

Venice Biennale ‘a gig like no other’ for indigenous photographer Tracey Moffatt

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‘People are keeping tabs on you, and that is what I’m not used to’: Tracey Moffatt in Sydney yesterday. Picture: John Feder

Photographer Tracey Moffatt came to notice with her 1989 self-portrait series called *Something More*, in which she wore a glamorous red dress and cast herself in an outback drama.

After three decades of solo shows and surveys from here to New York, Moffatt is about to take another decisive step in her career, when she opens her show at the 57th Venice Biennale in May.

Australia’s representative at the prestigious international art fair, Moffatt has been working on her exhibition for the past 15 months. She admits she’s terrified.

“The way I always work, I’m in a tizzy, but I’ve never been so exposed before,” she said yesterday.

“As the artist for Venice, people are keeping tabs on you, and that is what I’m not used to ... You sign up for the gig, which is Venice, and that’s the deal. I’m sure artists from many countries who are showing in Venice this year have gone through the same thing.”

Moffatt has produced a new body of work for the Australian Pavilion, two series of photographs and two video works, in an exhibition called *My Horizon*.

But at a meet-the-press preview at her temporary studio at Sydney's Middle Head, there was little to see. The doges of the Venice Biennale decree that exhibiting artists have to keep their work under wraps until the official opening.

Moffatt revealed a single image called *Hell* from a series of 12 large-scale photographs called *Passage*. Set in a dockland, the sepia-toned image shows two shadowy figures, strongly backlit with beams of hazy light. One of the figures is a mother, and the other, Moffatt said, was a "middleman".

Moffatt, whose past work has explored gender, race and sexuality, said the series was about journeys, and people who "escape across borders to seek new lives".

She is the first Australian indigenous artist to have a solo show at the Venice Biennale. Artists including Rover Thomas, Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Moffatt have shown in group exhibitions there. While such a high-profile forum may be overdue for an indigenous artist, commissioner Naomi Milgrom said that was not a factor in selecting Moffatt, "a great Australian artist".