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Collecting

Venice Biennale



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Identity parade

National pavilions | Artists respond to issues around representation. By Dan Einar

The idea of national pavilions evokes complicated issues around statehood and statelessness. In a globalised art world, how do the artists themselves respond to the notion of representing their countries? Previewed here are a selection of pavilions where the artists are directly engaging with this question.

Israel
 Gal Weinstein will present *Sun Stand Still*, in which wood drawings, sculptures, videos and prints created over the past decade form a single installation. The piece examines the dichotomies that Weinstein sees as central to Israel's identity, a nation simultaneously modern and biblical, geared toward progress and destruction. Billed as a highlight is the vast landscape "Moon over Ayalon Valley" made from metal, wood and felt. It depicts a moment in Zionist mythology in which Joshua ordered the sun and moon to stay still; Israel, Weinstein implies, is still caught between enlightenment and darkness.

Kiribati
 Making its debut at Venice this year is Kiribati, a dispersed island nation in the Pacific Ocean, whose pavilion will be based at the Palazzo Mora. Uniting 35 artists from different generations and disciplines, the project lends a contemporary framework to the customs that have remained at the heart of the nation's culture for centuries. Vocal and dance performance pieces form the basis of the exhibition, immersing viewers in Kiribati heritage. The exhibition will also offer a sobering reminder that the very existence of this community is threatened by environmental pollution caused by nations on the other side of the globe.

Netherlands
 Wendelen van Oldenborgh will subvert the notion of national representation at this year's Biennale with her series of short films, *Cinema Olanda*. Responding to De Stijl artist Gert Rietveld's design for the 1953 pavilion, in which he sought to project the Netherlands as a modern, harmonious country, van Oldenborgh

aims at "an alternative narrative to the Netherlands' self-image". The first film gives a voice to the marginalised Dutch citizens of the postwar period, focusing on the Caribbean and Indonesian communities who were (and are) subject to social and racial inequality; the artist's aim is to move beyond an idealised conception of her home country.

Iraq
 Iraq's exhibition, *Archaic*, will display 40 ancient relics from the Neolithic and Neo-Babylonian eras (dating as far back as 6100BC) alongside works by eight Modern and contemporary artists at the Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti. Most of these artefacts – from jugs, sieves and toys to stamp seals, cuneiform tablets, medical objects, a musical instrument and figurines – have never left Iraq; others have been retrieved from across the world following the 2003 looting of the Iraq Museum. The show's title refers not only to these antiquities but to the nation's outmoded infrastructure. Noting that many of the artists working in Iraq today are limited by the "orthodox aesthetic tradition", the curators exhibit work by artists making installation, video, photographic, performance and textual work. Also featured will be work by the acclaimed Belgian-born artist Francis Alys inspired by his 2016 visit to Iraq, which took him to the front line of the Kurdish Liberation of Mosul.

NSK
 NSK State features among the international pavilions at Venice despite being a "utopian formation, with no physical territory, not identified with any existing nation state". With contributions from more than 200 artists, philosophers (including Slavoj Žižek) and cultural establishments, the show addresses issues of statehood, bureaucracy and citizenship. And at a time when the value of the cross-border EU state is being questioned, NSK has asked 100 individuals to give their perspectives on Europe. Their responses will be presented in the NSK pavilion based in Palazzo Ca' Tron at the University of Venice. There will also be a passport office for those looking to join the current 15,000 NSK citizens.

Clockwise from top left: an NSK State passport; Jewad Selim's 1955 bronze relief "Pastoral" at the Iraqi pavilion; a detail from Gal Weinstein's "Jezreel Valley in the Dark" (2017) at the Israeli pavilion



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