

Italian artist Lorenzo Quinn builds bridges over Venice

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An artistic rendering of Lorenzo Quinn's six pairs of arching hands creating a bridge over a Venetian waterway. (Photo by BLJ via AP)

Italian artist Lorenzo Quinn created a splash on the sidelines of the Venice Biennale contemporary art fair two years ago with a gigantic sculpture of a child's hands reaching out of the Grand Canal, calling attention to climate change that threatens, among other things, to sink the lagoon city.



For this edition which will kick off on Saturday (May 11), Quinn has created a successor sculpture that he wants to be a call to action: Six pairs of arching hands creating a bridge over a Venetian waterway, symbolic of the need to build bridges and overcome divisions.

They are being erected in the Arsenale former shipyard against the backdrop of a city that stands as an historic East-West gateway -- and as Europe prepares to vote in a continentwide election that is shaping up as a battle of populism against more open social democratic traditions.

The sculpture isn't meant as a campaign platform, Quinn says. But his ideals are clear.

"Humanity has never grown by creating barriers. It always grows when it opens up its borders and it welcomes new cultures," Quinn said by telephone on Friday as he oversaw the installation another pair of the arching, clasping, white resin hands. "Venice is a testament to that. Venice opened routes to Asia, the Far East, with Marco Polo and the Merchants of Venice. It has been a driving force of European growth always."

Quinn's Building Bridges installation, like Support before it, is a collateral event to the Venice Biennale, which until Nov 24. Both projects have been backed by Venice city officials, after the Biennale refused to accept Support two years ago.

But the lack of formal art fair acceptance has hardly mattered. The monumental sculpted hands proved to be one of the most popular works of 2017, even though it was out of the official Biennale, one of the many side events that vie for the attention of the art world that floods Venice every two years.

Due to its enormous success, Support was extended six months beyond the close of the 2017 Biennale, and now is slated for permanent installation on the island of San Servolo, opposite the Biennale's Giardini. Quinn said that cities -- he won't say which -- already have opened a bidding process to win Building Bridges once its Biennale stint is closed.

Quinn -- the 52-year-old son of the late actor Anthony Quinn -- said the biggest compliments he received for Support were not for its execution or aesthetics.

"Quite a few people said to me that the sculpture Support struck a chord in them, in that due to the sculpture they changed their daily habits," he said, from not running water while brushing their teeth to taking shorter showers.

"If we all start doing things it creates a huge change."

Building Bridges will be officially unveiled on Friday with a performance by Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli.