

## Australia's biggest year at Venice

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**NAIMA MORELLI**

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There are more Australians showing at the Venice Biennale than ever before and it is not only the new pavilion creating a buzz.



*Reko Rennie, Regalia Image via [Recko Rennie \(http://rekorennie.com/\)](http://rekorennie.com/)*

With a [new national pavilion \(http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/grants-and-funding/deborah-stone/australias-venice-pavilion-from-%E2%80%98the-dunny-to-%E2%80%98the-black-box-247949\)](http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/grants-and-funding/deborah-stone/australias-venice-pavilion-from-%E2%80%98the-dunny-to-%E2%80%98the-black-box-247949) and Fiona Hall's striking show *Wrong Way Time* (<http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/visual-arts/gina-fairley/a-peek-at-what-fiona-hall-is-taking-to-venice-247526>) to launch it, there is no surprise that the official Australian exhibition is listened on a great many best-of lists - our own [Top Ten at the Venice Biennale \(http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/visual-arts/naima-morelli/the-best-of-the-venice-biennale-2015-248012\)](http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/visual-arts/naima-morelli/the-best-of-the-venice-biennale-2015-248012) included.

But the national show is by no means the only Australian attraction at the 56th Venice Biennale. The main exhibition *All the World's Futures* includes a disproportionate seven Australian artists among the 136, partly the result of a successful visit to Australia by curator Okwui Enwezor last year.

A further six venues around Venice host the work of Australian artists. The official collateral exhibition *Country* at Gervasuti Foundation features more than 30 Aboriginal artists alongside Italian peers. The Berengo Foundation in partnership with The State Hermitage Museum presents work by Melbourne artist Penny Byrne in *Glasstress Gotika*. Another six Australian artists are exhibiting at Palazzo Bembo and Palazzo Mora in *Personal Structures*, a group show presented by Global Art Affairs.

The sense of Australian pride at Venice this year is tangible. Penny Byrne, who exhibits in *Glasstress Gotika*. : 'I had to pinch myself, really, to see if it was happening. There are so many Australian artists this time. It's amazing to be part of this contingent, it couldn't have been better.'

Reko Rennie, whose work *Regalia* is in the Personal Structure exhibition at Palazzo Mora, said being part of the Biennale was an amazing opportunity: 'I'm honoured to be here, present work and be included among such amazing, diverse talent. There is so much to see, it's a visual overload. It's like an amusement park of art, and that's lots of fun.'

The new Australian Pavilion is, of course, at the centre of this sense that Australia is the country of the moment.. In the overwhelming hubbub of the opening days, the structure alone attracted a crowd who felt immediately engaged. 'The Australian pavilion looks almost alien compared to the rest of the buildings, which are all historical. But this singularity was precisely what attracted me,' one visitor told ArtsHub.

Australian artist Sam Leach – whose work is in the Personal Structure collateral exhibition – thinks the architecture is stunning: 'This big black tomb on the edge on the canal is just perfect. And the work inside is beautifully gloomy.' In his view the show is a great reflection of the mood of the country at the moment. 'It is dense and there's a lot to unpack. I really enjoyed that.'

The artistic duo Sonia Leber and David Chesworth, who are part of the main show at Arsenale, are also delighted that Fiona Hall is finally representing Australia: 'We have known her work for a long time and it's fantastic. She is such a dedicated artist. She's a maker and cares about things in such fine detail, while having an overall control of the space at the same time.'

The Australian artists in the main show have very individual approaches to art and provide very different inputs to the *All the World's Futures* theme so Australia appears as a vibrant but highly diverse culture.

One Australian work that has gathered attention in the Arsenale has been Marco Fusinato's social installation *From the Horde to the Bee*. It allows visitors to claim one of the artist's print documents placed along the perimeter of a wooden board, in exchange for leaving €10 in the center of the open work. 'It will be interesting to see what happens in a few months, when the quantity of money will become critical,' observed one a young visitor. 'I see this work as a social experiment which could possibly turn a little scary.'

Leber and Chesworth are presenting their video work *Zaum Tractor*. They say the experience has been very rewarding. 'The Biennale curator Okwui Enwezor has been very available and he kept appearing and looking at how things were going. He was very accessible and the whole team was great.'

Work by Newell Harry, Daniel Boyd, and the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye show the diversity of Indigenous Australian artists and their different ways of imagining the future. In the nearby Giardino Delle Vergini, Emily Floyd's immersive installation reflects on the concept of education and libraries.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator who specialized in Italian contemporary art and art from the Asia-Pacific area.