AUSTRALIA AT THE VENICE BIENNALE: PAST AND PRESENT

The Australian Pavilion, Image credit: John Gollings
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The original Australian Pavilion
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FIRST EXHIBITIONS

Australia was first invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 1924, but declined due to insufficient preparation time. Invitations for Australian participation continued, generating much interest domestically but Australia still did not participate until after World War 2.

Australia’s involvement with the Venice Biennale began in 1954 when Sidney Nolan, William Dobell and Russell Drysdale were invited to present their work in the Central Pavilion. Prime Minister Robert Menzies gave the exhibit partial government funding but it was essentially organised by the British Arts Council. In 1956, Albert Tucker, who was living in Rome, was also invited to exhibit. However, on neither of these occasions was Australia fully represented as an independent nation.
EXHIBITIONS IN THE ORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN PAVILION

Australian Pavilion during Venice Biennale 2009: Shaun Gladwell, artist

Jenny Watson, Installation, Venice Biennale, Italy, 1993
Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
THE NEW AUSTRALIAN PAVILION

The new Australian Pavilion by architectural firm Denton Corker Marshall is the only 21st century building in the Giardini. It consists of a large black granite box, with exterior panels that can be opened up or remain closed.

The two level structure comprises an entrance foyer and large exhibition gallery, as well as back of house and storage areas. The gallery is a neutral space with polished concrete floors and five metre high ceilings.

Describing the design concept, architect John Denton says, “Our idea is simply to create an object which sits confidently and powerfully within the historic Giardini landscape”.

The $7.5 million project has been funded primarily through donations from private benefactors, with a $1 million contribution from the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts.

The Australia Council Chair Rupert Myer AO, said:

‘It was always an ambitious idea, to build a new building in an historic European city that is surrounded by water. But the realisation of this beautiful new pavilion, which will stand large and proud in this prestigious international environment, says a lot about our cultural ambition as a nation.’

The Australian Pavilion Image credit: John Gollings
CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW AUSTRALIAN PAVILION

The new Australian Pavilion during construction.
Image credit: Alessandra Bello Photography
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THE NEW AUSTRALIAN PAVILION

The new Australian Pavilion.
Image credit: John Gollings.
THE AUSTRALIAN PAVILION

The Australian Pavilion, above and top. Image credit: John Gollings

The Australian Pavilion
Image credit: Alessandra Bello Photography
ACTIVITIES

DISCUSS

Consider the quote by Rupert Myer: “It was always an ambitious idea, to build a new building in an historic European city that is surrounded by water. But the realisation of this beautiful new pavilion, which will stand large and proud in this prestigious international environment, says a lot about our cultural ambition as a nation.”

What do you think he means about Australia’s cultural ambition?

How does a building reflect a nation’s identity?

CREATE

Design your own art gallery.
Research new galleries online for some contemporary inspiration.

What kind of building reflects your own identity?
Make a drawing and then a cardboard model.
REFERENCES

