

Dramatic Venice Sculpture Comes With A Big Climate Change Warning

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Venice is sinking. Image: halcyon gallery

By [Maria Gallucci](#)

Italy's famed city of Venice has grappled with flooding and encroaching waters since the Middle Ages. But as global warming speeds up sea level rise, the charming destination is steadily slipping underwater.

Italian artist Lorenzo Quinn calls attention to this threat with his arresting, larger-than-life sculpture in the sinking city. *Support* features two 5,000-pound hands bursting out of the Grand Canal and grasping the walls of the historic Ca' Sagredo Hotel.

“I have three children, and I’m thinking about their generation and what world we’re going to pass on to them,” Quinn said in an interview. “I’m worried, I’m very worried.”

Yet the sculpture, which was unveiled on May 13, is also a call for action — a plea to scientists, policymakers, and citizens alike to address human-caused climate change and its many impacts on communities and the environment.

“Something has to be done,” the 51-year-old artist said.

Venice, a [UNESCO World Heritage](#) property, was founded in the 5th century atop a mosquito-filled marsh. Spread over 118 islands and initially supported by wooden pillars, mud, and marble foundations, the city was never all that structurally sound.

Now rising sea levels are pushing more water into Venice and coastal cities around the world. Scientists [estimate](#) that if global warming exceeds 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, above preindustrial levels, about 80 percent of the world's coastline could see more sea level rise than the global average.

Quinn said he initially conceived *Support* for this year's Venice Biennale, a famous contemporary visual arts exhibition, but the project wasn't accepted. So Quinn and the gallery that represents him, Halcyon Gallery in London, decided to work directly with Venice city officials to install the sculpture. He built the hands from his workshop in Spain in just three weeks.



The hands “symbolize tools that can both destroy the world, but also have the capacity to save it,” the gallery said in a [press release](#).

“At once, the sculpture has both a noble air as well as an alarming one — the gesture being both gallant in appearing to hold up the building whilst also creating a sense of fear in highlighting the fragility of the building surrounded by water and the ebbing tide,” according to the gallery.

Quinn said he modeled the two hands after those of his 11-year-old son. The sculpture is made of a polyurethane foam covered by a resin, and four pillars reaching 30 feet deep anchor the hands to the bottom of the Grand Canal.



The hands will be on display through Nov. 26, the last day of the Venice Biennale.

After that, Quinn said the sculpture will likely go on tour. The artist has received multiple requests to install the hands at other UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as Italy’s Pisa, and cities suffering the effects of climate change.
