



Australian Government



FOR INFORMATION

To: The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for the Arts
From: Adrian Collette, Chief Executive Officer, Creative Australia
Subject: Venice Biennale Artistic Team 2026
Date: Thursday, 30 January 2025

Summary

This brief provides information on the decision for the appointed artistic team for the 2026 Venice Biennale. 2026 will be the 26th edition of Australia's participation at the Venice Biennale which commenced in 1954.

Creative Australia is the commissioner of the Australia Pavilion and the producer of the Australia at the Venice Biennale project, which incorporates the exhibition within the Pavilion, a suite of professional development programs for Australian creative and cultural workers, and a co-investment program that garners support and advocacy for the project.

Khaled Sabsabi has been appointed as the 43rd artist to present in the Australia Pavilion in the category of National Participation. **Michael Dagostino** has been appointed as the curator for the artistic team. Both members of the artistic team are from New South Wales.

As set out in our brief sent on Monday 20 January 2025, Creative Australia will publicly announce the 2026 Venice Biennale Artistic Team on **7 February 2025**. We invite you to include a quote in the media release, a draft of which is attached (**Attachment 1**).

Sensitivities – see point 9.

Background

1. Creative Australia is the commissioner of the Australia Pavilion and the producer of the Australia at the Venice Biennale project, which incorporates the exhibition within the Pavilion, a suite of professional development programs for Australian creative and cultural workers, and a co-investment program that garners support and advocacy for the project.

Assessment Process

2. Stage one expression of interest applications opened on 27 August 2024 and closed on 8 October 2024.
3. Creative Australia convened a panel of five industry advisors. The industry advice panel was carefully appointed from a longlist that was Board approved. 51 eligible applications were submitted to the stage one expression of interest.
4. The industry advisors were Mariko Smith (Yuin and Japanese curator), Elaine Chia (arts professional), Wassan Al-Khudhairi (curator of Hawai'i Triennale), Dunja Rmandić (Director

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Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery) and Anthony Gardner (independent curator and academic).

5. An assessment meeting was held on 8 November 2024 to receive the advice of the panel from which **six** shortlisted applicants proceeded to stage two of the assessment process.
6. Stage two applications opened 11 November 2024 and closed 6 December 2024. Industry advisors met with the CEO and Head of Visual Arts at Creative Australia, to provide feedback on stage two submissions.

Recipients and Shortlistee

7. Here is the appointed artistic team for the 2026 Venice Biennale.

State	Recipient
New South Wales New South Wales	Khaled Sabsabi (artist) Michael Dagostino (curator)

8. Here are the artistic teams that were shortlisted for stage two of the assessment.

State	Shortlistee
Victoria New South Wales	Hayley Millar-Baker (artist) Erin Vink (curator)
Northern Territory Queensland Australian Capital Territory	Dhopiya Yunupingu (artist) Tony Albert (curator) Sally Brand (curator)
Victoria Australian Capital Territory	Jenna Lee (artist) Tina Baum (curator)
Victoria New South Wales	Hong An James Nguyen (artist) Anna Davis (curator)
New South Wales United Kingdom	Mel O'Callaghan (artist) Tamsin Hong (curator)

Sensitivities

9. Khaled Sabsabi along with other artists withdrew from the Sydney Festival in 2022 in protest at the festival receiving funding from the Israeli Embassy, 'out of solidarity with the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23/12/2021).



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Announcement

10. Creative Australia will announce the 2026 Venice Biennale Artistic Team on **7 February 2025**.

Adrian Collette
Chief Executive Officer
Creative Australia

Attachments

1. Draft announcement of Australia's Artistic Team for the Venice Biennale (Media Release) – with opportunity to add a quote.



Media release

Announcing Australia's artist and curator for the 2026 Venice Biennale

Under embargo until 2PM AEDT, Friday 7 February 2025

Creative Australia announces award-winning multidisciplinary artist Khaled Sabsabi and esteemed curator Michael Dagostino as the artistic team to represent Australia at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

Their collaboration will bring an exhibition to the Australia Pavilion that hopes to build empathy and connection between all people.

For more than 35 years, Sabsabi's artistic process involves working across art mediums, geographical borders and with communities in Australian and international contexts. For Sabsabi, creating and exhibiting art has been a way to bring people together in immersive and engaging experiences. Through his work, Sabsabi explores human collectiveness; and questions identity politics and ideology, inviting audiences to do the same.

Michael Dagostino was the founding director of Parramatta Artists' Studios, later Director of Campbelltown Arts Centre, and currently Director of the Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney. Dagostino has embedded an intentional artist-driven approach to all of his curatorial and director roles, facilitating access, equity and authorship.

Reflecting on his collaboration with appointed curator Michael Dagostino, Khaled Sabsabi said "We acknowledge and recognise First Nations cultural and linguistic diversity that has existed on these lands for thousands of years.

Our collaboration is informed by our common lived experiences and work histories, as migrants and children of migrants. We trust in the culturally diverse voices of Western Sydney and Australia more broadly and the lessons they may offer in negotiations of global futures."

Khaled Sabsabi joins a distinguished group of 42 other Australian artists whose creative contributions have critically engaged with global audiences.

Federal Minister for the Arts, the Hon Tony Burke MP, said:

There were a total of six artistic teams shortlisted in the two stage open call process. Creative Australia wishes to acknowledge the talent of shortlisted teams, their efforts signal to the depth of Australia's artistic capacity:

- Dhopiya Yunupingu (1950 – 2024, artist) with Tony Albert and Sally Brand
- Hayley Millar Baker (artist) with Erin Vink
- James Nguyens (artist) with Anna Davis
- Jenna Mayilema Lee (artist) with Tina Baum
- Mel O'Callaghan (artist) with Tamsin Hong

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Media release



Creative Australia continues its role as the commissioner for Australia in the category of National Participation.

Creative Australia CEO Adrian Collette AM said:

"We are proud to support this extraordinary team as they prepare to showcase their vision at one of the most prestigious platforms for contemporary art. Khaled Sabsabi's work, in collaboration with curator Michael Dagostino, reflects the diversity and plurality of Australia's rich culture, and will spark meaningful conversations with audiences around the world."

established Australia Council Board Chair Robert Morgan said:

"Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino continue a proud tradition of showcasing Australia's exceptional artistic talent at this important global arts event. This unparalleled opportunity is only possible through the generosity of our philanthropic partners who, for decades, have enabled artists to bring their bold and compelling works to this prestigious platform."

The 2026 artistic team was selected based on the advice of a panel of independent industry advisors including national and international visual arts experts. Creative Australia thanks the industry advisors who took part in this process, including: Anthony Gardner, Dunja Rmandić, Elaine Chia, Mariko Smith and Wassan Al-Khudhairi.

The 61st International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia will take place from April – November 2026. In 2026, the main exhibition is being curated by Koyo Kouoh, the executive director and chief curator of Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa in Cape Town, South Africa.

More information about Australia at the Venice Biennale is available on our website.

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More information

About the Artist: Khaled Sabsabi

For more than 35 years, Khaled Sabsabi's artistic process has involved working across mediums and with communities. He sees art as an effective tool to communicate and converse with people, through a familiar language.

Sabsabi was awarded a Creative Australia (previously Australia Council for the Arts) Community and Cultural Development Fellowship in 2001, Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship 2010, 60th Blake Prize 2011, MCG Basil Sellers fellowship 2014, Fishers Ghost Prize 2014, Western Sydney ARTS NSW Fellowship 2015, Sharjah Art Programme Prize 2016, International Council of Museums' and Heritage Awards, Video Art Prize 2016, University of NSW Annual Alumni Award 'Art and Culture' 2019, Copyright Agency Cultural Fund Visual Arts Fellowship 2020,

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Media release


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Creative Australia 'Annual Visual Arts Award' 2023 and the Mordant Family and Creative Australia American Academy Rome Affiliated Fellowship 2024.

He is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane and has produced more than 65 major mixed media and installation-based works to date, exhibiting in over 90 solo and group art exhibitions in Australia and abroad. Khaled also participated in the 5th Marrakech Biennale, 18th Biennale of Sydney and the 21st Biennale of Sydney, 9th Shanghai Biennale, Sharjah Biennial 11, 1st Yinchuan Biennale, 3rd Kochi Muziris Biennale, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art 2018 and 2024.

About the Curator: Michael Dagostino

Michael Dagostino is the Director of the Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney. As a new museum, it unites the university's diverse collections into a multidisciplinary institution dedicated to education and community engagement.

As founding director of Parramatta Artists Studios, he established a key platform for emerging artists. In 2011, he became Director of Campbelltown Arts Centre, where he continued an artist-driven program supporting local, national, and international collaborations. Notable projects include *With Secrecy and Despatch* (2016), co-curated with Tess Allas and David Garneau, exploring colonial impacts through the Appin Massacre, and *Another Day in Paradise* (2017), showcasing Myuran Sukumaran's work co-curated by Ben Quilty.

Michael curated Lisa Reihana's *Cinemania* (2018) and commissioned the Australian First Nations component of her "*In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]*" for the NZ Pavillion at the Venice Biennale. *A Hope and A Promise* (2021), co-curated by Adam Porter and Matt Cox, surveyed Khaled Sabsabi's 30-year practice held at the Art Gallery of NSW and Campbelltown Arts Centre.

Michael has received Imagine Awards and ICOM awards for institutional excellence. His board memberships include Sydney Dance Company, FBi Radio, Accessible Arts, and the Sydney Writers' Festival, alongside advisory roles for the NSW Government. He remains committed to advancing museums' role in fostering access, equity and authorship.

About the Commissioner: Creative Australia

Creative Australia is the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body.

With artists at the heart of what we do, we invest in creative talent and stimulate the market for Australian stories to be told on a national and international scale, sharing our rich culture with the world. We do this because art and creativity define us, recording what we have been and what we might yet become. As a nation, creativity connects us and benefits us all.

We are proud of Creative Australia's 50-year history of investing in First Nations Arts and Culture and supporting First Nations self-determination. Creative Australia will build on that legacy in 2024 when the inaugural First Nations-led Board will be appointed.

Creative Australia is for the artist.

Creative Australia is for us all.

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Australia's participation at the Venice Biennale

Established in 1895, La Biennale di Venezia holds a reputation as one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the world and attracts over 500,000 visitors to its biennial Art exhibition. The history of the La Biennale di Venezia dates back from 1895, when the first Art exhibition was hosted. In the 1930s new festivals were born, including Music, Cinema, and Theatre (the Venice Film Festival in 1932 was the first film festival in history). In 1980 the first Architecture exhibition took place, and in 1999 Dance made its debut at La Biennale.

Australia has participated in the Venice Biennale since 1954 playing a crucial role in presenting Australian talent and ideas to the world. It is one of only 29 countries with a permanent national pavilion in the Giardini (Biennale gardens) and provides an elegant home to showcase the best of Australian art and architecture.

Creative Australia serves as the commissioner and producer of the Australia Pavilion, overseeing its ownership, management and the delivery of its Art exhibitions. It also presents associated activities that currently include sector development programs that provide invaluable international opportunities for visual arts professionals from across the continent.

From 2025, Creative Australia will deliver the production of the Architecture exhibitions to expand its advocacy and development role in supporting Australian creativity.