

THE AUSTRALIAN

ARTS

Roof opening reveals the elements in the room

MICHAELA BOLAND The Australian June 13, 2013 12:00AM



Artist Simryn Gill at her home in Sydney. She is representing Australia at the 2013 Venice Biennale. Picture: James Croucher
Source: The Australian

FOR her Venice installation, Australia's representative Simryn Gill decided to lift the lid off the pavilion -- literally.

For the final year of its use, the Philip Cox-designed small white exhibition hall's roof was partially removed, allowing fresh air and Italy's summer sun to flood over Gill's artworks.

Her somewhat spare exhibition features a deep bronzed disc, stacks of books along a wall, torn bits of newspaper stuck in formation along another wall and loops of potentially useful detritus such as you might see in the workshops of developing nations.

A plywood floor has been installed and the exhibition is intended to weather with the elements.

The Malaysian-born Sydneysider is one of a number of artists exhibiting in Venice's Giardini to incorporate architecture into her display.

In the US pavilion, artist Sarah Sze's artworks blend the outdoors with indoors; the pair of artists representing Georgia built a treehouse on to the nation's existing structure; Israel's pavilion features a hole.

The commissioner of Australia's pavilion, Sydney banker Simon Mordant, says: "There was a great deal of surprise with the removal of the pavilion roof, the changes to the floor and walls; this created a terrific audience response, too."

Mordant says Gill's work chimes with the context of other Biennale exhibitions, which also "spoke of the environment and integrated the art in that context".

The number of visitors to the Australian pavilion was similar to previous years "and the level of audience through the gardens and Arsenale was broadly similar to recent years at the vernissage (the preview period)," he says.

The Australia Council says there were 10,500 visitors in the first four days of Gill's exhibition and more than 200,000 are expected during the six months of the Biennale.

Unusually wet and cold weather in Venice during the four-day vernissage from May 29 resulted in gumbooted visitors scoping Gill's work. Even inside the building viewers were seen with their umbrellas up.

As the chill gives way to the heat of summer, organisers expect the exhibition will evolve and change with the seasons.