

Brisbane-born artist
Tracey Moffatt.



profile: TRACEY MOFFATT

IT'S EASY TO frame Australia's representation at the 57th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale 2017, in the terms of 'trailblazing' women and Indigenous talent, but that just quarantines our art away from the merit-based 'best' and buoys the 'cultural cringe'.

Yes, the selection of Tracey Moffatt as the first Australian Indigenous artist to present a solo exhibition at the Venice Biennale is "significant, bold and inspirational", as the PR spins, but it's also about bloody time. What other living

Australian artist, regardless of their sex or colour of skin, can claim 150-plus solo shows across Australia, Europe and the United States and representation in the permanent collections of multiple major international museums including the Tate in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York?

As the Art Gallery of New South Wales's website waxes, Moffatt is "probably Australia's most successful artist ever, both nationally and internationally". And yet her 'flag-waving' representation at the 'Olympics of art' (as the Venice Biennale is oft badged) has taken 25-plus years of prodigious art practice to transpire. Never mind the consistent tide of international acclaim — first rippling from

THE AUSTRALIAN ARTIST HAS A SOLO EXHIBITION AT THE 2017 VENICE BIENNALE — AND IT'S ABOUT TIME, WRITES ANNEMARIE KIELY.

Moffatt's 1989 nine-photo series *Something More* and fulminating in *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, the short film selected for official competition at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival.

Moffatt deserves her positioning at contemporary art's premier event, and any mention of race, other than relative to the content of her work, is redundant. As is the qualification 'female', which was amplified with the appointment of Natalie King as curator of Australia's pavilion for the 2017 Venice Biennale, and arts patron and retail powerhouse Naomi Milgrom, AO as Australia's Commissioner.

"We three are dead serious about art," said Moffatt when the Australia Council for the Arts first announced the all-female charge to the Biennale. "Naomi with her collecting and commissioning; Natalie, who has worked as a curator for more than half her life; and as for me, I haven't really had a life. I've only had art." »

ART & DESIGN



There are times in life when we can all see what is coming over the horizon
— Tracey Moffatt



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tracey Moffatt's works include *As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land* (2013, as background), *Suburban Landscape No 3 'Bullied Here'* (2013), *First Jobs, Waitress 1982* (2008), *Plantations (Diptych No. 3)* (2009, a series of 12 diptychs) and *Artist at Work* (1997). BELOW: *Self Portrait* (1999).

« Famous for both drawing on the history of cinema, art and pop culture in her work, and baulking at its exposition, Moffatt hints at the content of the large-scale photography and film that will soon install in the award-winning Denton Corker Marshall-designed pavilion in Venice's Giardini area. "*My Horizon* is very open and can be read in many ways," she says, elucidating on the exhibition's expansive title. "The horizon line can represent the far and distant future or the unobtainable. There are times in life when we can all see what is coming over the horizon. This is when we make a move. Or we do nothing and just wait for whatever it is to arrive."

It whiffs of the non-linear cinematic narrative that is soon to splay off in multiple directions, myths and metaphors, which is just the way Moffatt likes it — suggestive, not conclusive. The accompanying compendium of texts, published by Thames & Hudson, will shed light on the artist's fictions. "Tracey's new work is poetic and personal, melodramatic and fantastical, while reflecting on the way we live in precarious times," says King, who will oversee the pavilion's First Nation investigators while mentoring a First Nation curatorial assistant.

Her teasing glimpse of Moffatt's *My Horizon* is given gravitas by Milgrom. She promises an insightful, deeply moving exhibition, saying it is "... one that extends Tracey's acclaimed body of work and cements her position as one of Australia's most successful artists, someone who takes the tempo of our times". VL

My Horizon, Australian Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale; 10 May–26 November. Visit labiennale.org/en/biennale; roslynoxley.com.au.

