

OPINION

A Mammoth Venice Biennale

Anna Waldmann



An interview with curator Catherine de Zegher at the 55th International Art Exhibition (National participation of Australia).

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Source: [BiennaleChannel](#)

150 artists from 37 countries, 88 National Participations and 47 Collateral Events: how much art can one experience before deciding that shopping for shoes at Prada is an equally meaningful experience?

Opening the Arsenale section of the show with Marino Auriti's model for a 136-floor *Encyclopaedic Palace* intended to house all universal knowledge and achievements, the artistic director of the 55th Biennale di Venezia, Massimiliano Gioni offers visitors an unusual challenge: how to reconcile a plethora of Outsider and unknown artists with the notion of what should a "biennale" be.

Drawings by American Shakers and shamans from the Solomon Islands, the satanic tarot cards of Aleister Crowley, the patterned stone collection of surrealist Roger Caillois, Carl Jung's Red Book, blackboards illustrated in chalk by the philosopher-educationalist Rudolf Steiner, *Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace)* is an exhibition that combines contemporary artworks with historical artifacts and found objects, probably more a museum show than a biennale, but fascinating and unsettling.

It also represents a total disconnect from most of the national pavilions with their antiquated notions of nationhood. There are nonetheless a few great or at least intriguing pavilions.

France and Germany's pavilion swapped houses to present what I thought was the most successful exhibition in Venice: Franco-

Albanian artist Anri Sala, who lives and works in Berlin, shows *Ravel Ravel Unravel*, a cathartic combination of visual and auditory sensations, film and musical performance, of Maurice Ravel's 1930 *Concerto in D for the Left Hand*.

Other pavilions of interest are the Romanians conjuring up the Biennale's entire history from 1895 to today by employing five dancers to strike poses in tableaux vivants enacting key works from the 55 biennales, Simryn Gill's *Here art grows on trees* disintegrating gently in the open-roofed Australian pavilion and the USA representative, Sarah Sze with a manic exhibition taking over the space inside and outside like an out of control cobweb.

Do we need a new Pavilion of the Holy See? I don't think so! But to have "When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013" a remake of the show curated by Harald Szeemann at the Bern Kunsthalle and re-curated by Germano Celant with Thomas Demand and Rem Koolhaas at the Fondazione Prada go completely un-acknowledged by the Biennale, tells us something about the difficulty of negotiating this mammoth event.

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Sydney Contemporary 13 Review

Anna Waldmann



Sullivan + Strumpf at the inaugural Sydney Contemporary Art Fair.
Image courtesy of Sydney Contemporary 13

SYDNEY CONTEMPORARY 13 19 - 22 SEPTEMBER CARRIAGEWORKS

For many years, Sydney flirted with the idea of an art fair. When we rehashed the arguments at the Australia Council where I was director of visual arts, I felt that it would be as hard to have a Melbourne Art Fair AND a Sydney one as it would be to have a Sydney Biennale AND a Melbourne event. There was in fact a one-off Melbourne Biennale, one of the best international exhibitions in Australia, but it disappeared after the first event. I am convinced now, after being a long-term sceptic, that it won't be the case with SC13.

I like art fairs that look good overall and have an element of visual surprise, are easy to navigate, have a buzz, a good VIP space and program and, obviously, attract interesting collectors and curators and galleries. How did SC13 score?

Tim Etchells, co-founder of ART HK, knows how to do an art fair. He claims he's "never seen an unhappy person at an art fair". SC13 is a very Sydney affair: lots of glitz, a bit of VIP glamour, a bit chaotic, not the best organised event, but fresh, energetic and fun.

It's rewarding to have galleries travel from China (mostly Hong Kong) to exhibit at the inaugural fair. 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, de Sarthe Gallery, Edouard Malingue Gallery, China Art Projects and Sundaram Tagore are top galleries with excellent artists and collector networks. A

large Singapore contingent, including Element Art Space, The Drawing Room, Yavuz Fine Art and Equator Arts Projects, a couple of London galleries such as Paragon, a few fabulous New Zealand spaces such as Michael Lett, Bartley + Company Art, Gow Langsford and Starkwhite, Nature Morte from New Delhi/Berlin and a few others from Japan, South Africa and Indonesia represent the international contingent.

Melbourne and Auckland Art Fairs didn't do much better with international participants, but Hong Kong is much larger and considerably more diverse. Importantly, HK also has a program of talks from art leaders in recognition of the fact that many curators, writers and art museum directors travel to these events and they want a bit of intellectual gravitas to balance the shopping mall experience.

The fair's director Barry Keldoulis claimed in *Flash Art* "we are not trying to compete with the other art fairs, but rather find a place where we fit and complement. The Pacific Rim will be that place." That is a wise statement, given that it would be extremely difficult to compete with HK or even Singapore, let alone the Art Basel and Frieze franchises.

Video Contemporary curated by Mark Feary and Blair French and *Installation Contemporary* by Aaron Seeto are intellectually and visually rewarding and complement the commercial section which includes well established galleries, a few artist-run-initiatives and younger spaces like The Commercial and Alaska Projects. The galleries are clustered

around three headings - Current Contemporary for established galleries, Future Contemporary for younger ones and Project Contemporary for new galleries that had not participated previously in an Australian art fair.

My pick, out of over 80 galleries and curated spaces: Roslyn Oxley9 presenting works by **Fiona Hall** that were exhibited as part of her recent exhibition at Heide Museum as well as new paintings by **Dale Frank**; 10 Chancery Lane Gallery booth showing multimedia art collective **The Propeller Group**; **Rosemary Laing**'s newspaper-covered woodland photographs at Tolarno Gallery; Edouard Malingue Gallery's presentation of Taiwanese artist **Charwei Tsai**'s video *Incense Mantra* as part of the Installation Contemporary program; **David Rosetzky**'s choreographed video *Half Brother* at Sutton Gallery and **Arlo Mountford**'s playful *Truth to Materials*, in Video Contemporary.

The VIP program and lounge are somewhat predictable and some aspects not working well. The next iteration of Sydney Contemporary will need to improve them as well as the public talks. But overall, a great event – congratulations!

The inaugural SC art fair has attracted 28,810 visitors over the course of the three-day event including the preview and official opening held on 19th September.

Tim Etchells commented: "We are absolutely delighted with the response to the inaugural Sydney Contemporary, with visitor numbers

coming in at more than double our initial expectations." Etchells' company Art Fairs Australia will run Sydney Contemporary on a biennial basis in alternate years to the Melbourne Art Fair, which is managed by Art Fairs Australia and presented by the Melbourne Art Foundation. The success of the inaugural Sydney Contemporary follows the launch by Etchells' of another new art fair, Art13 London in February this year, which attracted 24,735 visitors over the course of the three-day event.

I don't have any sales figures, nor have I learnt how many collectors have visited and how many new ones were seduced into buying. It is one of the important criteria for success but possibly the hardest to gauge.

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Fehily Contemporary at the inaugural Sydney Contemporary Art Fair.
Image courtesy of **Sydney Contemporary 13**