

VENICE REVISITED

Sarah Greenberg picks the best of the Venice Biennale

The opening of the Venice Biennale is the art world's most chaotic summer jamboree. Now that the party's over, art lovers are in luck. The show continues until late November and the national pavilions in the Giardini are virtually empty. That means no queuing for the German pavilion that only allows in 25 people at a time, and plenty of elbow room to see **Sophie Calle's** film-based pieces inside the French Pavilion, where she asks a variety of women to read and interpret a break-up letter from her ex. The hilarious results make for one of the best pavilions this year. No crowds block the view



Far left 'Wave-function', 2007, by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
Left installation shot of 'Bolero', 1996-2007, by Francis Alÿs
Centre 'Hamster Wheel', curated by Franz West
Below left 'Pleasure Island', 2007, by Heather and Ivan Morison



of the dramatic installations in the Italian pavilion, a selection of international art curated by Biennale Director Robert Storr: **Nancy Spero's** mobile of bobbing heads in the entry lobby is stunning, as is the central hall hung with striking paintings by **Sigmar Polke**. Further inside, look for strong works by **Sol LeWitt**, **Waltercio Caldas** and **Steve McQueen**.

BIENNIAL BOOM

Two more biennials complete this feverish year of art. The tenth Istanbul Biennial 'Not Only Possible But Also Necessary: Optimism in the age of global war' (8 Sep-4 Nov; www.iksv.org/bienal), organised by the Chinese-born and Paris-based curator Hou Hanru, probes the political context of Turkey and elsewhere in works such as *Here and Now*, *Ancient Feeling*, 2006 (right), by Chen Hui-Chiao. The locations, including former power stations, historic sites and the opera house, are as interesting as the 35 countries represented in the show. Close on its heels is the Lyon Biennial (19 Sep-6 Jan 2008; www.biennale-de-lyon.org), co-curated by the



peripatetic Hans Ulrich Obrist, Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery. It is organised as a game and brings together 'players' (critics and curators) who each choose an artist to represent the current decade.

Seek out national pavilions beyond the Giardini – especially good is Ireland (near San Zaccaria and its heart-stopping Bellini), with compelling films by **Gerard Byrne**. Wales shows **Richard Deacon** RA's ceramic sculptures alongside wacky wooden constructions by the young duo **Heather and Ivan Morison** (far left). The multimedia mayhem of **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** (above left) in the first Mexican pavilion is worth a detour – as is its gorgeous palazzo.

The Arsenale, the Renaissance naval works open only during the Biennale, is better than usual. Storr, both an academic and a curator, shuns fashion in favour of serious and subtle issues. His show here gives space to powerful works, such as *Bolero* (above) and *The Politics of Rehearsal*, by **Francis Alÿs**, which inspires his show of the same title in L.A. Bulgarian **Nedko Solakov's** surreal installation on Kalashnikovs and young San Francisco artist **Emily Prince's** map of the US, filled with hand-drawn portraits of the American soldiers who have died in Iraq, turn bloody politics into poetic visions.

The most beautiful space in the Arsenale is the hall hung with tapestries by Nigerian artist **El Anatsui** (see page 26). His work also adorns the entrance of **Artempo**, a must for its mix of art from the Egyptians to today in atmospheric Palazzo Fortuny. Old meets new again in **Bill Viola's** video installation in the tiny church of San Gallo (see pages 18-19). Another wild card is **Hamster Wheel** (left), curated by Austrian sculptor **Franz West**, who invited artists he admires to make work in a warehouse near the Arsenale, which transfers to Toulouse this autumn. The energy, anarchy and Dadaesque fun of his show epitomise the Biennale at its best.

Venice Biennale (www.labiennale.org), until 21 Nov; Artempo (www.artempo.eu), until 7 Oct; Hamster Wheel, *Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse* (www.printempsdesseptembre.com), 21 Sep-14 Oct; Francis Alÿs: *The Politics of Rehearsal*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (www.hammer.ucla.edu), 30 Sep-10 Feb 2008