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Vancouver Biennale names senior curator for 2027-29 edition

This marks a return to Vancouver for the Brazilian curator Marcello Dantas, who organised a Vik Muniz project in the city as part of the biennale's 2013-15 edition

Hadani Ditmars

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Marcelo Dantas, curator of the 2027-29 Vancouver Biennale, pictured at Sfer Ik in Mexico, where he serves as art director
Courtesy Roth Productions

The Vancouver Biennale [↗](#) has selected Marcello Dantas to be the senior curator for its 2027-29 edition. According to the biennale’s founder and director, Barrie Mowatt, Dantas is “widely recognised as one of the world’s most distinguished and innovative curators, and we are honoured to welcome him to Vancouver”.

Mowatt says that Dantas's most recent projects include co-curating the 2024 edition of the outdoor art exhibition Desert X AlUla in Saudi Arabia (with Maya El Khalil) and curating an Es Devlin exhibition in São Paulo. Dantas is also the art director at Sfer Ik, an art centre in Tulum, Mexico. And, with the Fifa World Cup coming to Vancouver in just eight weeks, Mowatt adds that Dantas has "World Cup experience", having served as the artistic director of *Pelé Station*, a massive multimedia exhibition about the Brazilian soccer legend Pelé during the 2006 World Cup in Berlin.

In addition to curating exhibitions by artists including Shirin Neshat, Bill Viola, Tunga, Ai Weiwei and Laura Vinci, Dantas has produced operas by Peter Greenaway and La Fura dels Baus. He is also a film-maker who has made 12 documentaries about artists. This is not the São Paulo-curator's first time working in Vancouver: he was involved in the Vancouver Biennale's 2013-15 edition, curating a project by Vik Muniz that involved using local natural materials to create a portrait of a wolf that was so large it could only be fully viewed from an elevated platform. Dantas worked with local First Nations and community groups on that project, and says he hopes to continue those types of collaborations in the upcoming biennale.

"Vancouver is still a puzzle I'm trying to solve," Dantas tells *The Art Newspaper* during his first trip back to the city since 2018. "The city has changed tremendously. It now has emergent design that is very much concentrated into corporate real estate development." This requires, he says, a delineation between public and private space in relation to public art, leading to questions like: "What is community space? What is layered into them? Because there are sacred sites—the whole area has a First Nations history, as well as a colonial one."

He adds that Vancouver and the surrounding region have impressed him while he has spent the past week driving through 800 miles of urban and rural landscapes looking at possible "stages" for public art.

"Vancouver is one of the rare cities in the world where landscape and urban life are in constant dialogue," he says. "The proximity between ocean, forest and mountains creates a condition that is both humbling and inspiring—a place where nature is an active presence shaping perception, behaviour and imagination."

It is also a city, Dantas adds, defined by its multiplicity of peoples, cultures and histories—some recent, others profoundly ancient. "At its core lies a millenary First Nations presence whose knowledge systems, cosmologies and relationship to land are not only foundational to this territory but essential to any meaningful cultural discourse moving forward."



Public art

How a chain-link mosque at the Vancouver Biennale became a community hub

Hadani Ditmars

With a view to future projects, he says he is interested in exploring ideas of belonging and displacement, of what it means to be “native” in a world of constant movement. “I am drawn to forms of collaboration that transcend authorship—collective processes, shared structures and temporary architectures that invite encounter and participation,” Dantas says. He adds that Vancouver’s art scene reflects this sense of openness. “It is porous, engaged and increasingly attentive to questions of ecology, identity and coexistence. What excites me most is the possibility of expanding this sensibility into the public realm—through works that emerge from it.”

Rather than thinking of public art as permanent objects, he says his inspiration comes from “the potential of ephemeral, living and transformative works—projects that evolve, decay and return to the land. Works that are less about marking space and more about activating it.”

Opening dates and participating artists for the Vancouver Biennale’s 2027-29 edition will be announced at a future date.

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