

# Annalee Davis at Biennale Arte 2026. Landscape as Mourning, Archive, and Resistance

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Annalee Davis

*The Barbados-born artist brings to Venice a work that holds together extinction, colonial memory, and the desire for repair. Not a generic reflection on nature, but a practice of attention in which landscape returns as history, wound, and responsibility.*

[Link to the Italian version on Artribune](#)

A part of contemporary art, when it addresses ecology, ends up illustrating it: it takes collapse as its theme, translates it into image, surrounds it with good intentions. **Annalee Davis** (St. Michael, Barbados, 1963) works elsewhere. Born and based in Barbados, she approaches **landscape** not as backdrop, but as a **living archive**, material history, a place in which colonial memory continues to produce concrete effects in the present.

At Biennale Arte 2026, within [In Minor Keys](#), this position takes shape in **Let this be my Cathedral**, an installation built around **ecological mourning**, the persistence of **colonial history**, and the possibility of a form of care that does not remove conflict. Davis does not seek the definitive image of disaster, nor easy consolation. She builds, rather, a threshold,

a place in which loss, vulnerability, and wonder remain in tension. In this conversation, she speaks about the Venice project, the role of research, and the risk of flattening that still weighs upon the Caribbean in the European gaze.



Let This Be My Cathedral, artist's studio with suspended plants. Photo credit: RStudio.

## Interview with the Barbadian artist Annalee Davis at the Venice Biennale 2026

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### What has it meant for you to find Koyo Kouoh's name today at the origin of this Biennale?

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I met Koyo Kouoh thirteen years ago, during Videobrasil in São Paulo. I was coming from the experience of Fresh Milk, [the artist led-initiative I am the founding director of] while she was already leading Raw Material in Senegal. From that moment on, I followed her path, watching her become a central figure in international curatorial discourse, with a voice that was both lucid and necessary. For this reason, being part of a Biennale today shaped by her vision carries a profound meaning for me, and to be in a posthumous dialogue imploring us all “to shift to a slower gear and tune in to the frequencies of the minor keys”. The invitation came after her passing, through Rasha Salti and the curatorial team, so there was no direct dialogue with her during the development of the project. And yet her presence is strongly felt in the very structure of the exhibition, in its refusal of a more declarative or spectacular tone to make room for subtler voices, slower temporalities, and a complexity that does not seek shortcuts. It is in this quality of listening that responds appropriately to this moment, that her gaze continues to be felt.

## **What does this work make visible, and what does it refuse to simplify?**

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The work holds together conflicting feelings: on the one hand, alienation from the living world; on the other, the desire for a new intimacy with the more-than-human. The extinction of a specific species is a strong point of departure, but I did not want to stop at a funerary rhetoric. The herbarium also introduces curiosity, joy, the possibility of recalibrating one's gaze. Inspired by the small garden surrounding my home and studio which I consider a cathedral worthy of non-religious reverence, it was important that loss and beauty remain present without neutralizing one another.

## **In your practice, the land is never a neutral backdrop. What function does it take on here?**

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It is a very specific land: the place where I live and work, and where my father's family has lived for five generations. A site that was a sugar plantation in the seventeenth century, then a dairy farm in the twentieth century, and still changing today. That land is at once witness to history, tomb, archive, regenerator of life, and place of belonging. The works in the An Unbound Book of Prayer series also originate there, incorporating organic materials gathered on site and incorporated with appliqué, crochet, embroidery, and dyes. The slow, repetitive gesture of sewing is also a way of moving through the ecological and geopolitical anxiety of the present.

Let This Be My Cathedral, pressed plants for the herbarium. Photo credit: RStudio.

## **In your work, research does not come afterward as support but coincides with the process itself. What did it mean here, concretely, to do research?**

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It meant listening, walking, visiting places, speaking with people, consulting archives. Everything began with a conversation at dawn with my sister-in-law, who told me the story of the Eskimo curlew, driven almost to extinction in North America and then mistakenly shot in Barbados in 1963. From there I followed the traces of that episode: the shooting swamp where it happened, the owner of the site, a former hunter who became a conservationist, bird hunting historical records, family archives, the migratory route of the bird from the Arctic to Argentina. I also collaborated with the museum housing the bird and a foundation to produce its lead cast. For me, research does not illustrate the work from the outside: it is already part of its structure.

## **What is gained, and what is risked, when a work rooted in the Caribbean enters a platform such as Venice?**

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The Caribbean is often flattened into stereotypes of tropical paradise or exotic destination. In reality, it is a complex region, marked by colonization, slavery, indentured labor, and profound economic transformations. Venice can offer a more stratified reading. I hope the region's contribution to the production of knowledge and critical imagination will emerge more forcefully, not as a mere reservoir of raw material to be refined elsewhere, but as a

place that produces knowledge. There remains, however, the risk that a European gaze will continue to look to the Caribbean for ready-made images, rather than complexities that must truly be listened to.

**In your works, beauty is evident, but it is never pacifying. Where does this tension lie for you?**

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While a sober tonality in the work reflects the time we are living through, I did not want it to sound like a sermon. I come from a part of the world marked by missionaries as part of the colonial system: they took natural resources and left behind a Bible amid an impoverished biodiversity of their making. Perhaps beauty can act as an antidote to the colonial chaos of yesterday and to contemporary violence, but not by softening them. Rather, by opening a slower and more demanding form of attention.



An Unbound Book of Prayer, Series II, appliqué, crochet, organic materials, and embroidery on linen.  
Photo credit: RStudio.

What strikes one in Annalee Davis's work is an increasingly rare quality: the ability not to choose the shortest route. Not to reduce landscape to image, ecological trauma to formula, colonial memory to ideological backdrop. Let this be my Cathedral does not impose a moral and does not seek immediate consent. Instead, it constructs a slowing down, a threshold of perception in which the living world presents itself again not as theme, but as a compromised, historical, material relation.

This is where Davis's work acquires weight. Not because it seeks to impose itself, but because it refuses simplification and restores landscape to its most uncomfortable truth: being at once an archive of violence, a space of mourning, and a possible exercise in repair.



An Unbound Book of Prayer, Series II, appliqué, crochet, organic materials, and embroidery on linen.  
Photo credit: RStudio.

**Venice // until November 22, 2026**

**Annalee Davis. Barbados Participation**

**Corderie dell'Arsenale – Campo della Tana, Castello 2169/F**

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A Garden of Hope, apothecary installation at Walkers Reserve, St. Andrew. Photo credit: Walkers Reserve.