

LOOK UP

TIMES SQUARE TO VENICE:

Cultural Storytelling Through the Lens of ART X FASHION

A custom couture creation by designer Naeem Khan, with international curator Rachel D. Vancelette photographed at Palazzo Mora along the canals of Venice by renowned Italian photographer Francesco Francia, becomes a visual expression of LOOK UP's mission to connect art, fashion, and humanity.

Photo credits: Francesco Francia

Against the historic backdrop of Venice's winding canals and the architectural grandeur of Palazzo Mora, a remarkable creative collaboration unfolded during the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. More than a fashion editorial and more than an art project, the photoshoot created by renowned Italian photographer Francesco Francia featuring curator Rachel D. Vancelette in a custom couture design personally selected and created by internationally celebrated designer Naeem Khan became a visual expression of the very ideas that define LOOK UP VENICE: creativity, craftsmanship, cultural exchange, and the enduring dialogue between art and fashion. Captured throughout Palazzo Mora and along Venice's iconic canals, the photographs bring together a remarkable lineage of creative influence from the artistic vision championed by the late Franca Sozzani and by the remarkable Vogue Italia editor Alessia Glaviano, Vogue Photo, to the cultural legacy of Andy Warhol, Halston, and Studio 54, and ultimately to LOOK UP's contemporary mission of global connection through art, media, and storytelling.

Presented at Palazzo Mora as part of the European Cultural Centre's Personal Structures exhibition, LOOK UP TIMES SQUARE TO VENICE brings together artists, cultural leaders, photographers, performers, visionaries, and changemakers from around the world to explore what it means to "look up" in an increasingly connected society. The project marks the international expansion of LOOK UP and the human archive of voices from its debut in Times Square on Thanksgiving 2026 one of the world's most important cultural stages.

For curator Rachel Vancelette, the Venice presentation represents a meaningful full-circle moment. In 2010, under

the visionary leadership of the late Franca Sozzani and with the support of Vogue Italia's Alessia Glaviano, Vancelette was invited to contribute her first feature for Vogue Italia. The subject was artist Kenny Scharf and his legendary Cavern a Go-Go gatherings, immersive celebrations of art, fashion, music, performance, and creative expression that brought together artists, designers, collectors, musicians, and cultural figures in a uniquely New York cultural experience. The story proved particularly meaningful because Scharf's world embodied the very spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration that would later define much of Vancelette's own work. Cavern a Go-Go represented a place where art and fashion were not separate disciplines but part of a larger cultural conversation. In many ways, it reflected the same creative energy that LOOK UP seeks to foster today.

The foundations of that perspective were further shaped by the mentorship of the late Barbara Rose, the renowned art historian and critic who first encouraged Vancelette to come to New York, telling her simply, "Come stay a week and see if you like it." What began as a brief visit became a lifelong chapter. During those formative years, Vancelette also held senior leadership positions at Yvon Lambert New York and Gladstone Gallery, working alongside some of the most influential artists, collectors, curators, and cultural leaders of her generation. These experiences would ultimately help shape the philosophy behind LOOK UP, a platform dedicated to bringing together diverse creative voices through meaningful cultural dialogue. That philosophy found one of its most elegant expressions in Venice through her collaboration with Naeem Khan and Francesco Francia. For the occasion of LOOK UP VENICE and the Venice Biennale, Naeem Khan personally selected and designed a custom couture gown specifically for Rachel Vancelette. The creation was far more than a garment, it was a work of art.



Renowned internationally for his extraordinary craftsmanship, Khan's couture designs often require hundreds of hours of meticulous handwork by master artisans. Intricate embroidery, hand-beading, embellishment, and detailed finishing techniques have become signatures of his practice, elevating each creation beyond fashion into the realm of artistry. Every piece reflects a commitment to preserving traditional craftsmanship while embracing contemporary elegance. Created especially for Venice, the gown embodied the same commitment to beauty, excellence, and storytelling that has defined Khan's celebrated career. Photographed by Francia throughout Venice, with key images captured inside Palazzo Mora and along the city's legendary canals, the resulting series transcends traditional fashion photography. Instead, the photographs become visual narratives.

Through Francia's lens, architecture, history, couture, contemporary art, and cultural identity converge. The timeless beauty of Venice provides the setting, while Khan's handcrafted couture creation becomes a symbol of the dialogue between past and present, craftsmanship and innovation, fashion and fine art. The significance of Khan's participation extends well beyond fashion. Before becoming one of the world's most celebrated couture designers, Khan worked within the creative orbit of Andy Warhol and was influenced by the legendary cultural ecosystem that surrounded Warhol, Halston, and Studio 54. It was a period when artists, designers, photographers, musicians, and cultural icons gathered together, challenging traditional boundaries and creating new forms of cultural expression. Khan would later become one of the most respected names in international fashion, dressing an extraordinary roster of influential figures including Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez, Taylor Swift, Queen Noor of Jordan, and countless leaders from the worlds of entertainment, philanthropy, politics, and international society. Yet the Venice collaboration offered something uniquely personal.



Khan created a bespoke couture design specifically for Rachel Vancelette and the LOOK UP Venice initiative, a cultural platform dedicated to creativity, humanity, and connection. Vancelette, recently described by the Italian press as a "global cultural architect," has built LOOK UP TIMES SQUARE as an international dialogue uniting voices across art, fashion, media, and technology. The gown itself became an artistic statement, reflecting the shared values of craftsmanship, creativity, and cultural storytelling embraced by both Khan and Vancelette. Renowned for creations that often require hundreds of hours of intricate handwork by master artisans, Khan's designs transcend fashion, occupying a space between couture and fine art. The collaboration carries particular significance given Khan's unique place within fashion history. Early in his career, Khan worked alongside legendary designer Halston and within the creative orbit of Andy Warhol, experiencing firsthand one of the most influential periods in American cultural history, a journey chronicled in his celebrated Rizzoli book. Through the lens of renowned Italian photographer Francesco Francia, known for his masterful use of light and ability to capture both elegance and emotion, the Venice images become far more than a fashion editorial. Set against the historic interiors of Palazzo Mora and the timeless beauty of Venice's canals,

That dialogue includes a remarkable community of participants for LOOK UP TIMES SQUARE, among them Studio 54 icon Nikki Haskell, photographer Michel Haddi, actor Ray Fearon, television personality Max Tucci, Factory Boys Robert Dupont and Richard Dupont, makeup icon Laura Geller, Olympian and artist Roald Bradstock, and the celebrated collaboration between Shepard Fairey and Karen Bystedt for would of been Andy Warhol's 96th Birthday. Together they represent the diverse range of voices contributing to the growing global movement.

The dialogue surrounding the Venice presentation also extends to the growing intersection of contemporary art and couture. Among those helping shape this conversation is artist Stanley Casselman, whose ongoing creative relationship with Naeem Khan has sparked discussions about new possibilities between fine art, fashion, materiality, and art making. Through collaborative initiatives and shared creative exploration, Khan and Casselman represent a broader movement named KACE and work toward interdisciplinary cultural experiences that challenge traditional boundaries between artistic disciplines blending silkscreen painting with handmade adornments and

weavings. Vancelette is now working KACE in a movement toward institutional conversations about the broader collaboration of the merging of Art X Fashion for which she has discussed and written on for over a decade. Vancelette's upcoming book *In the Pursuit of Art X Fashion: A Global Compendium* presents over 400 collaborations, a six year project to be announced end of 2026.

While the Venice photoshoot remains centered on the collaboration between Khan, Francia and Vancelette, it also reflects a larger ecosystem of artists, designers, photographers, and cultural leaders whose work continues to inspire future conversations around museum exhibitions, publications, and international cultural programming. The exhibition LOOK UP TIMES SQUARE curated by Vancelette presents over 40 creative industry members voices speaking to the question "What Does LOOK UP mean to you?" with artworks by a series of artists, the private invitation by the European Cultural Centre to curate the exhibition came in February, the exhibition opened May 5th and remains on view until November 22nd at Palazzo Mora and open to the public daily. Ultimately, the Venice photoshoot is about far more than a series of images. It stands as a visual embodiment of LOOK UP's central message: that creativity has the power to connect people, disciplines, histories, and generations. This is a story has found a powerful new chapter on the canals of Venice with an upcoming LOOK UP conference which will be held November 21st which will hold talks, performances and more.

LOOK UP TIMES SQUARE: www.lookuptimesquare.com
Personal Structures Exhibition at Palazzo Mora, Venice Italy

Open to Public: May 5th- Nov 22nd, 2026

Website: <https://personalstructures.com/participants/look-up-time-square/>

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Special thanks to contemporary artists Rossella Vasta and Nathan Brujis.

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