



## Tracey Moffatt: Expanding Australia's horizons

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*Tracey Moffatt is one of Australia's most successful visual artists. A photographer and filmmaker, she has held around 100 solo exhibitions of her work around the world, and in 2017 will represent Australia at the Venice Biennale.*

The Venice Biennale has been dubbed the Olympics of the art world. Every other year, around half a million art lovers from across the world descend on Venice's historic Giardini della Biennale to soak up what each country has put forward as a representation of their nation's best art and artists.

In 2017, Australia will – for the first time – have a solo exhibition by an Indigenous artist. Photographer, filmmaker and video artist Tracey Moffatt.

Moffatt is no stranger to international attention. Since her first Australian exhibition in 1989, Moffatt's work has been shown extensively all over the world – from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, to the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Cannes Film Festival.

So what is it about Moffatt's work that makes her one of Australia's most successful contemporary artists?

### **Art, memory and culture**

Moffatt's work draws on both popular culture and her own background, weaving her childhood memories of growing up in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s into stylised photographic works that examine gender stereotypes, class divisions and suburban life.

“I like to create my version of reality, the work comes from me, what I know. Things I have seen and experienced and things I think I have seen and experienced. Maybe it's just an exaggerated version of my own reality. Sources of inspiration come from everywhere”.<sup>1</sup>



Tracey Moffatt at her exhibition *My Horizon* at the Venice Biennale. Credit: John Gollings.

Born in Brisbane in 1960, Moffatt studied visual communications at the Queensland College of Art. Her first major exhibition was a photographic series called *Something More*, which showcased many of the themes and motifs that are prominent in Moffatt's practice. These include the use of theatrical sets, hyper-real colour palettes, and a sense of isolation that hints at a sinister drama under the surface.

Much of Moffatt's work examines what it means to be Indigenous in Australia, a subject that has transcended international borders. The artist's first big international break came when her short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* was selected for the official competition at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival. The experimental film looks at the relationship between an Aboriginal daughter and her white mother, and the impact of society on their interactions with each other. Moffatt's cinematic success continued three years later when her first feature film, *beDevil*, was again selected for Cannes.

Since then, Moffatt has gone on to exhibit worldwide – from the world's best art fairs and Biennales in Gwangju, Prague, São Paulo, Sharjah and Singapore; to being part of major international collections at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography and the Tate Gallery in London.

Although Moffatt will be the first solo Indigenous artist to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale, she doesn't want to be known just as “an Indigenous artist”.<sup>2</sup> Instead, she sees herself as a contemporary artist producing work with global appeal.

*“My work can be read as Australian, but I think the reason it's travelled and crossed borders is because it can be appreciated by a vast audience. I know it's clichéd but it has a universal aspect. It deals with the human condition, and so resonates with many cultures”.*<sup>2</sup>

## Expanding horizons

For the past year, Moffatt has been working towards a new major exhibition which will be unveiled at the Venice Biennale in May. Showcasing new large-scale photography and film works, Moffatt's exhibition *My Horizon* will explore the concept of journeys and focus on issues of race and gender, sexuality, desire, identity, human connection and estrangement.

"*My Horizon* is very open and can be read in many ways," said Moffatt. "The horizon line can represent the far and distant future or the unobtainable."

"There are times in life when we all can see what is 'coming over the horizon'. This is when we make a move. Or we do nothing and just wait for whatever it is to arrive."

Working on her new exhibition, Moffatt took her camera into unknown locations and created photodramas, "using models, actors and people I find on the street. My stories meld fiction, fact and some aspects of my family history," says Moffatt.

*"I wanted to extend my filmic narratives into imaginary realms. The horizon line encapsulated in the title My Horizon can represent a yearning for escape to another place."*

For over a century, the Venice Biennale has been one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the world. The Biennale comprises a curated show, alongside more than 80 national exhibitions in pavilions throughout Venice. Since Australia's first exhibition in 1954, 37 contemporary visual artists have exhibited under Australia's banner including Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Patricia Piccinini and Fiona Hall.



The Australian Pavilion in Venice. Credit: John Gollings.

Moffatt will be the second Australian artist to exhibit in the new Australian Pavilion, Australia's permanent home in Venice. The award-winning Pavilion, designed by Australian architects Denton Corker Marshall, is the first 21st century building to be constructed in the Giardini della Biennale.

Denton Corker Marshall's design for the pavilion is a white box inside a black box. A blank canvas for artists to create what they please. And Moffatt is set to do just that, and in the process broaden Australia's horizons in the international visual art scene.

[1] [Tracey Moffatt](#), (2002) exhibition catalogue, City Gallery Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 33

[2] Australian Financial Review, [Tracey Moffatt on success, failure and the 57th Venice Biennale](#) (2017), John MacDonald