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## **Venice Biennale 2017: Tracey Moffatt's *My Horizon* a roaring success**

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Success at the Venice Biennale – the world's biggest, most prestigious art event – may be measured in many different ways.

One is the length of the queue that extends from the doorway of a national pavilion. If so many people are already waiting then it must be pretty good.



Moffatt at the Australia Pavilion in Venice. *Photo: John Gollings*

Secondly there is the ubiquity of a show bag that appears on shoulders during the vernissage – the three-day preview attended by international press, curators, bureaucrats, art dealers and collectors.

By both these criteria Tracey Moffatt's *My Horizon* at the Australian pavilion is a roaring success. The queue that snaked away from the entrance was formidable. It was impossible to walk two steps without seeing someone carrying a black bag emblazoned with the words "indigenous rights" or "refugee rights".



Touch (Body Remembers series) (detail) from Tracey Moffatt's *My Horizon*. Photo: Tracey Moffatt

A third, more permanent measure is to be awarded a prize by an international jury. Australia, the country most in love with art prizes, has never won a ribbon at Venice – a galling problem for the Australia Council, which manages this extravaganza.

At the time of writing, prizes had yet to be awarded, but organisers were feeling cautiously optimistic. Audience feedback had been good, and to be truthful, the 57th Venice Biennale: Viva Arte Viva is otherwise a disappointing affair.

Many countries have responded to the uncertain politics of our times with dull, socially concerned displays. For the curated component of the show, director, Christine Macel, has put together a Biennale "designed with artists, by artists and for artists", with lacklustre results.

In such company Moffatt's *My Horizon* strikes the right political chords, but does so in a more stylish manner than most of the competition. The content may be serious, but the images are almost glamorous.



Rock Shadow (Body Remembers series) (detail) from Tracey Moffatt's *My Horizon*. Photo: Tracey Moffatt

The mix includes two new photo sequences and two new videos, representing a return to the Australian themes that helped put Moffatt on the international art circuit in the 1990s. She would spend more than a decade living in New York but the quality of her work seemed to suffer with distance from her roots.

Coming into this Biennale Moffatt badly needed a hit, and it appears she may have got one.



Mother and Baby (Passage series) (detail) from Tracey Moffatt's *My Horizon*. *Photo: Tracey Moffatt*

That desperation was reflected in the opening which was almost embarrassing in its displays of mutual affection between the artist and her team. Master of ceremonies was Rupert Myer, Chair of the Australia Council, who expressed the required noble sentiments about indigenous Australians. Ambassador to Italy, Greg French, spoke about the power of art. Filmmaker, George Miller, who had the job of opening the show, gushed about the "Mighty Tracey Moffatt", and was just as fulsome in his praise of the commissioner, the "Mighty Naomi Milgrom".

Visitors could choose between coffee, iced tea or water, adding a strangely puritanical touch to an opening that was more love-in than official function. Nobody left the Australian pavilion flushed with alcohol; instead they carried away the warm inner glow that comes from announcing one's sympathy for the downtrodden of the earth.