

Venice Biennale seeks to capture the 'unruly' world of art

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▲ Visitors look at an installation "To Breathe" by Bottari artist Kimsooja at the Korean pavilion during the press preview of the 55th Venice art biennale on Wednesday in Venice.

AFP-Yonhap News

▼ Jeremy Deller's installation as part of "English Magic" at the British pavilion AFP-Yonhap News

▼ "Triple point" by U.S. artist Sarah Sze at the United States pavilion

Reuters-Yonhap News

LONDON (Reuters) — Blocks of ice from the Bahamas, cardboard bed clothes from Iraq and a thumping Vatican heartbeat will help the 2013 Venice Biennale attempt to capture the "unruly" world of art.

The rich diversity of unexpected sights and sounds at the world's largest non-commercial art exhibition are partly a result of sheer numbers, with shows from 88 countries installed across the canal city in time for this week's opening.

More than 150 artists are taking part in the Biennale, which has been running since 1895 and continues to attract artists, art-lovers and collectors from across the planet to Venice.

"Every two years we try to capture the world — and then the world is unruly," Biennale curator Massimiliano Gioni told Reuters.

Ten countries — including the Vatican and the Bahamas — are participating for the first time this year with their own dedicated pavilions in a fair that runs until November.

"The national pavilions are fantastic because they give us a glimpse of the diversity of the world ... a world of exceptions," said Gioni.

The Holy See's pavilion, in the Arsenale or old shipyard site, is a far cry from the Renaissance masterpieces of the Vatican. While the three rooms are based on the relatively orthodox themes of "creation," "uncreation" and "recreation," the use of video and a pervasive thumping heartbeat soundtrack add a thoroughly modern element to the installation.

Another Biennale newcomer, the Bahamas pavilion holds a surprise for anyone who was expecting the warmth and sunshine of a Caribbean island.

Nassau-born artist Tavares Strachan's show includes a 14-hour video of his recent trip to the North Pole and two freezer pods containing blocks of ice — one of which he brought back from the Pole and another made to a specific formula so that it would resemble polar ice as closely as possible.

"I grew up on an island that was 24 miles by 7 miles. It was tiny. So if you got on a bike and you started riding, you hit the edge and you were like ... 'what else am I going to do?' And so exploration for me was kind of a natural part of the way I thought about the world," said Strachan.

The Encyclopedia Palace Gioni themed the 55th iteration of the Venice show on the "Encyclopaedic Palace," a design filed at the U.S. Patent Office by eccentric Italian-American Marino Auriti in 1955 for an imaginary museum, 137 storeys high, that would house all worldly knowledge in one place.

Auriti's ambition was destined never to be realized, but the Biennale has set a more realistic goal, giving an introduction to art which is rarely seen abroad.

"I hope that we are going to be an introduction to Iraqi art," said Iraqi artist Furat al Jamil, one of 11 artists involved in the Iraqi pavilion which is set in a traditional Venetian apartment overlooking the grand canal.

"These are samples. Modest samples but genuine and very sincere," as she showed her "Honey Pot," a sculpture made of suspended honeycomb frames dripping into a broken antique pot to convey sweet melancholy and the possibility of healing.

Furat's colleagues Yaseen Wami and Hashim Taehe have furnished the opulent apartment's bedroom entirely in cardboard, right down to the bedclothes.

