artistic journeys are essential to understanding the complexity of contemporary art today.

This approach reflects the idea of Confluences, developed for this year Personal Structures edition. The exhibition is a platform where encounters generates dialogues and new perspective and where art become a place of exchange responsibility and possibility".