

# Biennale's bigger picture

## ■ VISUAL ART

Harbant Gill

**T**URMOIL and playfulness are the rival forces at the heart of the three creations representing Australia at this year's Venice Biennale.

Melbourne artist Callum Morton has recreated his childhood home, albeit hole-riddled, to capture its sad destruction and also the bigger picture of global ravage.

Susan Norrie from Sydney focuses on a Third World disaster zone.

Melburnian Daniel von Sturmer, however, will play with viewers while confounding their sense of scale and orientation with his installation.

Norrie, who will exhibit her *Havoc* in the Italian city, says her work was triggered by an oil drilling accident that unleashed a hot mud flow in Porong in volcanic East Java last year.

"I wasn't chasing misery," says the artist who has dealt with the impact of man-made and natural disasters for the past 15 years.

The Indonesian accident struck her because it smacked of Third World exploitation and also because of our proximity to the region.

"The mud flow won't stop and they don't know what to do about it," she says. "I was up there a few weeks ago and the area we were driving through has been decimated again."

"It's a very frightening situation. What's happened to the landscape after this incredible mud flow is like a landscape of the apocalypse."

"It's made about 20,000 people homeless. You are talking about an agricultural community that's been completely displaced."

Norrie, who has visited Porong three times, will set up several screens in three rooms of the canal-side Palazzo Giustinian Lolin to show footage of the incident, provide information and display the havoc of an actual volcano.

Morton's 15m-tall steel and timber *Valhalla*, which is being set up in an overgrown football field at Palazzo Zenobio, also alludes to global heartache.



**Home and away:** Callum Morton with his installation of his childhood home to be displayed in Venice.

Picture: DAVID GERAGHTY

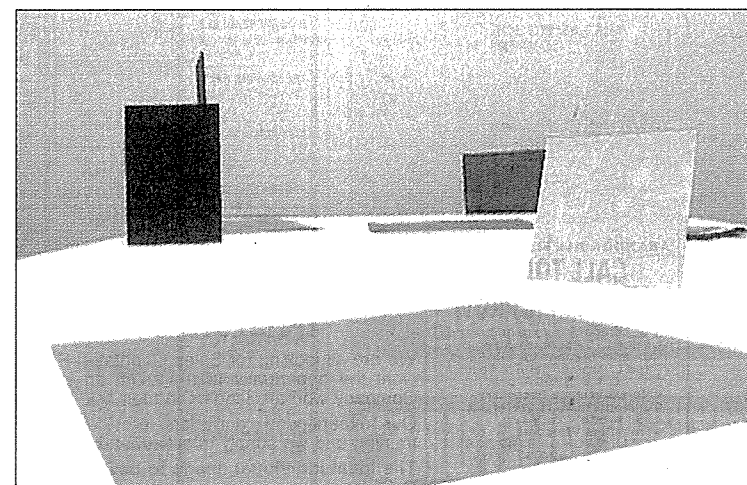
"It's as if the house has been bombed out," he says. "Torched, sutured together and shot through with holes, a monument to all those skeletal structures left dangling after disaster."

Step in and you find a white-marbled room, hear screeches, feel seismic shudders and get soothed by ambient music.

The house, built at a Campbellfield factory and then dismantled and shipped out, is three-quarters the size of the Melbourne home that Morton's architect father designed.

"Last year I drove up the street I used to live in almost 30 years ago. I was a little shocked to discover the house had disappeared. All that remained was a vacant overgrown block, a hole," says Morton, whose hotel-corridor *Babylonia* was part of the 2005 Melbourne Festival.

"The idea was to bring the house



**Playful:** *The Field Equation*, a recent work by Daniel von Sturmer.

back to life. It's as much about my biography as it is about a larger, collective image."

Von Sturmer, concerned with

how we relate to the world and to one another, says his *The Object of Things* is a "humorous and playful installation".

Comprising video screens, objects and a plywood structure that will connect the two levels of the Australian Pavilion, it will offer viewers a shifting perspective as they move around.

"I'm quite interested in the viewer enjoying the experience and engaging with the ideas in a playful manner," he says.

Together the three artists — who join a Biennale honour roll including Howard Arkley (1999), Ricky Swallow (2005) and Emily Kame Kngwarreye (1997) — are costing the Australia Council \$2 million to send to the artists' mecca.

Australian commissioner John Kaldor says this is the first time a trio has represented Australia at the Biennale.

The 52nd Venice Biennale runs from June 10-November 21.