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# TRAVEL

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## See modern treasures in old Venice

*French billionaire puts contemporary art on show at restored Dogana*

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**By Bonnie Friedman**  
Special to The Advertiser

Literally the "Point of Customs," Punta della Dogana in Venice is a massive triangular structure occupying the westernmost point of the sestiere (district) of Dorsoduro, an island unto itself in this Italian city of islands. From the 16th century, it was the repository of the republic's imported treasures — spices, rubber, fabrics.

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Today, it is the storehouse of what is arguably the greatest contemporary art collection in the world. The collector is a French billionaire businessman and he definitely knows how to attract a crowd. On the same weekend this past June that marked the opening of the 53rd Biennale, Francois Pinault had an opening of his own. Beating out the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for a 33-year-lease on the structure, Pinault unveiled the brilliantly restored Dogana, which now complements another Venetian exhibition venue he purchased several years ago, Palazzo Grassi.

As with the palazzo, he trusted this restoration to Pritzker Prize-winning architect Tadao Ando. The refurbishment instantly reinvigorated the original's landmark status and, after several days of nonstop, celebrity-studded parties, art lovers from around the world descended. Among the artists represented are Jeff Koons, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman.

**Other highlights:** A commissioned work that is on its way to becoming a new symbol of the city is "Boy With Frog" by American artist Charles Ray.

Positioned at the edge of the point, the 8-foot-tall statue looks like pure white marble; it is actually cast stainless steel and acrylic polyurethane. No matter. "The Boy" already has many thousands of fans.

**If you go:** The spectacular basilica that rises up next to Dogana is Santa Maria della Salute. Completed in 1681, its construction fulfilled a promise by the senate made 50 years earlier — that if the city was delivered from the plague that claimed a third of Venice's population, a new church dedicated to the Virgin Mary would be built.

The structure itself is worth a trip; the paintings by Titian inside enhance the experience.

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"Boy With Frog" is part of the newly opened Dogana art complex in Venice. The steel and polyurethane statue is by American artist Charles Ray.

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