

Glass house of dreams

Korea takes on Venice Biennale

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Almost 90 countries will participate in this year's Venice Biennale, the world's oldest and most prestigious international art festival that takes place every two years. Kim Soo-ja is intent on ensuring the Korean Pavilion will be seen, creating an imaginative space of light and sound she titled, "To Breathe: Bottari."

The 56-year-old painter and installation artist didn't have the best venue to work with. The Korean Pavilion has become notorious among visitors for its glass exterior, which lets in too much natural light during the day. Kim's design was not about taking this as a deficiency but embracing it as a strength because she interpreted the venue as a large "bottari," a type of cloth used by Koreans to carry things in a tied bundle.

She covered the pavilion with a translucent film that causes the incoming light to become an iridescent spectrum that changes constantly according to the time of the day and weather conditions. Mirrors were installed on the ceiling and floor to create additional illusions. She conveys her ideas for the pavilion in "The Weaving Factory," a piece of performance art based on recorded sounds of her breathing.

"I interpreted the glass exterior as skin and the pavilion as the body, like a living organism that interacts with the external environment," she said.

No Korean artists participated in the biennale's main exhibit, "The Encyclopedic Place," a pavilion designed by Massimiliano Gioni. Gioni was the artistic director of 2010 Gwangju Biennale and he took the inspiration for the 55th biennale from artist Marino Auriti, who tried to obtain a patent for an imaginary museum to house all kinds of knowledge, a concept he



Kim Soo-ja

described as an "Encyclopedic Palace."

Held at pavilions in the former shipyard of Arsenale, the exhibit features works of more than 150 artists from 38 countries. The last Korean artists who showcased their artwork at the biennale's main exhibit were Yang Hae-gue and Koo Jeong-a in 2009.

There was a significant Korean presence in Venice.

The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) brought along a group of young Korean artists and their definitive works for the "Who is Alice?" exhibit at Spazio Lightbox. Inspired by Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland," the exhibit showcases a whimsical, dreamy side of Korean contemporary art.

Sixteen artists, including Choe U-ram, Oh Hein-kuhn and Jung Yeon-doo, present a colorful array of artwork. Choe's "Pendulum of Secret," a combination of mysterious swinging objects, and the restless and complicated expression of a girl captured by photographer Oh highlight the display.

Suh Jeong-min, who creates unique textured works with small pieces of



Clockwise from top: Oh Hein-kuhn's "Su-ra KANG, Age 18, July 19, 2008" is on display at the "Who is Alice" exhibit at Spazio Lightbox, Venice, an event that runs alongside the Venice Biennale 2013, which opens today; Gwon O-sang's "A Statement of 420 pieces on Twins," which is also a part of "Who is Alice;" Kim Soo-ja's decoration of the Korean Pavilion, a work she titled "To Breathe: Bottari."

Courtesy of Kimsooja Studio, Arts Council Korea, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

rolled and cut "hanji," or traditional Korean mulberry paper, was invited to "Personal Structures," another ancillary exhibit at the Palazzo Bembo.

Another group of Korean artists

organized an exhibit at Venice's Hotel Amadeus, titled "Corea Campanella." Venice Biennale 2013 runs through Nov. 24. For more information, visit labiennale.org.