

The Best Art in the 2022 Venice Biennale's Main Show, From Fragrant Sculptures to Kinky Body Horror

BY [ALEX GREENBERGER](#) April 20, 2022 6:14pm

The Venice Biennale's main exhibition, "The Milk of Dreams," is strange, sexy, alluring, and frequently thought-provoking, too. Vast and packed with art, the show, curated by Cecilia Alemani, theorizes that Surrealism neither began nor ended in the era after World War I.

As Alemani views it, artists have always—and will always—resort to particularly strange worldviews when the going gets rough. The means by which artists represent parallel universes have simply changed with time.

There is a historical underpinning to all this, expressed mainly through galleries oriented around a specific theme that features artists who have died years ago. (To make matters especially confusing, some deceased artists appear outside that context, in the main spaces, along with all the other figures who are still living.) Much has been made of the unusually large amount of female and gender nonconforming artists in these spaces, and rightly so. The stereotype has been that Surrealism was dominated by white European men. The Venice Biennale asserts otherwise.

At times, the Biennale strains to divine linkages between past surrealisms and present ones. But it does make its point successfully, and the show is aesthetically cohesive—a rarity, it must be said, for major biennials anywhere in the world.

Below, a look at 10 of the best offerings in this Biennale:

Elle Pérez



Work by Elle Pérez in the 2022 Venice Biennale.
Photo : Alex Greenberger/ARTnews

There isn't much photography in the main exhibition—a sorely felt snub for all lovers of the medium—but thankfully what little there is of it is high-quality. Some of the best pictures come courtesy of Elle Pérez, who has repeatedly proven themselves to be one of the most exciting young photographers working today. Two of these understated photographs feature people in a wrestling position known as a "clinch," which involves pressing together in a way that is difficult to escape. Near them are more abstract images, including one of a rippling ocean tide that was shot in Puerto Rico. In placing them together, Pérez evokes diasporas in which people are forced to try to hold on to the culture they call their own while also letting go of their homelands.