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BE DAZZLED

## The Sistine Chapel Goes Full Cirque Du Soleil

Music by Sting. Smoke effects. Male acrobats. If artainment (marriage of art and entertainment) makes you cringe, you aren't alone. But a new Vatican show might change your mind.

ROME—You may not recognize the name Marco Balich, but you are sure to have seen his spectacular light work at [Olympic ceremonies](#) and stadium events across the world. His speciality is marrying lights, music and live performances at events meant to entertain. Now, he's bringing his style to one of the most serious and storied institutions around: the Vatican.

Balich, flanked by the Vatican museum director Barbara Jatta and the collared director of Vatican Communications Monsignor Dario Edoardo Viganò, laid out his €9 million (\$10.5 million) Vatican “artainment” project called *Universal Judgement: Michelangelo and the Secrets of the Sistine Chapel* at a prosecco-laden reception inside the Vatican Museum Raphael Rooms on Friday night. The show opens in March 2018. Balich, whose new company Artainment which was created for this event, is holding auditions in Rome for dancers and main male protagonists who will perform at the show,

which will not be permanent, but does not have a published end date.

Jatta, the first woman to ever head the Vatican Museums, said the initiative is meant to capture the attention of the younger “screen generation” who don’t distinguish between being on or off line. She says they don’t often appreciate things that aren’t displayed through technology, and while nothing compares to an actual visit to the Sistine Chapel, the Balich show will certainly come close. “This is geared toward the online generation to bridge the tech gap,” she said, admitting that the Vatican Museums no longer appeal to audiences as they once did.



## “The show will ‘unveil the secrets of the Sistine Chapel’”

The new show, which will last about an hour, will be polar opposite, essentially immersing the audience into the chapel with close up views and loud music. Balich says the experience “will cost around the same as a movie ticket,” and “will bring the Sistine Chapel to life” with 4K flyover imagery, live performances similar to Cirque du Soleil classy acrobatics and full immersion music that was composed specifically for this project by Sting. Sistine Chapel masterpieces have been replicated through laser technology, and the recreated details indistinguishable with the naked eye will be revealed up close.

He says the show will “unveil the secrets of the Sistine Chapel” by recreating everything from the whispers and creation of black and white smoke of papal conclaves to the painting of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgement*. He says the “creation of life” scene on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, the one where the image of God nearly touches Adam’s finger, will be “brought to life” and visitors will see computer generated images of the Sistine Chapel as it was being built and while it was being painted.

The show will be presented at the repurposed Conciliazione Auditorium on the street leading up to St. Peter's square. The 1,500 seat auditorium is being fitted with a special arched projection screen the same size as the actual Sistine Chapel that will give attendees a 270 degree perspective. The Vatican will not make money from the tickets, but Balich joked they "paid dearly" for the photo and video rights and the Vatican will profit from "contained" royalties from the performance.

The show is the latest in a series of moves that might easily be compared to the "Disney-fication" of the Vatican museums. It is already possible, though extremely expensive, to rent out the Sistine Chapel for events, like Porsche did recently for a \$10,000 a person dinner. Those proceeds go to the pope's projects for the homeless like building showers in St. Peter's square.

The show promises to unveil the secrets of the Sistine Chapel, which was built in 1473 and receives around 6 million visitors each year. There is no word yet whether Pope Francis, who doesn't watch TV or use a computer, will see the high tech show, but it does have his blessing. "The pope has been kept informed of this from the beginning," says Vigano. "He supports anything that brings people close to the church." Even if that means artainment.

## *Sistine Chapel Aims for New Heights With Olympics-Style Show*

VATICAN CITY — The Sistine Chapel might be coming to a theater near you.

The Vatican Museums have collaborated with Sting and producers of Olympic ceremonies to create a surround-sound, live show telling the tale of Michelangelo and his frescoed masterpiece.

The 9 million euro (\$10.6 million) production, "Universal Judgment: Michelangelo and the Secrets of the Sistine Chapel," debuts March 15 at an auditorium near the Vatican.

Creator Marco Balich, the artistic director for several past Olympics, says he's already entertaining requests to take the hour-long spectacle and its Sting-penned soundtrack abroad.

The Vatican will receive "contained" royalties from the production.

Museums director Barbara Jatta says the show provides an unparalleled educational opportunity to bring art, culture and faith to younger audiences.

She stressed the Vatican's history of using "tradition and innovation" to communicate.

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