

Lord Parkinson speech at Venice Biennale

Good evening everyone,

I am very pleased to be with you all this afternoon, representing Her Majesty's Government. It's great to be here in person at La Biennale di Venezia and to be celebrating the British Pavilion, and Sonia Boyce's wonderful art work.

I am very grateful to the British Council for inviting me to this auspicious event and to say a few words.

The Biennale is a much cherished opportunity to showcase some of the best artists in the UK, but also to see international artists and colleagues, reinforce connections, and to make the most of the face to face interaction which we have all been missing so much.

But of course we meet against the backdrop of the terrible situation unfolding in Ukraine. I know everyone here will want to extend our support and warmest wishes to our Ukrainian friends as they continue to suffer under the deplorable invasion by the Russian Federation.

I look forward to visiting the Ukrainian pavilion during my stay here in Venice, to demonstrate the UK's solidarity with Ukraine – and to admire the wonderful artwork of that culturally rich country.

It is clearer than ever that to survive the challenges of this troubled world we must work together, and it is here that Sonia Boyce's work has much to teach us. She is an artist who embodies the value of working together, of sharing a platform, whether she's working with local communities in Barking and Dagenham or exhibiting at the Tate – or indeed the British Pavilion here at the Biennale.

Sonia has had a 30 year career as a teacher as well as an artist. She has influenced many generations, sharing her expertise and experiences as an artist and enriching those with whom she has come into contact.

We are very proud that she is representing Britain here in Venice.

She joins an august group of previous exhibitors, including Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Anish Kapoor, Gilbert & George, and Jeremy Deller. The British pavilion has always been a showcase for the brightest and best of UK art, managed by the British Council, and I'm delighted to see this tradition continue this year.

On behalf of the HM Government I would like to thank the British Council for the brilliant job they have done managing the British Pavilion programme, which, together with their wider work around the globe, has promoted the best of the UK's arts and culture on the world stage.

And may I also express my gratitude to the many sponsors, supporters and patrons of the British Pavilion, whose kind and generous support is so vital to its continued success. Thank you very much.

The Central Exhibition will also feature the work of five further artists from the UK, supported by the British Council through the Biennale Foundation.

The 59th Venice Biennale is therefore set to be a great showcase for British arts, demonstrating that the UK is an international cultural powerhouse, not only in our heritage but in our amazing and thought-provoking contemporary art.

So I would like to conclude by wishing the greatest success for the British Pavilion, and the UK artists in this year's festival. And it's now my pleasure to hand over to Stevie Spring, Chairman of the British Council.

Thank you