

# Blowing Venice out of the water

The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art plans to ambush the city's Biennale with three performance artists, writes **Gina McColl**.

**T**HE Australian Centre for Contemporary Art is taking three Victorian performance artists to gatecrash the world's biggest contemporary art event, the invitation-only Venice Biennale, next month.

While Australia's official entrant, Sydney sculptor Hany Armanious, will be on show at the Australian pavilion for five months, artists Laresa Kosloff, Anastasia Klose and Stuart Ringholt are turning up for the three-day preview (known as the Vernissage) — when the world's top curators, patrons and media attend.

With about 45,000 people expected before the Biennale's opening to the public on June 4, artistic director Juliana Engberg is describing ACCA's move as opportunistic.

"It's a hugely important showcase, and a great opportunity to profile three young artists we're hoping to introduce to some of our [overseas] colleagues, who are there to make decisions about things they might pick up and include in their programming over the next couple of years."

Performance artists Kosloff, Klose and Ringholt share a low-tech, home-made aesthetic, in the emotional key of self-deprecation, empathy and

excruciating embarrassment. Klose's earlier works include the *Nanna* series, in which she wandered the streets of Melbourne wearing a white wedding dress, with a cardboard sign around her neck reading, "Nanna I Am Still Alone!" and Ringholt's performances have included standing at a social security booth with snot streaming from his nose, and walking around with toilet paper hang-

**◀ There's a skew-whiff view overseas about the work we do. ▶ JULIANA ENGBERG, ACCA**

ing from his trousers. It's Tracey Emin meets David Sedaris.

Engberg will not reveal details of performances created for the Biennale because she wants the works to perform the old-fashioned equivalent of going viral: turning into "art rumours", as she calls them.

"Even if you're not there and you didn't see it first-hand, you'll hear about it, you'll be talking about it."

She also wants to make a statement about the Biennale's concentration on object-based work. Engberg says much local work is performative and collaborative with a lo-fi "aveago feel".

"Because its not selected for official presentation, we get a little bit of a skew-whiff point of view from overseas about what kind of work we do here."

Gonzo and opportunistic it may be — and the first stunt of its kind by an Australian group since the 1970s, Engberg believes — but it has not put official noses out of joint.

Doug Hall, Australia Council-appointed commissioner for the Australian exhibition at the Venice Biennale is enthusiastic. "We welcome it and the [Italian] authorities welcome it too."

All that work, money and time spent on planning and logistics for the five-month display — isn't there a fear the unofficial work could steal some of its thunder?

Not all, according to Hall, who compares the numerous alternative venues and events that vie for attention alongside the "official" main event at the Biennale to the fringe activities of an arts festival.

"Venice is the last remaining model of the grand 19th century idea of international expositions where countries are represented by people, but it's not accompanied by all that nationalist bluster. I think everyone likes everything that's happening. No one gets hijacked by anyone else."



ACCA artistic director Juliana Engberg and co-ordinating curator Charlotte Day (front), with artists Anastasia Klose, Stuart Ringholt and Laresa Kosloff.

PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS