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Simryn Gill At The Venice Biennale 2013

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The Venice Biennale 2013 opens this weekend and although Simryn Gill's installation at the Australian Pavillion remains under wraps, Julia Champtaloup takes a look at Gill's past work, and explores the artist's philosophy to give us glimpse of what to expect from her in Venice.

For artist Simryn Gill, 'here' can be a place between where we have been and where we are going, an intertidal zone of memory and time. From May 30th, with her usual precision, Simryn will transform the Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale with site-specific works, capturing moments in time reflective of the way we occupy our space on this planet.



Simryn Gill, Australia's artistic representative, 55th International Exhibition of Art, la Biennale di Venezia, 2013. Photo by Jamie North

To bring her exhibit, *Here Art Grows on Trees*, to life in Venice, Simryn will take 'there' what is 'here': many of her long-standing relationships with Sydney-based and international collaborators and artisans, to activate several ideas that have been floating in her mind for some time. The exhibit will include a broad representation of work, including large, collaged drawings, a series of photographs and works made of disused and collected materials.

Often using objects and discarded everyday items, Simryn's collections mark time or celebrate the obsolete. In the past many of her images have been of everyday life or the surroundings of the many places she has lived, such as Port Dixon in Malaysia, Adelaide, and Marrickville in Sydney.



Simryn Gill, Naught (detail), 2012, Collected objects, Variable dimensions, Courtesy Tracy Williams Ltd, New York, Photo by Jenni Carter.

Gill's work is often a story of personal and cultural history that reflects stories in us all. Hence she becomes our story teller, revealing layers and meanings, offering awareness or perhaps understanding. Often ephemeral or reflective of domestic life, her works in various media have been described as offering an intervention into a small bit of reality. Precise collecting and gathering often means Simryn is engaged in the quiet nature of life that becomes a shared story. Projects with books, printed words and other printed matter in the past became fragments with historical context or renewed meaning. Texts have sometimes provided a framework for the reinterpretation or alteration of existing objects.



Simryn Gill, Naught, 2012, Collected objects, Variable dimensions, Courtesy Tracy Williams Ltd, New York, Photo by Jenni Carter

Curated by Catherine de Zegher, *Here Art Grows on Trees* will feature all new work by Gill “that is made in her customary way — in the places she lives”, according to de Zegher. It will also be made in the context of a building that will soon be disused and discarded. The artist and curator have worked closely to honor the current Australian pavilion as it will be dismantled after this year’s Biennale. Gill’s exhibition will in part pay homage to its extinction. (A new, larger pavilion is planned for completion by 2015.)



Simryn Gill, Untitled, 2004, Still from Super 8mm film, Courtesy the artist

Venice will be another moment in time for Simryn, marking time and making history. The subject of Simryn's work, *Power Station* (2004), explored similar themes: revealing an archaeological archive and celebrating remnants of the past. For Venice, Simryn will reveal not only the constructed layers of the pavilion itself but also man-made constructed layers of the wider world that give way to destruction and decay. When Simryn travelled to Tasmania, the Olympic Dam uranium mine in South Australia and the Pilbara in Western Australia to see more of the detail of the country she is to represent, she investigated environmental issues as well as questions of identity and permanence that inform some of the works in this exhibition.

A new publication will be launched at the exhibition, featuring extensive colour plates and commissioned essays by Catherine de Zegher, Carol Armstrong, Michael Taussig, Brian Massumi, Kajri Jain, Lilian Chee and Ross Gibson.

Julia Champtaloup will be at the Venice Biennale and will report back to 'A Magazine' with the latest news from Venice.

About the artist

Simryn Gill was born in Singapore, and lives and works in Sydney and Port Dickson, Malaysia. Gill has had solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Tate Modern, London; and The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Her works have been included in Documenta 12 (2007) and Documenta 13 (2012) in Kassel, Germany.

About the curator

Catherine de Zegher is the curator for the forthcoming 5th Moscow Biennale (2013). She was the co-Artistic Director of the 18th Biennale of Sydney in 2012, and Guest Curator in the Department of Drawing at MoMA.