

# The Sydney Morning Herald

## Roof opens up to reveal wonder of words at Venice Biennale

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**John McDonald**



**SIMRYN GILL**

Pictured in her Marrickville studio. Photo: Tamara Dean

By some strange osmosis, Australia may have tapped into the right current in this year's Venice Biennale - the world's largest, most prestigious exhibition of contemporary art.

Simryn Gill's installation: *Here Art Grows on Trees*, in the Australian pavilion, is one of several shows that take the tree as a focal point.

The most striking feature of Gill's show is that she has peeled back the roof from an Australian pavilion earmarked for demolition at the end of the Biennale.



Simryn Gill's Half Moon Shine. Photo: Supplied

In this she has taken a contrary approach to most of her predecessors, who turned off the lights and spot-lit the works, to try and nullify the impact of Philip Cox's upstairs-downstairs design. Flooded with light the building is transformed for the better.

A series of long, white panels covered in thousands of tiny word collages torn from books will be left open to the elements, decaying gradually over the next few months.

The other part of the installation, on black walls, features photos of Australian mining sites and natural locations that look like mining sites. It is a conceptual balancing act that works better than might be expected.

The lead-up to this presentation was so mysterious that one could only anticipate the worst. For once those expectations have not been met. This is one of Australia's better showings in Venice.

There may be trees aplenty, but the 55th Biennale di Venezia is not preoccupied with environmental issues.

Curator Massimiliano Gioni has struck a very different note with his chosen title, *// Palazzo Enciclopedico* (The Encyclopedic Palace), which pays homage to a plan by an eccentric Italian immigrant, Marino Auriti, who filed a plan with the US Patent Office in 1955 for a 136-storey building to house all earth's knowledge.

The proposed structure would have been 700 metres tall and covered 16 blocks in Washington DC. It makes Jamie Packer's schemes at Barangaroo seem modest in comparison.