

Can-Do Canadians Struggle Toward Venice Biennale

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The Canada pavilion in the Giardini della Biennale

Photo by wonderferret, courtesy Flickr

Mark Lewis, a 50-year-old filmmaker, is going to represent Canada at the 2009 Venice Biennale, but to do so, he's had to become as much a fund-raiser as an artist.

Lewis is spending a lot of time at dinners and will sell copies of some of his works in order to help bridge a budget gap of at least CAN\$800,000 (U.S. \$736,000) after the CAN\$344,000 contribution from Ottawa.

Getting to represent Canada at the prestigious art gathering has been a "pyrrhic victory," according to Barbara Fischer, curator of the project and executive director of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto. But costs have been inflated by renovations needed for the Canadian pavilion, both to deal with an aging building and to accommodate Lewis' complex projection installations. The artist specializes in blending old-fashioned film backdrops with high-tech digital foregrounds.

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Having its own pavilion is both a good and bad thing for Canada. The structure is one of 30 in the Giardini della Biennale. Countries that have their own buildings for biennale benefit from increased visitor traffic, and the 60 exhibitors that don't have their own buildings are forced to exhibit off-site in temporary locations.

But the Canadian structure is in bad shape, and the renovations are contained in the annual budget, which includes exhibition costs. The glass, wood, and steel structure is rusting and rotting, and the decline of the Canadian dollar against the euro means there is little available funding for repairs. Management is left up to the curator of each Biennale's exhibits, so there is no continuity, and European regulations are complex.

Read more at the *Globe and Mail*.